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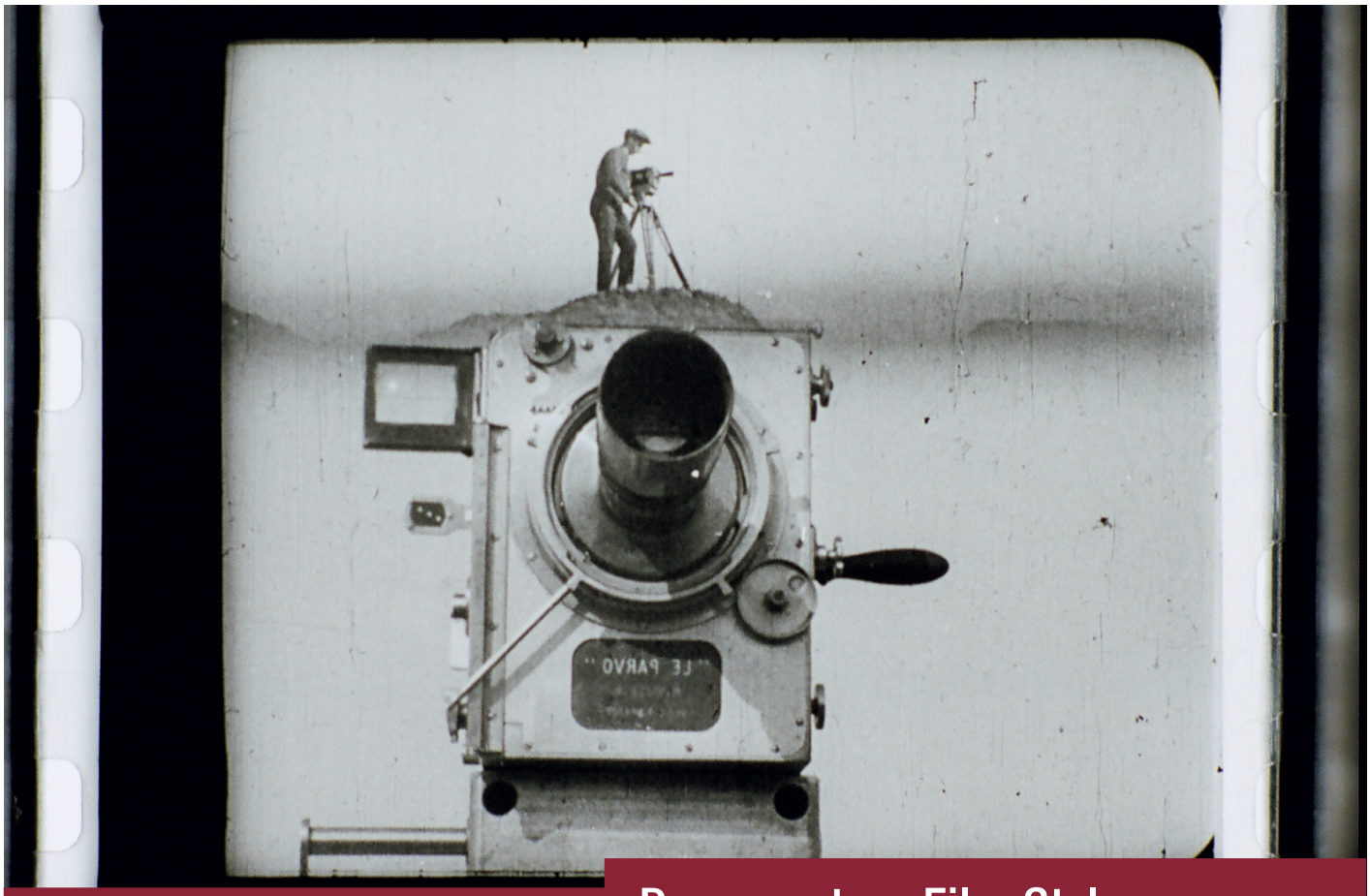

Documentary Film Styles
Historical and Sociological Perspectives

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Documentary Film Styles

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Historical and Sociological Aspects of Documental Pictures

Carsten Heinze

Introduction

Although the history of film begins with non-fictional recordings of everyday life, in comparison with classical Hollywood movies, documental films are underrepresented in scientific research. This is true not only of film and media studies but, with some exceptions, sociology and the humanities. So far, both disciplines lack a systematic examination of documental film as regards form and style as well as regarding insights it might provide into the (audio)visual reproduction of social and historical truths. Since the invention of film, only ethnography and visual anthropology have used it as an important methodological tool of social and cultural observation and have discussed its role as such at any length (see Schändlinger 2006, 350). In this context, the social scientist becomes the filmmaker and has to deal with the requirements and demands of film production (see Kurt 2010) without, however, claiming to be a »cinematic artist.« And in general, these are commonly called scientific or sociological films (see Reichert 2007; Kaczmarek 2008; as well as Schnettler in this issue). However, aside from analyses of film as a method, the relevance of documental pictures, from a sociological and a historical perspective, to public cultures of communication and media is often neglected (see Heinze 2012a). Even though there is some overlapping of visual anthropology and film as a method with public cultures of communication and media, there are still some very important differences regarding the goals of these distinct conditions of production.

The lack of interest can, on the one hand, easily be explained from a sociological point of view by the marginal role documental films play in cinemas in comparison with Hollywood films. This, however, is a blind

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spot in the discourse of media sociology, as realistic/documental forms of communication such as photography and documental film are an important component of societal communication. Realism, as an artistic principle, is itself a changing historical phenomenon that plays a major role in the imagination of reality in modern rational societies (see Heinze 2012b). On the other hand, empirically-oriented social sciences are always loath to use resources not based on personally conducted surveys. In both qualitative analysis and in media analysis, about 90% of all studies are based on oral surveys (see Ayaß 2006, 63). As a rule, the possibilities offered by other media analysis techniques are neither being exhausted, nor are the inter- or trans-disciplinary approaches of visual and film studies being exploited. Finally, sociology—as a science that relies mainly on the written word—finds it difficult to evaluate pictures and films for a further gain in sociological knowledge. Film sociology and visual sociology are exceptions to this rule (see for example Heinze, Moebius, and Reichert 2012; Winter 2010, 1992; Schroer 2007; Winter and Mai 2006; Raab 2008; Schnettler and Pötzsch 2007), although here too the genre of documental film is seldom a topic. Within the sociology of media and communication there are some works about the current documental phenomenon of reality TV (see Reichertz 2011; Keppler 2006; Göttlich 2008, 2004, 2001, 1995), but the history of this format is strongly attached to the medium of the television (on television documentary see Hissnauer 2011).

In the field of history, film is a controversial source. In contrast to sociology, however, there has been epistemological interest since the beginning of film history (see Riederer 2006, 98–99). There is less controversy about the fact that films *are* useful historical documents than about *how* to unlock their potential as a source (see Wilharm 2005). In this discourse, documental film is regarded as more trustworthy than fiction films as it promises to be more authentic and nearer to the historical truth (see Riederer 2006, 100). But Post-structural debates and the »critique of Representation« (see Sandkühler 2009) have steadily taken their toll on this trust. Recently, new television formats with historical content have increasingly become the focus of discussion in light of the rise of

numerous hybrid mixes such as docufiction, essay film, compilation film or historical infotainment (see Fischer and Wirtz 2008; Elm 2008; Hohenberger and Keilbach 2003). This new manner of mixing fictional and non-fictional film sequences is most likely increasing uncertainty as to how to handle history in film, at least for those who see documental films as a reflection of reality. An analysis of different forms of documental film sheds light on the way history is portrayed and dealt with in film. Historical themes as well as historical truths are not only a favourite topic in motion pictures, but also of documental films in a variety of forms. The importance of film as a key medium for the production and distribution of historical themes is currently also being discussed in the context of the culture of remembrance as a media practice (see Lüdeker 2012; Erll 2008; Kaes 1987).

Both sociological and historical work on documental films has to answer a variety of questions such as: What are documental films? What demarcates them from fictional films? How can documental films themselves be differentiated, how broad is the spectrum of their formal language? What does the documental style of a film reveal about the handling of social and historical truths (for example Claude Lanzmann's rejection of archival images in his major documental work *Shoah*)? Which communicational functions and tasks are and were being fulfilled by documental films in recent and previous societal media cultures? Which *Bilder des Wirklichen* (Images of the Real—Hohenberger 2006) are cultivated by different forms and styles of documental film and which social discourses are these based upon? Which fundamental sociological and historical epistemological values can be derived from documental films? How are documental films embedded in social contexts and in discourses on sociality and history? Which institutions are responsible for production and distribution, and how is and was the reception? What pictures of society and history do documental films create, what notion of the social do they deliver? How do documental films treat society and history, what is their socio-communicative function? And finally, how can we deal with a documental film aesthetic from a sociological or historical point of view? Which sociological and historical insights can be

won from the way in which different styles of documental film handle social and historical realities? This essay takes up some of these questions and presents preliminary ideas on documental film from a sociological and historical perspective. First, however, I shall attempt to give documental film a framework with regards to definition and theory.

What are documental films? Theoretical remarks on documental film styles.

Theories of documental film look into its epistemology and try to determine or to question its phenomenology. Answers to the question of what a documental film is, what documentaries are (and are not) allow for further conclusions about practical implementation and documental styles as forms of social and historical reality.[1] Eva Hohenberger (2006, 28–30) identifies three theories of documental film[2] as regards history and theory which she categorizes as *normative* theories of documental film, *reflexive* theories of documental film, and *deconstructive* theories of documental film. These are actually not detached from one another, but are rather chronologically overlapping theoretical approaches to and attempts at theorization. Normative theories focus on the documental film's desired state. These are descriptions of the subject matter, formulated in the main by documentary filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov, Paul

1 The individual strands of discussion are often quite perplexing, as the following description by Klaus Kreimeier (2004, 439) illustrates: »More than other film genres, documentary film perseveres in the search for self-definition as if to repeatedly assure itself of its existence not only through its production practice, but also in the strict eyes of theory. Documentary film continuously asks: Do I exist? And quite often the famous theory debates tangle into a knot which discussants try to escape through the same hair-splitting which got them into their predicament in in the first place.« (This and all other translations from the German are by Audrey Terracher-Lipinski and Sara Harould unless otherwise noted.)

2 Her anthology speaks of »*Dokumentarfilm*« (documentary) and not »*dokumentarischer Film*« (documental film) which limits the term to a historically central, but special form of documental film. The fields of television-specific or journalistic forms are not subsumed under this terminology.

Rotha, John Grierson, Ioris Ivens, and Klaus Wildenhahn (see Hohenberger 2006). These theories are characterized by their focus on media and social politics and distance themselves deliberately from the »bourgeois theatre of illusions.«[3] Reflexive theories take up and discuss aspects of normative theories, without however questioning the status of documental film as a genre. Within this discourse, the discussion concentrates less on the filmmakers themselves, but rather on film and media scientists who endorse text-centered approaches (see Hohenberger 2006, 29–30). At the level of the documental films themselves, self-reflexive explorations of the genre show up quite early. For example, the camera itself temporarily becomes an individual, autonomous protagonist in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929); slow-motion and stills are other filmic techniques used by Vertov to highlight the craftsmanship of his fact-based method. In essay and compilation films, in Cinéma Vérité and Direct Cinema, as well as in newer hybrid styles of documental film, we find self-reflexive hints at the instability of the genre, without however rejecting it as an independent phenomenon (see Meyer 2005). Finally, *deconstructing* theories question the genre as such. These approaches deny that there is an ontology of documental film (see Hohenberger 2006, 30). Basically, these approaches assume that the film itself provides no information as to its documental or fictive status, that the documental is rather utilized and viewed as a stylistic effect, or that there is a hybrid form which does not allow any specific classification (nevertheless, the difference between documental and fictive is still maintained).[4] In the

3 This declaration of principles is formulated nowhere as succinctly as in the manifestos of the Russian Kinoki group centered around Dziga Vertov. In *We. Varient of a Manifesto* he writes: »We are cleansing kinochestvo of foreign matter—of music, literature and theatre; we seek our own rythym, one lifted from nowhere else, and we find it in the movements of things.« (Vertov (1973 [1922], 7). This media-political challenge is later taken up and pursued by Klaus Wildenhahn in his criticism of the »synthetic film« (see Wildenhahn 1975).

4 Pseudo documentaries or mockumentaries have shown that the documental can be a stylistic staging as in *The Blair Witch Projekt* (1999), *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) or *Man Bites Dog* (1992) (see Heinze 2013, forthcoming). Conversely, the fictive has always been marked by documental

end it is impossible to say where film images come from and this creates a »hyperreality« (Baudrillard 2010). Deconstructive theories also include those approaches that conceptualize documental films as a specific type of communication between film and spectator in which specific documentalizing and authenticating codes evoke mental associations of the real. These codes vary throughout history, so that perceptual relationships also become flexible. The definition of the documental is thus dependent upon what is understood as documental film at a specific point in time; from the perspective of the recipient and as regards the context in which the films are produced. The documental element of documental films thus results, according to these theories, from the viewer's perception and the film's communicative surroundings.

What, however, defines documental films? Which criteria and material attributes set them apart from feature films? As a rule, in the production and reception of films, a distinction is made between feature films (non-fictional or popular film) and documental films (non-fiction films or, in a narrower sense, documentaries).[5] Whereas a feature film is rarely an-

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stagings. *Citizen Kane* (1941) is a prominent example (see Roscoe and Hight 2001 and Rhodes and Springer 2006 on the problem of fake documentation; also interesting in this context is Izod, Kilborn and Hibberd's (2000) anthology on the evolution of the documental *From Grierson to the Docu-Soap*.

5 There is almost no consensus in the literature about the application and differentiation of terms. I would therefore like to stress the difference between »fictive« and »fictional.« The latter refers merely to the actively designed, whereas the former means freely invented. If documental films are perceived to be without artistic elements, then they are non-fictional and non-fictive. Assuming, however, that *every* film has artistic elements—and this is meanwhile accepted as common sense in the theory—documental films can be fictional but not fictive (see Arriens 1999, 37). It is understandable why fictional motion pictures are classified as popular films (even though there are unpopular motion pictures). It is equally understandable why documental films are classified as not popular, as it is often, but by no means always, true. Michael Moore's documental films for example should certainly be categorized as popular films. To date, there is no terminology that clearly delineates the two sides. At the same time it would be neither acceptable nor empirically

nounced as such, the assignation of a film as »documentary« is common on announcements, in reviews, and on posters. These textual attributes channel the attention of the spectators and influence their attitudes. A »documentalizing« reading results in a different mind-set than a »fictionalizing« reading (Odin 2006; also see Hissnauer on the semio-pragmatic approach 2011, 61–63). The film's narrator as well as the people and situations it portrays are then regarded as »real.« Guynn (1990, 229) describes this difference as follows:

> The spectator who goes to see a documentary is quite aware that the film is not designed to provide the same experience as the fiction film. Normally, he/she has not chosen the film as a leisure-time activity whose goal is to activate the pleasures of the imaginary. The specatator is, rather, conscious of an overriding seriousness of purpose defined, at least in part, by special conditions of consumption.

On the socio-communicative level, where documental films have a specific communication function within societal media cultures, they at first sight differ from feature films (see Nichols 2010, 7–9; Hohenberger 2006, 20–21). From these viewpoints, documental films are committed to conveying knowledge and information about the real social and historical world; they enlighten, inform, and provide insight into (previously) unknown topics. The events captured and shown by documental films would have occurred (perhaps with minor changes) without the presence of the camera. They originate from social reality and are not fictive. John Grierson, however, in his well-known first description of documental film, points out that it is a »*creative* treatment of reality.« Thus the staged and open character of documental films is intimated at in a very early stage of documental film history.

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correct to ignore the different characteristics of fictional and documental films. Therefore Heller (2001, 18.) suggests speaking of a relationship of difference rather than of opposition, which takes on a different shape at varying points of time in film history.

The people in documental films are real people and enact themselves; they act within their social roles. As regards perception and reception, documental films activate a perceptual framework for perceiving reality. Spectators recognize that these films are about, and make an argument about, the real social and historical truth. Finally, documentaries in the narrower sense have a much smaller budget than feature films (see Hohenberger 2006, 20–21).[6] As we can see, all attempts to define documental films rely heavily on their relationship to non-filmic or rather pre-filmic reality[7] as well as the perceived authenticity and credibility of the events shown (see Hattendorfer 1999). These attempts at clarification mislead us into thinking that documental films reproduce real pictures of reality, allowing an undisguised view of real events captured by the camera. This opinion is anchored in realistic film theory (see Elsaesser and Hagener 2007, 10), of which Siegfried Kracauer is perhaps the most important sociological representative. In contrast, formalist film theories focus on the constructive and representative aspect of film production (ibid.). They highlight those aspects which give form and thus the medial transformativity of *each and every* film shot. Formalist approaches oppose the concept of pure mechanical reproduction of pre-filmic or non-filmic reality and accentuate the artificial/artistic conditions of filmmaking (as

6 In the next section I will say more on the job market for documentary filmmakers and the market for documental films.

7 Eva Hohenberger (1988, 26–28) describes the medial transformation process in which documental films emerge and are perceived as different levels of effect (with regards to the implications and critique of this model see Hissnauer 2011, 46–48). The *non-filmic* reality is reality sui generis. It is the all-encompassing reality of the world and ultimately only to be ascertained philosophically; it cannot and will not be filmed. The *pre-filmic* reality is the selected extract that is recorded in front of the camera at the moment of recording. The *reality film* denominates the contextual surrounding of the film production. This entails distribution, rental, funding, and advertising, but also editing. The *filmic reality*, however, is the reality the viewer is confronted with in the film. This is the finished film in which the previous levels are incorporated, but cannot or only rarely be seen. Finally, post-filmic reality describes the reception of and discourse on the film and all related discussions.

an art form) and the materiality of the film (see Arnheim 2003 [1932]). Recently, Bruno Latour's actor network theory has been discussed as a method for delineating the practices of the creation of documental films (see Weber in this journal). Thus documental films can be discussed on the level of content, form, and production.

Currently, there is such a variety of styles and forms of documental films that is difficult to maintain an overview. These different styles and forms are marked by different ways of dealing with pre-filmic reality. Whereas some documental styles share characteristics with auteur films (see Felix 2007 on auteur film),[8] most current forms and formats come from television, where the author usually disappears.[9] Hissnauer (2011, 19–20) points to the fact that within the documental television formats of the past few years, there has been an explosion of different names for subgenres:

> Documentary, documentation, feature, documental play, docudrama, docu-soap, docu-thriller, docu-satire, docu-comedy, report, *living history*, event or adventure documentation, essay film, documental essay, documental story, reconstructions, reenactments, docu-fiction, faction, real-life-soap, reality soap, Reality TV, fake-docu, *mockumentary*, pseudo-docu, *factual entertainment*, fictive docu-

8 The Russian film theorist B. M. Ejchenbaum (2003 [1927]) discusses the »problems of film stylistics« as the director's process of creation, looking at the creative process of filmmaking from the point of view of a subject acting artistically. Behind the terms »form« or even »format,« the handwriting of the creator as subject increasingly disappears. In formulaic television, the individual creator loses his significance. But in spite of the »death of the author,« (Barthes), auteur cinema is still an important category of analysis within film theory and is still discussed as auteur film by the audience (see Felix 2007, 13). Within the field of documental film, authors such as Michael Moore, Ulrich Seidl or Michael Glawogger are certainly amongst the most important representatives of documental auteur film, and their productions exhibit a signature style.

9 However there are documental TV-film authors who have defined styles, for example Hans-Dieter Grabe, Georg Troller, Egon Monk or Klaus Wildenhahn, whom I mentioned above.

> mentation, fictionalized documentation, *scripted documentary*, et cetera. [emphasis in original]

This list could be expanded many times over. Additionally, there are subgenres such as the »educational film« (see Ahnert in this journal). This large spectrum of documental forms demands additional and intensive theoretical discussion. Due to the importance of documental styles and forms as a socio-communicative genre, there is further need for an exhaustive theorization and systematic analysis of the complex epistemological status of documental filmic images and their formation, taking current developments into account. Equally important is the inclusion and differentiation of the societal and cultural contexts in which documental films communicate. The main question is always the way in which social and historical realities are dealt with and staged on the visual and auditory levels, as well as the interplay of sound and image and the spectators' perception and classification of the film as a »social experience« (Schändlinger 1998). Is it the original soundtrack or is there offscreen commentary? Are all images observing events, or are there other documental materials such as photos, documents, and animation? Which approach has been chosen to handle the topic in terms of content and form? Can we call an animated film a documental film (on animadoc see Hoffmann 2012)? Another central question is the handling and staging of time; is it the observed time of the events or a time period created by edited images? The key question of the »authenticity« and »truth« or »truthfulness« of documental film (see Arriens 1999) can either be dealt with by making the production process invisible or, as in artistic engagements with documental materials, self-reflexive by questioning the material as »documental« (see Knaller 2010 and Seider in this journal). For example, journalistic formats stage themselves as reasonable, factual, truthful, and objective, while the author usually disappears; whereas in documental films, subjectivity, argumentation, and selectivity predominate and an issue is presented from a specific point of view (see Niney 2012, 152–154). Finally, if we are to learn to comprehend historical differences, we must continually review the shifts in, interrogations of, and dissolution of fact and fiction as documental film practices in order to

understand how media/cultural and reception-oriented perspectives on documental »reality« also change. With all this in mind, I would like to make some short remarks on sociological and historical aspects of documental films.

Notes on documental film and sociology

From a sociological point of view, documental films have a central significance. They are audio-visual recordings of people, bodies, locations, interactions, and social events in temporal and spatial motion, and as such provide realistic material for societal analysis. Documental films enable social interactions with the world which, in contrast to other media, are realistic (but do not reproduce reality!). This distinguishes film from all other forms of depiction such as the written word or static image. Due to its genre-specific aspiration to deal with non-filmic or pre-filmic realities (no matter the form), documental film always refers to real social and historical realities;[10] they are embedded in and emerge from specific media cultures: there is a central connection between society, culture, and film. Documental films promise enlightenment, knowledge, and information—even if they pursue a self-reflexive and deconstructive critique of representation by means of irritation and playing with media frameworks and codes, with documental styles and forms. On the one hand, the ability to record makes film a tool of scientific observation (*film as method*), on the other hand documental film is a central communication code within public media cultures (*documental film as part of media cultures*). Within this range, a large variety of documental styles, forms, and formats have developed—from artistic critical argumentations to entertainment and objective/documental depictions. Before I quickly review some common sociological views of films in order to transfer them to documental films, a short excursus on the history of documental film shall show its significance for the history of society.

10 This is of course also often true of fictional films, which also even use the same or similar methods.

Excursus

A brief look into the history of documental film shows that films that aim to portray social reality have been utilized in many different ways as media of communication and have therefore fulfilled different socio-communicative tasks. The large variety and different uses of documental films cover such a broad spectrum of content, styles, forms, and formats that it is nearly impossible to examine in its entirety. The disparity of its utilization is mainly a result of the degree of institutional embeddedness, the conditions of production and reception, as well as the development of new technologies and media experiences.

Documental depictions are shown in different societal contexts and go hand in hand with social, cultural, economic, and political communication.[11] The first non-fictive films showed different scenes of everyday life as »attractions« (Gunning 1995) or »living photographs« (Loiperdinger 2005) and were shown at fairs, in shops, at vaudeville shows, and so on for the pure fun of motion. During the First World War, the power of documental film as a propaganda tool was discovered on both the German and the Allied side (in the form of filmic depictions of successful battles to reassure those at home). The 1920s are marked by a manifold diversification of documental film. This is the first peak of industrial films, cultural films, educational films, ethnographic films, avant-garde films, advertising films, and many more; they are screened at educational institutions, industrial sites, and cinemas or for political agitation. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the time of the Second World War, documental pictures served as propaganda and to spread (ideological) views of the world (newsreels). In the USA as well as in continental Europe, films were made that aimed to influence and collectivize the

11 See Barnouw (1993) and Ellis and McLane (2009) for the history of documental film in the English-speaking world; for the German-speaking world from 1895–1945, see the three-volume standard work by Jung et al. (2005). Silberzahn (2009) also provides a good concise overview of this period.

public consciousness.[12] After the Nazi seizure of power, propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels nationalized the entire German film industry and created, alongside entertainment films (the majority of all productions between 1933 and 1945), approximately 100 documental films (see Faulstich 2005, 89–91). In Britain, John Grierson created industrial and political propaganda films for the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), which was supported by the state and later called the General Post Office (GPO). These films promoted the preservation of democracy against the background of economic crisis and the danger of war. Grierson realized that state-supported documental film was an opportunity to engage the participation of the masses in public affairs. His readiness to simplify topics to make them compatible for mass consumption was later the cause of much criticism, despite the significance of his work for the development of the genre (see Aufderheide 2008, 35–37).

In the 1950s, documental film enjoyed a boom thanks to the spread of television as a new leading medium. New contexts emerged for the production of documental films, allowing them to reach a larger public and increase sales. The 1960s were marked by important technological developments resulting in the creation of Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité, styles that still influence the common idea of what makes a documental film (in contrast to a motion picture).[13] Whereas American Direct Cinema has its roots in journalism and produced a specific idea of objective filmic observation, Cinéma Vérité is based on social and ethnological studies and aimed to trigger reactions and social interactions by means of

12 The fact that even staged propaganda films such as *Der ewige Jude* (1940) by Fritz Hippler (the placard clearly labelled it as a documentary) did *not* have the hoped-for radicalizing effect shows that the manipulative effect of (documental) film is relative.

13 Although neither style understood itself as political, they nevertheless both used the new technological possibilities to take up social and political topics in order to challenge the hegemony of TV by presenting alternative modes of portrayal (on Direct Cinema see Saunders 2007; Faller (2007, 43) remarks on the »counterculture« environment of Direct Cinema).

the camera's intervention and provocation (see Beattie 2001, 83–85). Both forms would be unthinkable without the technical developments in camera and sound technology (lighter cameras, synchronization). The ongoing technological evolution towards smaller and more complex technologies and thus the new possibilities of filmic observation have nowadays created a new use for government-funded films: public surveillance (see Aufderheide 2008, 76–77). This new area of documental film production, government surveillance of public places, is currently being intensively discussed and criticized—although not in the context of documental film theory (see Kammerer 2008).[14]

Since Germany introduced a dual broadcasting system in the 1980s and opened the television market to private channels, the concomitant commercialization of television resulted in an increased differentiation of documental styles, forms, and formats and more mixing of non-fictive elements with entertaining and fictive elements. In this context there has been much talk of hybridization, referring not only to the film itself, but also to its contextual conditions of evolution (see Weber in this journal). This opening is accompanied by a change in the institutionalization of documental film towards more outsourcing of production to a broader basis of small and very small companies as well as the creation of an oligopoly of just a handful of large broadcasters (see Lingemann 2006).[15]

14 At the 29th Kassel Dokfest in November 2012, Michael Palm's film *Low Definition Control* was screened. This film deals with this topic in essay form.

15 This institutional change has led to a precarization of documental film producers. A recent study by AG Dok shows that producers in the documental film branch work for under €10 per hour. What is more, all preparations for the realization of a documental film have to be taken on by the producers themselves, which means approximately 4 months of unpaid work each year: »The effect of this often inadequate monetary compensation is an *very poor income and living situation for authors and directors. Of these, 85% must earn additional income*, as the remuneration from their work as author or director does not secure their livelihood. Even so, *18% have a net monthly income below €636*« (Langer 2012, 20; emphasis in original). Paradoxically, these jobs in the creative and cultural sector are supposed to serve as a model for future employment in other branches

The orientation of documental television towards the lowest common denominator of mass taste and the difficult situation for many small companies in this market have led—some critics say—to a dumbing-down of documental film styles and forms in favor of a streamlined format as regards both time and content (for an overview see Wolf 2003; Zimmermann and Hoffmann 2006). Contemporary postmodern media culture is dominated by hybrid styles and blurred borders, so that in the field of media studies, questions are again being asked about the origins of documental film and traditional demarcations (see Springer 2006).[16] For example, the current variety of documental film styles and forms allows us to recognize a trend towards infotainment. Yet—on a formal level—the irritations of this manner of playing with reality (see Hoffmann, Kilborn, and Bard 2012) hint at a growing media sensibility as regards claims of realism and objectivity, today considered outdated. Forms such as pseudo-documentaries, mockumentaries, and other hybrids of fictive and fictional productions have shown (in spite of all criticism) that no conclusion about the origin or status of images can be made solely from the way in which they are portrayed. This can be seen as a positive effect, or at least a step towards media democracy and media competence.

End of the excursus

Against this background, the history of film—especially documental film—has been strongly neglected by sociology. The reason for this neglect might be a rather competitive relationship (see Winter 2012; Schroer 2012). Film and sociology (as institutionalized disciplines) arose at approximately the same time; both deal with the depiction, represen-

as regards their flexible conception of working and living (see Manske and Schnell 2010).

16 The traditional differentiation made of the origin of film history—the non-fictive films of the Lumière brothers and the fictive films of Georges Méliès—can no longer be upheld: even the short films of the Lumière brothers were highly staged and skilfully captured scenes of everyday life.

tation, and observation of social reality with their own specific methods.[17] Nevertheless, for a long time sociology has dismissed film as a marginal topic or relayed it to the verdict of industrialized and ideologized mass culture (see Horkheimer and Adorno 1969; Prokop 1970). Early attempts to broach film from the viewer's perspective and to delineate their social structure remained isolated (such as the well-known study of the Mannheim cinema audience by Altenloh (1914), who was the first sociologist to highlight the aspects of both production and reception). Probably the most significant sociological approach to connecting film, culture, and society is realistic film theory, most prominently represented theoretically and empirically by Siegfried Kracauer (1960; 1964). Due to the fact that Kracauer puts film ontologically in the same category as photography he imbues it with genuine qualities, arguing that it is »the redemption of physical reality.« (1964; Surprisingly, Kracauer, who subordinates the documental film to the factual film, only deals with the former on a few pages.) There are also early anthropological conceptualizations of the documental film that touch on questions of the sociology of film (see Morin 1958; 2010) and also affect the field of ethnological and scientific film. Even though there has been neither a systematic debate on what specifically a sociology of film is, nor a compilation of original texts on the history of the sociology of film,[18] there have been considerable stimuli for the preoccupation with film from the field of Cultural Studies, motivated by an interdisciplinary perspective (see Winter 1992; 2010; 2012). The significance of this approach as compared to earlier ones, such as Critical Theory, is its radical contextualism, its focus on the audience as the generator of meaning, the potential of film as a means of intervention in educational work, and the concentration on different forms of reception, resulting from the polysemy und timeless availability of films. Recently, research on the audience has

17 Fritsch (2009) shows, that there are many parallels of social individualisation processes and the cinema as a disposition on the writings of Georg Simmel.

18 Dieter Prokop (1971) edited an interdisciplinary anthology on the aesthetics, sociology, and politics of film.

been rather empirical whereas earlier sociological works on the reception of the film audiences relied more on the structure of media texts (see Winter and Nestler 2010, 99). For documental films, this work has concentrated mainly on reality TV and its reception by adolescents (see Prokop and Jansen 2006), but there has also been interview-based research on the reception of motion pictures (see Geimer 2010). In this way a sociological approach to film differs from purely semiotic models that deal solely with the inner structure of cinematic signs and treat a film as a closed system (see Mai and Winter 2006). This sociological approach, however, concentrates strongly on (post)modern and (post)narrative Hollywood mainstream cinema and television. In general, documental film still plays a minor role or acts as a contrast to motion pictures (Winter 2012, 55; Winter and Nestler 2010, 105). But it is a further paradigm of Cultural Studies that make documental film interesting for sociological research: Cultural Studies assumes that media communication can never be understood as a »harmless« site of communication, but always takes place within a political power structure where questions of identity such as class, gender, and race are central to media presentation and representation (see Marchart 2008, 33–35) This means that media communication is embedded in a cultural and societal context and reflects a negotiation process between hegemonic and subversive interpretations of social reality. The subversive and interventionist, but also system stabilizing potential of documental films is well-known historically (see Roth 1982). Following Siegfried Kracauer, Rainer Winter points out that films quite often contain criticism (of society) which needs to be deciphered (see Winter 2012, 56–57). This is particularly explicit in documental films—on the level of content as regards choice of topic as well as on a stylistic and aesthetic level thanks to the »creative interpretation« of social and historical realities« (Schärdinger 1998, 302). An educational or socially critical intention can be found in many documental films that have not emerged within the context of documental television.

Films address central fields of society and handle them in their own way (see Schroer 2007). With the increase and affordability of audio-visual

technologies, the boundary between production and reception becomes blurred, we live in »filmed societies« that know film not only as a scientific survey tool or popular mass entertainment, but also as lay productions (see Schroer 2012, 16). These lay productions made in people's private lives are in the focus of a visual sociology of knowledge that examines the medial organization of social (viewing) experiences (see Raab 2008, 169–171) or tries to implement film as a method. Including this field of lay production—where documental forms dominate in the recording and observing of family celebrations and other social events—in theoretical considerations of documental film means opening up completely new areas for the sociological examination of the documental as a form of seeing, looking, and receiving; especially against the background of the YouTubeization of society. Research on the broad field of the internet as a possible distribution platform for documental films and the significance this might have on the conditions of production and reception is yet to be done.

Professionally produced documental films also focus on everyday life as a central site of social experience. Everyday life is staged not only in reality TV and home movies, but daily routines in all their facets also take center stage in documental films and, more narrowly, in documentaries. Whether work, urbanism, economics, food, youth cultures, biographies, music, environment, family, spare time, culture or politics—documental films deal with all aspects of societal life. Long-term projects give a unique insight into the developmental processes of people and society as hardly another medium or research tool. Winfried and Barbara Junge's film *The children of Golzow* (1961–2007)—one of the longest project in film history—is an important document of a GDR generation that grew up during the 1960s, experienced the fall of the wall and reunification, and had to cope with the new circumstances. The resulting collective and individual portraits from 1961 provide an insight into individual and collective biographies and life courses, into the everyday life of different people in diverse circumstances and stages, into success and setbacks, but also into the historical and political situations and their contingent metamorphoses. At the same time, the Junge couple staged the protago-

nists' viewing of earlier material and thus created complex temporal levels of self-reflexiveness. For instance, protagonists comment on earlier film recordings of themselves and so position themselves in relation to their image within the image. Michael Apted's *Up* series and Rainer Hartleb's *När Jag Blir Stor* are projects with a similar motivation. Such long-term observations now have numerous successors.

Only few sociological analyses are dedicated to the possibilities and potential of gaining knowledge about society through documental films and establishing a boundary between film as a method and film as a part of public media culture (see Rubelt 1994). Robert Schändlinger (1998), one of the few sociologists to have dealt comprehensively with documental film and its foundation, conceptualizes film as the most important form of social experience. Taking this argument to the extreme, this would mean that without documental films, access to events in the world would be strongly reduced or even impossible (for more on realism as a means of the medial configuration of reality see Heinze 2012). Within this area, the boundary remains indistinct between the scientific film as documentation of an observation process and the artistic and aesthetic work of documental filmmakers, who have a societal, but not a scientific agenda (which does not mean that they are less »sociological«). In order to make a sociological observation film, as Kaczmarek (2008) points out, scientific training is required which documental filmmakers from public media cultures usually lack. In his view, the main difference is that social scientists strive for objectivity and neutrality so as to gain »unadulterated« recordings of social situations. This approach is informed by the concept of an (naive) omnipotent technical apparatus that reproduces reality, a theory long since abandoned in media studies. Documental film *artists* such as Klaus Wildenhahn or John Grierson have an educational background in sociology or political sciences, and thus understand documental films as a tool. Nevertheless, Klaus Wildenhahn, as a practitioner, contributed to awakening ideas about the possibilities of realistic filmic accounts of reality—by politicizing documental film and by his clear rejection of »synthetic« films (resulting in the well-known Wildenhahn-Kreimeier debate (see Aitken 2013, 1006)). He is thus understood

as the last representative of an »indigenous« approach to documental film, his works remain *artistic* cinematic representations of social events.[19] A new reading and re-evaluation of the early theoretical works by Vertov, Grierson, and Wildenhahn on documental film is necessary from the perspective of a sociology of film, media, and communication. This could free these disciplines from semiotic approaches that conduct epistemologically correct theorizations, but lose sight of the societal effectiveness and communicative reality of documental films. Bringing together style, forms, formats, *and* topics or rather content and putting them into a societal and cultural context—from which they arise and in which they are discussed—would be an important task for the sociology of film, expanding current debates in media and film studies. History, in my opinion, faces similar challenges, as I shall go into briefly below.

Notes on documental film and history

History is relevant to documental film in many ways: as documental historiography of film, as historical source, and as a (sub-)genre of documental films. The historiography of film as part of media and film studies deals with the historical evolution of films and their complex cultural, economic, and aesthetic contexts of creation and reception (on this see the standard work by Nowell-Smith 2006). Film history is closely linked with questions of style, form, and format from different time periods, provides insights into thematic genres, technological development,

19 A cautious thesis might be that Wildenhahn set important filmic stimuli in a historical and political context (1970s) in which the mere suspicion of an aesthetics or of aestheticizing would have been rejected by politically critical media and film workers. Although his films show an eminently artistic aspect and Wildenhahn himself has looked into the theory of art in his papers, he was classified as an ontological theorist and finally abandoned. It seems to me that this is a misunderstanding of his approach due to the time period, or is at least a very narrowing view of his work. The fact that form and content are placed in an artistic tension and that on top of this he develops a societal perspective on documental films makes him, like the whole of Direct Cinema, interesting for a sociology of film that is not purely post-structural or deconstructionist.

all aspects of filmic narrative and representation, and much more. According to Faulstich, film history can be told in many ways and covers different aspects, however its main focus is on fiction films (see Faulstich 2005, 7). As a historical source, film has to be (critically) evaluated with regards to its testimonial value for a specific period, as films are used as »pictorial evidence« in order to (re)construct history and historical events (see Arnold 1998, 48). However images are considered unreliable sources, as the semantics of images and films are not explicitly determined, but rather ambiguous (polysemous). Films allow different readings and points of access, depending on the point in time and the viewing situation. Therefore, images and films first obtain sense and significance from the communication and utilization contexts into which they are put and from which they are disseminated. These may vary historically and diverge culturally. Documental films as well, with their claim to referencing reality, do not transport unambiguous mirrors of social reality but are bound in the complex context of their dissemination and communication. Their functions include information and illumination, proof, evidence, education, and propaganda.

History differentiates between primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are contemporary recordings of events and therefore historically generally more reliable than secondary sources that emerged later, possibly much later than the historical event (see ibid., 44–45). Documental films of different eras are *primary sources* as long as they are understood as recording and observation tools and create »views« of political, social, economic and cultural events. The excursus on the history of documental film above considers it to be a primary source which can be utilized for research on historical usage and contextual embeddedness and thus on the importance of documental film at a certain point in time. Such historical reflection not only allows insight into changes as regards production, but also into what is understood as a documental film at different points of time. Contemporaneity, however, is not an explicit criteria for or proof of the »authenticity« of primary sources: documental shots may have been staged and events re-enacted, falsified or produced for a

special purpose.[20] Documental films are secondary sources if they deal with history from some time in the future. This is true for documental films when they reconstruct or reflect on history. This form of handling, recreating, and staging history is nowadays popular in documental (sub) genres, forms, and formats such as docufiction/docu-drama, compilation films, historical infotainment, biopics, films with contemporary witnesses (»oral history« or »talking heads«), living history, and the likes. (These films can, in the future, be used again as primary sources on the handling of history by documental films of a certain period). Whereas film history and the use of primary sources in historic sciences may be similar in their focus, the critical debate on secondary sources and the development of hybrid history films and television formats with history as their topic will be an interesting new field of research as this area of documental film production is very popular in today's media cultures and is highly successful nationally and internationally.[21]

The question of whether images have an epistemic value for historical sciences can be answered with a clear »yes«: they may be used for historical research but should not be seen as a copy of the represented (see Talkenberger 1998, 83). Rather, following Panofsky, history uses iconographic or iconological techniques (on film see Panofsky 1971) in order to deal with pictorial material or applies semiotics or communication theory. The latter connects analytical questions about content and form and thus assign images to a historical communication context. This

20 Georges Méliès for example staged the coronation of Edward VII before it even happened. Other documental films were also staged by Méliès at this early stage of film history. Even the probably most important film for the history of documental film, *Nanook of the North (1922)* by Robert Flaherty, is to a large extent staged (see Ellis and McLane 2009, 12–14).

21 Buzzwords like »public history« (see Bösch 2009) or »history goes pop« (see Korte 2009) exemplify this trend. In this context the aim is not only an accurate appraisal and reconstruction of history but rather (postmodern) medial processes of reflection which seek to delineate the limits and possibilities of representability within the universe of signs in film and television. On this see the new anthology *Spiel mit der Wirklichkeit* by Hoffmann, Kilborn and Barg (2012).

accommodates the medial inner logic of film and images. In contrast, »naive« theories of reproduction are being rejected. Reception-oriented approaches deal with the perception of pictures by the observer (see Talkenberger 1998, 86–88). With regard to documental film, questions arise as to what has been understood as documental film at which time, about the context in which documental films appear and what they were to communicate.[22] The historical sciences thus have many methods at their disposal to investigate the specifics and the meanings of different documental film styles, forms, and formats. When documental films are looked at not only as pure reproductions, but also within the context of their symbolic meaning and communication contexts, the question arises as to how history is staged and depicted in film and its collective generation of meaning. This is the subject of current works on medial memory where film is seen as a new key medium (see Erll and Wodianka 2008). In German film and television productions, documental films about the contemporary and ancient history of Germany are booming.[23] The current boom of history films and history television (in Germany) stems fundamentally from societal historical navel-gazing. This can be seen for example in films such as Heinrich Breloer's docu-fictions/docu-dramas on central topics of German contemporary and cultural history (*Speer und Er, Die Manns* or *Todesspiel*). Documental films as a secondary source thus contribute to a great extent to the constitution of contemporary commemoration cultures, a lively and controversial debate

22 Kerstin Sutterheim (2012) submitted interesting research on the display of the occult ideology of National Socialism in documental films of the Third Reich. In these films, the genre's ostensibly educational function is not fulfilled, rather films such as *Wintersonnenwende* (1936) work on the creation of a myth.

23 In the meantime, whole series deal not only with recent German history (as in the popular Guido Knopp broadcasts), but go back to the beginnings of German history as in the TV productions *Wir Deutschen* (2006) or *Die Deutschen* (2008).

within the field of history.[24] Especially the use and staging of contemporary witnesses is an important and at the same time critically viewed form of the realization and conservation of history in film (see Sabrow and Frei 2012; Keilbach 2010; Elm 2008; Fischer and Wirtz 2008). The question of the adequacy of historical reconstruction, authenticity, and historical truth of the topics depicted in such productions will remain subject to discussion.

There are very different ways to work on and to authenticate historical topics in documental film. Basic problems arise from processing history in film and television, including personalization, de-contextualization or rather de-historization, and dramatizing and emotionalizing events; to this the the economic pressure of ratings must be added (see Wirtz 2008). This has resulted in the now wide-spread »discomfort of historical sciences on the popularization« of history in film (see Crivellari 2008, 161), a development welcomed by veterans of Postmodernism. In their view, parting from the meta-narrative of history opens up vistas on the fragmentation and fragility of historical realities and experiential contexts (see Jarausch and Geyer 2005). The variety of ways of illustrating history in documental films challenges the concept of history itself. At the same time, the different film forms and formats underline questions about the complexity and accessibility of the past.

Aufderheide (2008, 91–92) pinpoints three main difficulties faced by documental filmmakers when dealing with a historical topic: 1) The existence of (audio-)visual material on the topic: the use of different sources of images and sounds such as archival films, photographs, pictures, re-enactments, expert interviews, typical music, contemporary witnesses, off-screen commentators, etc. These materials are brought into context through the montage of image and sound without claiming that they are history. 2) The filmmaker is usually not a historian. Although historians are often asked for advice and support in historical

24 In the future, documental films will have an important place in the mediation of audio-visual presentations of history and will become a central part of our transformed medial memory.

documental film productions or historical knowledge is incorporated, the dramaturgy of time and content follows rules other than those of the historical sciences. This may lead to intentional omissions, ambiguity, and difficulties in interpretation. In addition the filmmaker has another methodological approach towards his topic; usually he incorporates stylistic or film aesthetic traditions. Especially the staging of the image and the montage as an aesthetic element of design provide information about the strategies of documental filmic realization. The aesthetics of the documental film image already offer a range of important information on the chosen approach to the topic, and thus the attitude and perspective of the filmmaker. 3) The realistic impression produced by documental film makes it difficult to develop alternative perspectives on history within documental films or to question the reality suggested by the images through alternative illustrations. It is just as difficult to make it apparent to the spectator how much interpretation has been created through the choice and montage of the material. Documental film forms and formats activate different techniques in order to conceal or dismantle filmic historic representation. Depending on their strategy, documental film images may be suggestive, reflexive or deconstructive.

Finally, I would like to go into three different formats for dealing with history in documental films: docu-fiction/docu-drama, essay film, and living history. All three forms differ in essential aspects and are more or less popular in film and television.

Television made docu-fiction/docu-drama a well-known documental format. It usually targets historical events that have an inherent dramatizing potential (see Barg 2012, 324). Over the past years, it has become one of the most successful and at the same time most contested forms of reconstructing history, utilizing both facts—documental recordings, expert interviews, historical findings—and fiction/fictionalization, that is animation or re-enacted scenes of real events by actors when no pictorial material is available. Docu-fiction/docu-dramas are

> filmic reconstructions of documented or lived reality of people or events with the claim to documenting past events in a way that gives the impression of authenticity and truth (…). In order to re-

> alize this, re-enacted dramatization of documented reality, usually actors or lay actors are engaged (Behrendt 2007, 148).

The key narrative elements are the personalization and dramatization of individual events and destinies, as well as their (melo)dramatization in order to increase suspense. The re-enacted scenes make their narrative elements not unlike those of fictional film (see Beattie 2001, 19). Historic structures and long-term societal developments, however, are less represented. In the German context, there are docu-fictions/docu-dramas on eventful topics, historic personalities, situations of radical change or selected stages of German contemporary history (see Steinle 2012, 306). These dramatizations of an event (and thus the attribution of importance) in their most pointed form are part of a medial staging often framed by television broadcasts and round tables, and accompanied by paratextual internet and print media announcements. The event is then not only the inner-filmic staging, but the complete orchestration and marketing strategy in TV media and commemorative culture. National Socialism and the GDR are popular topics, as well as catastrophic events in recent history. The objective of the fictional and documental elements is to be as near to reality as possible and seemingly authentic. At the same time, spectator interest, historical discourse, and filmic plot have to be taken into account in order to make such programs attractive. Docu-dramas play an important role in the current cultivation of commemorative culture. We can observe the following as regards collective memory and commemorative cultures from the staging and success of docu-dramas: an on-going interest for historic topics with a nostalgic impetus (or cathartic intent); the mixing of entertainment and information, whereby the ratio of the mix varies greatly; a tendency to put historic tragedies and conflicts into a formula in which—thanks to the pointed modulation of the characters in the fictional re-enactments—the viewer is offered the perspective of the victim in order to encourage identification (conversely, the perpetrators are de-realized and unreal, see Jureit 2011). As regards the integration of interviews of contemporary witnesses, one criticism made of current productions is that all witnesses, regardless of their experience or fate, are given equal footing without any historical

commentary (see Bösch 2008, 68–69). On the other hand, depictions of the GDR are loaded with stereotypical, clichéd symbolic associations that suggest the GDR as a state was doomed from the beginning (see Steinle 2012). In this way, docu-dramas/docu-fictions intervene prominently in the interpretation and classification of historical periods and events, and should thus be critically scrutinized as regards their perspectives and possible interpretations.

Like docu-fictions/docu-dramas, essay[25] and compilation film works with fictional elements of motion pictures and with documental filmic recordings. However, unlike the docu-drama, this documental film form is *not* an easily consumable product; one reason why these productions often quickly disappear into the collective »non-memory« (Scherer 2001, 14). Essay films often work with realistic artistic conceptions (see Heinze 2013). They scrutinize the possibilities of an artistic-medial access to reality, and interpret the latter quite subjectively. They do not use the above-mentioned documental material to affirm and increase the authenticity of the material, but rather in a self-reflexive and deconstructive manner.

Documental methods in art work with texts, pictures, and objects of different semiotic structure and type: trace, evidence, index, recording, copy, certificate, chronic. Generally determinant of the document is the truth attributed to it, the key questions therefore determine place, time and form of certification, guarantee by authorities (witnesses, detectives, scientists, artists), media (photography, film, text) or facts/objects. The document is always preceded by fact and is itself a fact. It refers to facts and—as it stops doing so—becomes a fact itself, embedded in a certain practice. In this dual function the documental has a huge artistic potential, encompassing epistemological and ontological considerations and socio-critical functions. It can create a discussion about concepts of real-

25 The differences between essay film, film essays, and essayistic film will not be further developed here. See Scherer (2001:22–24) On essay film see also Kramer and Tode 2011; and Blümlinger and Wulf 1992.

ity, temporal forms, models of truth and discourses on authenticity. (Knaller 2010, 175)

Thus all documental elements of cultural memory can be used to reflect on media. Essay films refer, within themselves, to knowledge of cultural memory and bring their work about the past to the light of the present; they unite art and mediality. They work with visual and auditory alienation in order to provoke irritation and reflective processes within the audience. Whereas the docu-drama focusses essentially on suspense and emotion and easy consumption through dramatization, essay films promote the viewers' reflection on that which they (do not) see—the absent and forgotten. Thus there is a tension between the showable and the not-showable. Essay films create inter-mediality between literature, painting, music, and photography. They work associatively and bring the dream closer to commemorative work. Commemorative work is thus not dealt with on a topical level, but also on an aesthetic level. It is a filmic attempt to give memory a visual equivalence. Essay films follow an open style of depiction and focus on self-reflexiveness and enquiry about the limits and possibilities of documental depiction:

> A constitutive characteristic of the essay film is raising the issue of and staging the subjectivity of the gaze or, rather, the subjective view of the world. Dreams, imagination, experience, and memory are central topics. It also distinguishes itself through self-reflexiveness and self-referencing: the aesthetic possibilities of film are reflected in the film. This is accompanied by the articulation of doubt about images and the filmic reproduction or rather representation of conditions. Knowledge of the tentative nature of realization is constantly present in the essay film; it concentrates on the provisional (the attempt), on processuality, blurriness, the not-clearly-defined (Scherer 2001, 14).

In contrast to docu-dramas, the aim is not an authentic and appropriate depiction of extra-filmic historical events, but possibilities of raising these issues within the film and questioning them in a self-reflexive manner. In this epistemological context, self-reflexiveness means a consciousness of being subject and object of a commemorative and thus

perceptive process at one and the same time. In order to critically reflect his own position and the conventions of documental film, the filmmaker uses filmic means of expression (see Meyer 2005, 52). In the history of documental film forms, this self-reflexive filmmaking is rooted in the 1920s avant-garde (see ibid., 61–63) and, unlike docu-drama/docu-fiction, is usually not geared towards a mass audience. The essay film is less committed to the »what« than to the »how.« It thus fulfills important epistemological functions and is committed to reflection of the conditions of the constitution of cultural memory. This makes it an awkward form that is often only viewed by a small audience.

Living history, lastly, is a form of TV documental history where the viewer himself actively turns into a historicized protagonist. »Living history formats are two things: a game of history and a mirror of the present. The simulation of the past serves as a kind of experiment on crises: the sudden absence of daily routines in historical settings expose that which we take for granted in our present everyday lives« (Hißnauer 2009, 120). These reality experiments are thus closer to the docu-soap. In living history formats, people intentionally take on a bygone way of life, follow the rules, and allow themselves to be observed. The historical setting can be in any era: *Abenteuer 1900—Leben im Gutshaus* (2004; Adventure 1900—Living at the manor) takes the actors back to rural life around the turn of the century with its strict hierarchical regime, whereas *Steinzeit—Das Experiment—Leben wie vor 5000 Jahren* (2007; Stone Age—The experiment—Living like people 5000 years ago) immerses the protagonists in an era that is hard to grasp. These historical plays are less documental and more experimental. They are meant to display human behavior in unfamiliar extraordinary situations, to rouse emotions and to dramatize events (see Hoffmann 2012b, 171). Alongside providing shallow entertainment, living history—which has in the meantime disappeared from TV broadcasts—discloses another dimension that asks the more basic question of what audiences might find interesting in historical documental film formats. Perhaps a contemporary affinity to nostalgia hides behind the »allure of the historical« (ibid., 169), a conservative/conserving attitude that promises, through historical retrospect,

support and stability at a time when traditions and things previously taken for granted seem to disappear. The collective observation of history is possibly an illusionary remedy against individualized drifting in the »Risk Society« (see Beck 1986) or »World Risk Society« (see Beck 2008). The boom of historic documental film forms can possibly be explained by its function of stabilizing society and providing a collective orientation and thus fostering, as Jan Assmann (1997) described, the solidarity of the group as societal collective.

Docu-drama/docu-fiction, essay film, and living history offer three different possibilities of dealing with history in film in a documental way. All three feature history in an entertaining, investigative, self-reflexive, structured, and compassionate manner. All three should be treated critically by historians. Sociological as well as historical perspectives provide a platform for the further analysis of such forms and formats. These documental forms and formats can be seen as part of a postmodern media culture, because their staging and configuration of history suggest an open and ambiguous handling of history. Early representatives of documental film would not have dared to dream that documental films would be placed in, and discussed in, such a context.

About this journal

This journal provides insights into the styles and developments of documental film. Bernt Schnettler's contribution deals with the tradition and present-day use of film as a method in the social sciences and visual anthropology. Informed by the sociology of knowledge and by anthropology, his article highlights the use of film as scientific tool of observation and reconstructs its origins in visual anthropology. In doing so, the potentials and limitations of the medium for sociology and anthropology are disclosed.

Laurel Ahnert deals with the use of documental film in the early 20th century and discusses the educational use of instructional films as a neglected documental form between the »view aesthetic« and the documentary proper. She works in the main with the conceptualization and historicization of documental films in Bill Nichols' work. She thus high-

lights a form that has been neglected in the historiography of documental film.

In his contribution, Thomas Weber traces contemporary tendencies of documental film forms and formats. He deals with the difficulty of contextualizing documental films and their medial environment. His proposal breaks with earlier models of documental film theory and leans on Bruno Latour's sociological actor network theory.

Tanja Seider examines the essay film using Philip Scheffner's *The Halfmoon Files* as an example. This film centers on a forgotten topic from the time of the First World War. Her contribution illustrates the possibilities of this documental film form to approach the past with different materials in a self-reflexive manner. This reveals layers of history that have an important epistemological function in the debate on history in the documental film.

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Notes on the History and Development of Visual Research Methods[1]

Bernt Schnettler

Precursors of interpretive visual analysis

The rich, varied, and prolific body of research using visual data has made it a virtually impossible task to trace the complete development of visual methods in the social sciences. Particularly in the past few years, we have witnessed a vibrant intensification in the field of visual sociology and in visual research methods.[2] In order to understand the current state of

1 This article is based on a paper given at the conference SIAVTAC in Mexico City in 2008, first published in 2011 as »Apuntes sobre la historia y el desarrollo de los métodos visuales« in a book edited by César A. Cisneros (*Análisis cualitativo asistido por computadora. Teoría e Investigación*, 165–191). I draw partly on previous publications, some of them jointly written with colleagues that generously allowed me to use our collaborative efforts (Pötzsch and Schnettler 2007; Schnettler 2007; Schnettler and Raab 2008; Schnettler and Baer 2013). I am grateful to Alejandro Baer and Hubert Knoblauch and two anonymous reviewers for their critical comments.

2 This revival is well documented in a number of monographs (Raab 2008; Bohnsack 2009; Breckner 2010), introductory books (Moritz 2011; Dinkelacker and Herrle 2009; Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010; Reichertz and Engler 2011), collections (Kissmann 2009; Corsten, Krug, and Moritz 2010; Pink 2012; Lucht, Schmidt, and Tuma 2013) and handbooks (Margolis and Pauwels 2011; Rose 2011). Several journals have published thematic issues on visual sociology, including *Sozialer Sinn* (vol. 8, no. 2, 2007); *FQS* (vol. 9, no. 3, 2008); *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* (vol. 37, no. 2, 2012); and *Soziale Welt* (vol. 64, no. 1–2, 2013). Moreover, the ISA Thematic Group on Visual Sociology, established in 2009, has recently been elevated to the status of a Working Group (WG03).

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both, it seems necessary to recapitulate at least the major steps in their historical development.

The first usage of photos and films for scientific purposes were determined by their capacity to produce *documents* of the realities they depict. Very early on, disciplines such as cultural and social anthropology, ethnology, and folklore studies discovered the particular benefits of visual data. In a strange coincidence, sociology and photography emerged at around the same time.[3] Sociology however did not easily develop an intimate relationship with photography. In the mid-nineteenth century, there was an extensive use of visual materials in sociological research areas.[4] At that time, visualizations produced by the novel technology of photographic cameras gradually began to replace the hand-drawn pictures that had hitherto accompanied ethnographic texts and served to illustrate scientific documents (Theye 1989). After 1916, photographs were abruptly replaced by tables, formulas, and graphs. Due to the growing influence of statistical methods, these suddenly became considered the only legitimate forms of scientific illustrations (Stasz 1979).

It is no wonder that in the following years, projects located on the margins or even outside the social sciences provided decisive stimuli for the development of the incipient field of visual sociology. Among the most prominent of these projects is the work of German documentary photographer August Sander. Sander was an exception among the photographers of his time. His oeuvre *People of the Twentieth Century* strikingly demonstrates his extraordinary skills and the gentle subtlety with which he took advantage of documentary photography's evocative potential. To-

3 It was in 1839 when August Comte published the first volume of his *Course de Philosophie*—the same year Daguerre's technology was announced at a meeting of the Academy of Sciences (Becker 1986).

4 Raab 2008 points out that the first uses of visual documents in sociology date from 1903 to 1915, when a series of articles were published in the *American Journal of Sociology* which used photographs as illustrations or to render documentary evidence (see for example Breckindrige and Aboth 1910; MacLean 1903; Walker 1915; Woodhead 1904).

day, his influential original work continues to be highly appreciated by ethnographic photographers. Susan Sontag (1977, 59) called it a true »example of photography-as-science,« although she commented critically on his efforts to strive for objective evidence. Sander's ›sociological‹ endeavor consisted of taking photographic portraits which he subsequently organized into folders in order to create a visual record of his contemporary society. In a letter from July 21, 1925 addressed to Professor Erich Stenger, Sander explained his photo-documentary concept:

> With the help of pure photography it is possible to create images that document the people in a genuine way and with their complete psychology. I started from this principle after acknowledging that I could create some real pictures of people, to produce a true mirror of the time in which they live [...]. For an overview of our time and our German people, I organized the photos into folders, starting with the farmer and ending with the representatives of the intellectual aristocracy (Heiting 1999, 22 [translation BS]).

Fig. 1: August Sander, *People of the Twentieth Century*: from left to right: notary, sergeant, baker, painter, cripple.

Sander's approach is remarkable for two reasons. First, because of his idea of the *visual* representation of social stratification. The carefully designed order of the photographs was intended to reflect the visible structure of social inequality as perceived by Sander, and according to how he came to interpret it. Second, he challenged the dominance of words over images, because his photographic collection was not accompanied by any textual commentary, except for a succinct caption providing the person's occupation or social status. Trusting in the demonstrative power of images, Sander argued that the photographs' order

itself would operate as a resource for their interpretation. Seen together, the photos would act as visual mutual comments on one another (Soeffner 2006).

Fig. 2: Left: Dorothea Lange, Plantation Overseer and His Field Hands near Clarksdale, Mississippi (1936); Right: Plate from Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (1939)

Several decades later, there was another outstanding milestone in the history of visual analysis: the photo documentation of the lives of people in rural America, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and managed by the Farm Security Administration (Rusinow 1942; Evans 1973). This project was inspired by anthropological concepts and methods, and was explicitly aimed at establishing visual sociology as an independent and novel discipline. In their book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* James Agee and Walker Evans (1939) explored new ways of balancing the relationship between image and the text by emancipating pictures from their merely illustrative function: »Photographs are not illustrative. They and the text are coequal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative« (Agee 1939, IX). It is worth noting that their photographs were the result of extensive ethnographic fieldwork. For a considerable period, they shared the daily lives of their subjects, whom they studied intensively before taking any pictures. Only after having become a part of these people's lives did they begin to take photographs. They worked sensitively and selectively, and with a perspective that allowed them to capture reality not only as it presented itself to them as photographers. Rather, they learned to perceive the everyday reality of the

groups they investigated from their subjects' point of view. The sociological value of these impressive photos transcends the narrow field of documentary photojournalism. Thus, visual sociology as a novel discipline received an important thrust from the works of talented photo documentarists such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Irving Rusinow.[5]

These works continue to exert an influence on current approaches within visual sociology. Recently, Sybilla Tinapp (2005) has taken up concepts from Sander, Evans, and others in her visual sociological research on social change in contemporary Cuban society. Her method of ›visual concentration‹ is firmly rooted in sociological hermeneutics (Soeffner 1989; 1996).[6] Combining the skills of both a professional photographer and a trained anthropologist, Tinapp lived for several years in Cuba, documenting the manifold manifestations of evolving social change with her camera. Putting into practice the principles of Sander, Evans, and other precursors of this method, Tinapp emphasized an emic point of view by asking her informants to themselves choose the domestic and professional scenes in which they wished to be portrayed. Moreover, once she had taken the pictures, she let her subjects select those photos they felt best represented their reality or, more precisely, their realities. By presenting her subjects in contrasting environments

5 For a critical discussion of documentary photography, see Solomon-Godeau 1991.

6 Sociological hermeneutics combines methods of textual interpretation developed over centuries of humanistic tradition with Weber's sociological theory of *Verstehen*. This »understanding« is rooted in our everyday interpretations. Everyone socialized in a particular cultural context is—more or less—able to understand, to make sense of, his or her surroundings. Based on this first-order ability, sociological hermeneutics has developed methodological instruments that lead to a deeper and broader understanding of social reality, as reflected in the materials studied. Initially this method was mainly applied to textual data such as interview transcripts or field documents. In recent years however, hermeneutical sociological interpretation has also been applied successfully to visual data.

and—like Sander—organizing the photos into folders without any textual reference except captions, Tinapp has created a unique visual record of the current transformations of everyday life in Cuba.

Fig. 3: Sybilla Tinapp (2005), Sequence IV: tourist guide, teacher, and athlete

These studies illustrate one important research focus that uses visual methods centered on the notion of *documentation*. Their main research themes included visual documentation of social problems such as the poor life conditions of ethnic minorities and marginalized social groups, or the lower classes' everyday struggle for survival.[7] In addition, the mimetic power of photography was used in the social sciences for studying topics such as role behavior in families and was especially appreciated in the field of urban sociology (Becker 1981; 1986). If the methodological perspective of the photographic works cited above emphasizes the notion of documenting social reality, the same characteristic feature can be witnessed in the second major contribution to the history of visual analysis, namely ethnographic cinema.

7 See Stumberger 2007 and 2010 for a comprehensive history of social documentary photography.

Fig. 4: Robert Flaherty, stills from *Nanook of the North* (1922)

One can distinguish two stages in the development of ethnographic film, both grounded in different epistemologies. The first is infused with the documentary spirit mentioned above. Easily observable cultural differences and the »visibly« diverse and heterogeneous character of anthropological objects of study stimulated a new research branch and a corresponding filmmaking practice named »ethnographic cinema« or »visual anthropology.« Robert Flaherty (1884–1951) was one of the pioneers of ethnographic film. His famous documentary about the life of the Inuit, *Nanook of the North* (1922), is considered the first feature-length documentary in history, and had considerable box-office success in the United States and beyond. Flaherty spent two and a half years living with the family of Inuit hunter and fisherman Allakariallak, who plays the character of Nanook. He shot his well-known film about the daily life of the Inuit near Inukjuag on Hudson Bay.

Decades later, dynamics within classical visual anthropology, conceived as a kind of camera-supported field work, led to new methodical approaches still well-known today (See Bateson and Mead 1942; Mead 1975; Collier 1967 and 1979; and Collier and Collier 1986). Mead's and Bateson's (1942) famous study on the *Balinese Character*, which explicitly coupled social science with image-taking technologies, constituted an important innovation in social research methodology. Their study explored the role of culture for shaping personality. Technological advancements, including the miniaturization of camera equipment, allowed them to carry out an unprecedented visual ethnographic research that incorporated both photography and film. The 25,000 photographs and 22,000 feet of 16mm footage Mead and Bateson shot in Bali provided an impressive amount of data that served as both illustration and support-

ing evidence of their hypotheses. Their deliberate use of images was a response to the severe criticism that had been aimed at them earlier. Their detractors accused Mead's and Bateson's arguments of lacking scientific rigor. Both anthropologists trusted that the enormous corpus of visual data collected by their cameras would furnish their ethnography with an indisputable documentary basis and improve the expressive power of their reasoning (Harris 1986, 360).[8]

In the following years, ethnographic film achieved a certain degree of institutionalization, both in Europe and in the U.S.A. In France, the *Comité du film ethnographique* at the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* was established. In 1953, the German *Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film* was founded in Göttingen. In the U.S., various institutional centers were created, including a center at Harvard University Department of Anthropology, the National Anthropological Film Center in Washington, D.C., and the Center for Visual Anthropology at the University of Southern California (Asch 1991). In Spain, the development of ethnographic cinema was more timid. It was marginalized as an academic discipline and associated primarily with folkloric film production (Ardèvol 2001).[9]

The second stage of the development of ethnographic film relates to the ›crisis of representation,‹ which initiated a significant reflexive turn in ethnographic cinema. The documentary *The Ax Fight* (1975) by Napoleon Chagnon and Tim Ash provides an excellent example of this shift in

8 Mead contested this critique, asserting that: »Those who have been loudest in their demand for ›scientific‹ work have been least willing to use instruments that would do for anthropology what instrumentation has done for other sciences—refine and expand the areas of accurate observation« (Mead 1975, 10).

9 Exceptions are the written and filmic work created in the *Taller de Antropología Visual* in Madrid by the anthropologists Ana Martínez, Manuel Cerezo, and Penélope Ranera, as well as Elisenda Ardèvol's visual anthropological research. These researchers have addressed the visual aspects of anthropological practice, especially in relation to fieldwork (Camas and Martinez 2004; Ardèvol 1996 and 1998; Lisón 1993).

perspective in ethnographic filmmaking. The two intended to document the lives of the Yanomami in the Amazon jungle. While they were shooting in a village, they were surprised by the sudden outburst of a fight among the Yanomami, a startling incident that occurred before their eyes. Despite their astonishment, they continued filming, although they did not understand what was happening. Thus, the footage includes both the documentation of the strange events as well as comments by the two filmmakers, expressing surprise, anguish, and incomprehension at this unexpected situation. Instead of removing what they could have considered an unwanted accident, they decided to maintain this sequence in the final cut of this film. Thereby, they intentionally address the problem of perspective and reflect on the lack of comprehension in fieldwork done by Westerners in non-western civilizations.

Fig. 5: Stills from *First Contact* (1983) by Bob Conolly and Robin Anderson

A second classic ethnographic film illustrates another way of systematically contrasting different perspectives using cinematographic resources. The German version of this Academy Award nominated film was released under the title *Als die weißen Geister kamen* (i.e. *When the white spirits came*, 1984). It reconstructs the ›discovery‹ of indigenous peoples in the interior of Papua New Guinea from their own point of view, combining rediscovered historical material with more recent footage. In the early 1930s, a team of Australian gold prospectors ventured into the mountains of New Guinea's unexplored interior, where they met a tribal population who had never had any contact with white people. One of the Australians, Michael Leahy, filmed this encounter between twentieth-century Western culture and a »primitive civilization« The material was forgotten for 50 years until filmmakers Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson rediscovered it. They decided to revisit the people and interview those involved in the original encounter. Their film confronts the his-

torical viewpoint with a contemporary perspective, and also juxtaposes the standpoints of the Western adventurers and those of the villagers. In this way, the encounter is reconstructed from different angles. By intersecting old and new footage, they create a new type of documentary that contains parallel perspectives, and tells a story of colonialism and its aftermath. The filmmakers mix captivating recordings of first encounters with interviews sequences of the Leahy brothers recounting their experience during the expedition.[10]

The examples cited here have something else in common. They use the audio-visual medium as a *resource* to produce a record of a given reality. This is done through artistic forms of expressions in order to present those features the filmmakers consider relevant. In other words, they use visual material predominantly as a support for what in technical terms would be called data collection and presentation of results, while skipping over the most important phase in any sociological investigation: the analysis.

Before going on to discuss the use of cameras as devices for analytical purposes, we should note that despite the initial efforts mentioned above, the foundation of visual sociology in the proper sense did not take place before the 1970s (Cheatwood and Stasz 1979; Schändlinger 1998). In that decade, the production, analysis, and interpretation of visual data were organized for the first time as a specialized discipline within the social sciences. During the 1980s, visual sociology enjoyed a major boost: several journals were published regularly, a series of conferences were held, and important anthologies printed. In this period, numerous introductory student manuals were issued, some of them accompanied by didactical tutorials. Several universities in the U.S. offered post-graduate courses and seminars in which the theory and practice of

10 The documentary is part of a series of five films produced by Conolly and Anderson between 1983 and 2001 and was originally entitled *First Contact* (1983). On current developments in the sociology of film, see the anthology recently edited by Heinze, Moebius, and Reicher 2012.

visual sociology was taught (Curry and Clarke 1978; Curry 1984; Henney 1986).

But despite the enormous efforts undertaken to broaden the field of visual sociology (Caufield 1996; Harper 1988; 1996), and to ensure its institutional basis as an autonomous, specialized sub-discipline within academic sociology, it began to lose authority from the late 1980s onwards. This was due mainly to the increasing popularity and pervasiveness of cultural studies, which had a significant impact, especially, but not exclusively, in Anglo-Saxon academic communities. Cultural studies sought to establish, as a ›post-disciplinary‹ project, what has become known as visual culture and visual studies.[11] Despite the criticism of its implicit socio-political agenda and its insufficient methodological instruments of discourse analysis (Bal 2002), one of the unquestionable merits of visual studies is its emphasis on the increasingly important role of audio-visual media in people's daily life and work.

The growing appeal of media and communication studies, especially the study of mass media (Chaplin 1994; Long 1997; Mikos 1999) also weakened the strength of visual sociology. In Germany, attempts to institutionalize visual anthropology and visual sociology suffered the same fate as in the U.S.[12] But outside the mainstream of the social sciences, some qualitative studies remained within the minority position of visual sociology by studying the nonprofessional use of cameras in everyday life

11 Bryson, Holly, and Moxey 1991; Evans and Hall 1999; Jenks 1995; Mirzoeff 1998; Mirzoeff 1999; Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Walker and Chaplin 1997. Recently, visual studies (Schulz 2005, 85–91) has intended to create a *Bildkulturwissenschaft* or »new science of image culture« (Holert 2000, 21), combining notions derived from critical theory, media studies and critical discourse analysis and transferring them from texts to audio-visual forms of cultural expression.

12 Ballhaus 1985; Taureg 1984; 1986; Teckenburg 1982; Wuggenig 1990/1991. This development is symptomatically illustrated by the existence of an entry on the subject (»Visuelle Soziologie,« Berghaus 1989) in the first edition of the German Dictionary of Sociology (Endruweit and Trommsdorf 1989) and its absence in the subsequent edition (Endruweit and Trommsdorf 2002).

and in advertising. This approach started around the 1960s when still cameras became popular. Bourdieu et al.'s ([1965]) well-known study on photography as »middlebrow art« and Goffman's (1979) study on »gender advertisements« are situated in this context. At that time, photographic images began to massively penetrate many areas of daily life. These studies discovered markedly varying aesthetic practices in different social stratum, as well as visually mediated ways of presenting stereotypes of men and women.

Subsequently, research was extended to the study of certain popular television genres and their respective styles.[13] The end of the era of »mass production« (Piore and Sabel 1989) in the economy in general and in consumer culture in particular also had a major impact on the »reality of the mass media« (Luhmann 1995). Social differentiation, the fragmentation of audiences, and diversification, together with the increasing »democratization« of media were the results. This ended an era dominated by the sociology of mass communication (Hunziker 1988; Maletzke 1988). Individualization and the imminent rise of the multi-optional communicative society transformed many of the previous approaches, and united them under the new banner of cultural studies.[14]

Studies undertaken within the framework of visual studies have, however, also faced severe criticism. The have been accused of overemphasizing epistemological problems and debates concerning the ›truth‹ of images and how images may cheat the spectator, while disregarding methodological issues. Few researchers, though, were preoccupied with questions such as how to use audio-visual media appropriately for social

13 Such as advertisements (Kotelmann and Mikos 1981), news (Keppler 1985) and films (Kepplinger 1987) or telenovelas (Rössler 1988).

14 See also Chaplin 1994; Long 1997; Mikos 1999. This branch of visual sociology has experienced a significant boom over the past few years. One should mention the International Visual Sociology Association, IVSA, which edits a specialized academic journal entitled *Visual Studies,* as well as approaches such as participatory visual research or visual ethnography (Pink 2007).

research purposes.[15] This has had decisive consequences for current research on and with visual and audio-visual data. Indubitably, research with visual data had to evolve beyond classical notions of media sociology and mass media research (See Albrecht 1991; Hunziker 1988; Denzin 2000; Rose 2000; Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001; Loizos 2000), not only in terms of its objects of study and the respective social fields in which those are embedded, but also as regards conceptual and methodological questions.

First analytical uses of the camera

Parallel to the developments outlined so far, one can draw a different trajectory for the field of researching with visual materials. In this field, the use of the camera as a tool for analyzing phenomena of human action and interaction dominates, sometimes in an almost microscopic manner. This second field dates back to early days when photography emerged as a new technology. Capable of visualizing and documenting the most diverse phenomena, the camera initially became a device for recording and analyzing body movements. The British photographer Eadweard Muybridge quickly recognized the new possibilities offered by this discovery and in the 1870s invented a photographic apparatus for taking multiple snapshots of a galloping horse and recording them on one plate. These photographs were the first representations of an ordered sequence of motion, an analysis obtained from methods that could be replicated and verified (Frutos 1991). Soon after, these images appeared in the most prestigious scientific journals (including *Scientific American*, and *The Nature*), attracting much attention among the scientific community. Muybridge's photos were even compared to the images obtained with instruments like the telescope or microscope, because the

15 Although there are important exceptions, see for example Jordan and Henderson 1995; Heath 1986 and 1997a; or Lomax and Casey 1998. See below for a more detailed discussion.

photographic sequences allowed the analysis of phases of rapid locomotion and thereby opened a hitherto invisible world to the human eye.[16]

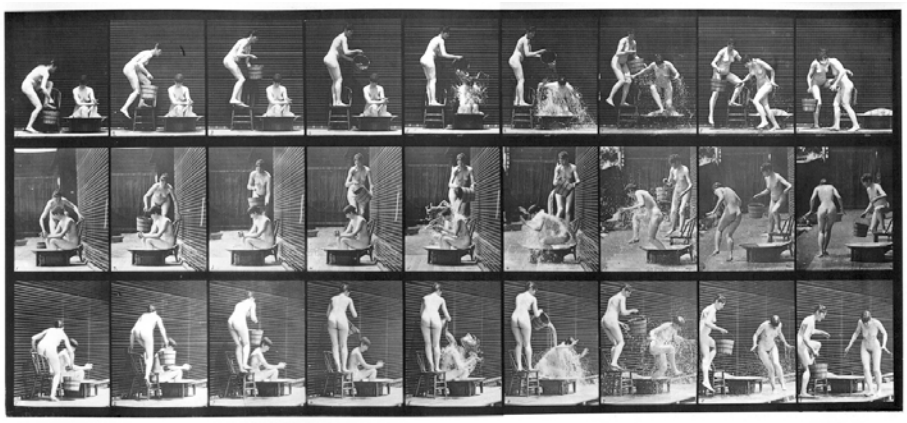

Fig. 6: Eadweard Muybridge: *Human Females in Motion Nude*, Vol. 4, Plate 408 (1887)

In sociology, however, methodological competence in analyzing visual and audiovisual data still remained underdeveloped and weak, compared for example with the long and well-established tradition of ethnographic film in anthropology. One may recall, as prime examples, the work of Ray Birdwhistell (1970), one of Erving Goffman's tutors, or the approach developed by Albert Scheflen and Adam Kendon (Kendon 1990) and known as »context analysis.« This approach was based on and continued the seminal research of the so-called Palo Alto group—Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson—which analyzed a small sequence of a film (the »Doris Film«). The Palo Alto group combined context analysis with the »natural history approach« (Pittinger,

16 Muybridge's pioneering work is appreciated because he »also opened up for scrutiny such diverse human activities as standing, leaping, lifting a ball, fencing, and a woman with multiple sclerosis, walking« (Heath et al. 2010, 3). But surely sociological analysis transcends the mere analysis of locomotion. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that Muybridge's work exerted a strong influence on the development of scientific management and is closely associated with a rather positivist perspective.

Hockett, and Danehy 1960). Birdwhistell, Kendon and Scheflen developed a method to analyze interactions which can be called sociological in the proper sense. While the psychological studies of Ekman and Friesen (1969) focused on individual forms of emotional expression, in their audio-visual studies they focused on social interaction, a subject that is also studied in comparative ethology, but along different methodological lines (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Schiefenhövel, and Heeschen 1989). In this and other methods—such as human ethology, proxemics (Hall [1962]) or contextual analysis, audio-visual data is used to scrutinize the role of physical behavior, i.e. the body's role in interactions. This leads to real discoveries such as the use of common space in informal groups called »face formation« or »F-formation« (Kendon 1990b).[17]

Interpretive Video Analysis

Interpretive video analysis is one of the subfields of visual analysis that has contributed to a certain revival of visual research methods over the past years. Its theoretical and methodological bases and its current applications cannot be discussed in detail here.[18] The purpose of this section is to allow readers to contextualize interpretive video analysis within the broader development of visual research methods. Interpretive video analysis was influenced by developments in the field of anthropology, ethology, and human communication theory described above. It has also benefited from linguistic studies of the forms and structures of verbal interaction. Among its precursors we find the work of linguist John J. Gumperz, who filmed sequences of intercultural interactions in the 1970s. Gumperz recorded interactions to determine the causes of misunderstanding between people from different cultural backgrounds, and used audio-visual material for a microanalysis of these interactions. In *Crosstalk* he studied, among other things, service interactions between waiters and guests in a restaurant and between bank clerks and custom-

17 In recent years, Kendon has contributed to the study of gesture (2004).

18 Elsewhere, we have discussed different approaches of videography and video analysis at length (see Tuma, Knoblauch, and Schnettler 2013, especially chapter 2).

ers. Paying special attention to the ways in which these interactions were performed, he came to discover how, for example, variations in accent and inflection may cause misunderstandings between English-speaking native inhabitants and English-speaking immigrants from South Asia. The approach he developed—interactional linguistics—demonstrates that there is a high potential for misunderstandings stemming from different cultural pronunciations and inflections. One of the outcomes of Gumperz's analyses was the production of a TV program broadcasted in cooperation with the BBC (Gumperz, Jupp, and Roberts 1979).[19]

In the early 1980s, the gradual introduction and social dissemination of video camcorder technology led to a considerable expansion of audio-visual data as an object of scientific study and to a substantial increase in analytical skills in this area. In psychology, this development nurtured predominantly quantitative and standardized methods,[20] whereas in sociology, a strong orientation emerged towards qualitative methods of video analysis—a return to the classical task of studying interactions. One of the firsts and most important researchers in this respect was Charles Goodwin (1981; 1986), whose seminal work used video-analysis to studying phenomena of interaction hitherto only studied using audio records, and who systematically addressed the role of visual aspects of interactions. Around this time, Christian Heath (1986) published his path-breaking video-analytical study on doctor–patient interaction.[21] The work of both of these researches, also grounded in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, was highly influential for an incipient area of research using video-analysis and focused on interactions in technologized work environments, workplace studies or WPS (Luff, Hindmarsh,

19 This program is a valuable example of how to present research results to larger audiences. The development of adequate publication formats is one of the challenges still faced by video analysis.

20 See, for example, Mittenecker 1987 or Koch and Zumbach 2002. One should also mention the famous Stanford Prison Experiment. For a comprehensive overview, see Reichert 2007.

21 See also Erickson 2011 and Johnson and Amador 2011 for a history of video analysis.

and Heath 2000). Heath is among the few who have developed new principles and original methods of video analysis.[22] Lucy Suchman, who used video-based fieldwork to analyze interconnected but spatially distant workplaces activities in four locations within an airport as a highly complex environment (Suchman and Trigg 1991), also played an important role in the emergence of WPS. In workplace studies, the interactive articulation of work in centers of control, coordination, and observation are studied intensively, bringing together approaches from sociology, ethnography, design, and cognitive disciplines. Recently, workplace studies has been extended to areas including interactions in museums, galleries, and auctions (Lehn and Heath 2004; 2013).[23]

Important theoretical and methodical advancement in the field of visual analysis can also be ascribed to a related, but theoretically different line of thought associated with the communicative paradigm of the new sociology of knowledge (Knoblauch 1996, Luckmann 1997; 2006a). Grounded in interpretive sociological theory and following Weber, Schütz, and Berger as well as Luckmann, the concept of the »communicative construction of reality«[24] stems from sociological theory and sociolinguistics. Within its conceptual and theoretical framework, the sequential analysis and interpretation of audio-visual data plays a crucial

22 On the development of WPS, see also Heath, Knoblauch, and Luff 2000. Methods of video analysis are discussed in Heath 1997b and Heath and Hindmarsh 2002. See also the recent textbook edited by Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010. The decisive role of ethno-methodological approaches for the methodological advancement of video analysis cannot be overestimated.

23 See also the video analyses of work in hospitals and surgeries (Schubert 2002; 2006a; Muntanyola 2010), architectural offices (Büscher 2005), or the ethnographies of scientific laboratories (Amann and Knorr Cetina 1988; 2002), which pay special attention to the role of the visual.

24 The notion of a communicative construction of reality was first developed in Knoblauch 1995. It has ramifications for genre analysis, discourse analysis (SKAD) and sociological hermeneutics, respectively. For a recent collection see Keller, Knoblauch, and Reichertz 2012.

role.[25] The theory of communicative genres was originally developed for the interpretation of oral genres (Luckmann 1986; 1995; Günthner and Knoblauch 1995; Knoblauch and Luckmann 2004). Its corresponding method, genre analysis, was transformed into a method for investigating the forms of mass media communication, and applied to the values, activity patterns, and status and gender differences in various social sectors, and their respective symbols, cosmologies, and world views (See Ayaß 1997; Keppler 1985; Knoblauch and Raab 2001; Willems 1999).

In the 1970s Luckmann and Gross initiated a research project using video data to investigate human interaction (Gross and Luckmann 1977) in which the concept of interaction scores was developed (Bergmann, Luckmann, and Soeffner 1993; Luckmann 2006b), recently taken up by video hermeneutics (Raab and Tänzler 2006). A product of the tradition of hermeneutics, initially used exclusively for the interpretation of texts and conversations, this methodological approach is progressively working with other materials and data such as images and other forms of visual expression, to investigate historical changes in forms of expression, perception, and presentation beyond oral and textual communication.[26]

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25 For a reconstruction of the history of this approach, see Luckmann 2013. Starting from the notion that social reality is constructed in and through social action, he emphasizes the revolutionary advantages of audio-visual technology for the sociological study of how reality is actually constructed: »[…], in the past decades, taking the new technologies for granted, we have been in an increasingly better position to direct our efforts to an analysis of the ›production process‹ in relation to the ›product‹ and in relation to the ›consumption‹ of the ›product‹, *i.e.,* to an analysis of interaction and dialogue both as a part of social reality and as source of much of social reality. […] I am convinced that sequential analysis provides the empirical foundation for an essential component of contemporary social theory, in particular for one of its branches, the sociology of knowledge.« [Emphasis in the original.]

26 This is happening in structural hermeneutics (Englisch 1991; Haupert 1994; Loer 1994; Müller-Doohm 1993; 1997; Tykwer 1992), the hermeneutic sociology of knowledge (Hitzler and Barth 1996; Pfadenhauer 2001; Reichertz 1994; 2000; 2001), sociological hermeneutics (Raab 2001; 2002; Raab, Grunert, and Lustig 2001; Raab and Tänzler 1999;

A still unfinished story

The aim of this article has been to present some of the precursors of the still unfinished history of visual analysis in social research in general, and to trace the roads leading to its current development in the field of interpretive video analysis in particular. Since its beginnings, visual analysis has suffered ups and downs. Currently, it is attracting renewed interest in many disciplines throughout the social sciences, generating novel approaches in studies using visual techniques, both photography and video. Today, interpretive video analysis has been extended to a series of sociological research areas and continues to develop in various directions.[27]

The current boom of visual analysis in the social sciences is fueled by ongoing changes in contemporary culture regarding the proliferation of visualizations and their ever-increasing use in mundane communicative activities. At least partly, this methodological shift in social research is profiting from a more general sociocultural development in which visual forms of communication are gaining in importance. This is most certainly also related to the pervasive use of digital photography and video. The omnipresence of photography and videos in our culture is obvious. The widespread and general acceptance of technologies and video recordings both in domestic life and in the institutional spheres of our society will also generate new methods of scientific research that uses visual and audio-visual data. The development of interpretive methods

2002; 2006; Soeffner and Raab 2004; Tänzler 2000; 2001; Soeffner 2000; 2001) and similar approaches which try to synthesize theories and methods within the sociology of knowledge (Bergmann, Luckmann, and Soeffner 1993; Bohnsack 2001; 2005; 2008; 2009; Guschker 2001; Schnettler 2001).

27 Including schools and educational institutions (Wagner-Willi 2006; Baltruschat 2010) social gatherings and public events in migration research (Rebstein 2012), or science and technology studies (Schubert 2006b; 2006a), to name but a few. For a more detailed overview see Tuma, Knoblauch, and Schnettler 2013, chapter 4.

of video analysis has accelerated significantly over the past few years, as recent publications well demonstrate.[28]

Audio-visual methods of production and data analysis in interpretive studies can offer promising new horizons for the empirical study of social realities. In the past few years, visual methods have experienced important progress. However, the field continues to be highly dynamic; the next chapters in its history remain open. It is in the hands of other researchers to add new sections and chapters to this story.

28 See Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010; Moritz 2010; Corsten, Krug, and Moritz 2010; Reichertz and Engler 2010; or Tuma, Knoblauch, and Schnettler 2013. In terms of methodological advancement, the contribution of Tuma 2012 towards a »vernacular video analysis« has particular methodological relevance.

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The Factual Treatment of Actuality: The Emergence of Educational Film in the 1920s and its Relation to Documentary Film Proper

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Nonfiction films produced in the United States and Europe before the 1930s vastly outnumber fictional feature films produced during the same period, and yet the scholarly work done on these films is minimal compared to the number of publications that attend to their fictional counterparts (Gunning 1997, 10). By and large, so-called educational films have been further ghettoized by the film studies discipline. What little work there is on early nonfiction cinema has been divided between an analysis of early actualities and the Documentary Film Movement of the 1930s. And while Robert Flaherty is widely recognized as one of the first documentary filmmakers with his canonical work *Nanook of the North* (1922), broadly speaking the film studies discipline has ignored other educational nontheatrical films produced during the same time period. Some notable exceptions include John Mercer's *The Informational Film* (1981), Anthony Slide's *Before Vide: A History of the Non-Theatrical Film* (1992), Ken Smith's *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films 1945-1970* (1999), Geoff Alexander's *Academic Films for the Classroom: A History* (2010), and the recent anthology *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (2012).

There are a number of reasons for this gap. Educational films are couched within a different set of academic discourses than are typically dealt with in the field of film studies. Furthermore, many nontheatrical films, considered outdated and no longer needed for their originally intended use, have long since been discarded by the organizations and institutions that once held large collections. Additionally, cultural as-

sumptions about artistic value lead scholars to attend more closely to films made by ›auteurs‹ and films exhibited in theaters, as opposed to films produced by anonymous filmmakers and exhibited predominantly in the classroom or the church. All in all, nontheatrical films have been marginalized for their perceived lack of aesthetic and technical quality. While documentary films have developed a certain cultural cachet, educational films have not, and are seen as mere relics of a bygone era. Their contingency on a particular cultural period, however, is precisely their value to us today. These films were viewed by millions of adults and young people; they both *depicted* daily life and *functioned within* daily lives. And, while eventually inhabiting a space that is neatly distinct from theatrical film, educational films were once part of a conversation about the fluidity of film's form and purpose.

Bill Nichols, one of the most influential scholars in documentary film studies, distinguishes between educational films and documentary proper, privileging the aesthetic properties of the latter. In his book *Introduction to Documentary*, Nichols characterizes documentaries as films that draw from the real world, but convey the filmmaker's »voice« through a rhetorical structure that makes prominent use of film form (Nichols 2010, 67–72). This contemporary definition of documentary excludes educational film, even though educational films—in both form and content—raise the same issues about representation that are raised by documentaries. While he and others certainly situate educational films under the larger umbrella of nonfiction film, educational films are still essentially ignored by the discipline for their perceived lack of aesthetic and rhetorical force. In similar fashion, film historian Tom Gunning differentiates the »view aesthetic« of early cinema, a term that I will elaborate below, from the more sophisticated evidentiary editing techniques we associate with later documentary films. His work is significant, but leaves an unexamined gap between the First World War and 1926, the year John Grierson is credited with first using the term »documentary« in a review of Flaherty's second film *Moana*.[1] By the same token,

1 Originally published in the *New York Sun*, February 8, 1926 under the pen name »The Moviegoer.«

Ian Aitken draws boundaries around the Documentary Film Movement, arguing that it began in 1929 with John Grierson's first and only film *Drifters*, and ending somewhere around 1948 with the relocation of many filmmakers who worked under Grierson into new organizations and geographic locations (Aitken 1998, 9). While there is arguably a distinct characteristic shared by the nonfiction films made during this period, limiting our attention to the Griersonian tradition obscures the many films that were made by nonfiction filmmakers who likely had no relationship to Grierson. Rather than seeing documentary as cultivated by a single historical agent, early educational films show us that documentary emerged as part of a larger cultural trend in nonfiction educational film in the United States and Great Britain. While I do not disagree that there seems to be an evolution in documentary structure from early cinema to the 1930s, I do not see this as an abrupt shift in nonfiction film style. Rather, during this period of the early to mid-1920s, there is a notable ambiguity in how nonfiction films are produced, used, and interpreted by audiences that defies neat categorizations of »view« versus »documentary« models.

How nonfiction (and even fiction) films are classified in the period before World War II is difficult to nail down. The terminology used to talk about nonfiction films—educational film, instructional film, propaganda film, scientific film, teaching film, industrial film, and newsreel, just to name a few—is prolific and indeterminate. In different contexts a single film can be classified in any number of ways, and indeed, may be associated with more than one of these terms in the *same* context. It can be argued that the slippages in the language is evidence that the categorization of film in the period cannot be reduced to subject matter or formal composition, but to institutional, exhibition, and discursive contexts. A single film can slide between categories as its interpretive framework shifts from one social context to the next, in the process revealing the nebulous perception of film's form and function during the 1920s. While John Grierson primed later film theorists and historians to view the 1930s as a pivotal decade for the development of documentary film as its own distinct mode of filmmaking, I intend to show that the so-called

educational films of the 1920s were not dramatically different from documentary films of later decades. In fact, the 1920s can be seen as a kind of gestational period for documentary, helping us to better understand the social and historical factors that contributed to the rise of documentary as a unique form of filmmaking. Furthermore, a closer look at the ignored educational films of the 1920s forces us to reconsider the privileging of fictional narrative film in film studies, considering the cultural centrality of nonfiction film of all types and its role in the active cultural negotiation of the motion picture's structure and purpose that took place during the period.

In the following pages I will begin by situating my work within the ongoing conversation about early nonfiction film. In this section, I focus first on the analysis of early cinema by contemporary film historian Tom Gunning and, second, on John Grierson, whose writings about the definition and role of documentary film were originally published in *Film Quarterly* during the early 1930s. As I hope to demonstrate, both draw neat lines between early cinema and post-1930 documentary film proper, a distinction that does not work well with nonfiction films produced and circulated during the 1920s. I will demonstrate this argument with a specific case study: a series of propaganda-style films produced by the Illinois state government, including *Foster Mother of the World*, *Dawn of a New Day,* and *Illinois, the Good Samaritan* (circa 1919–1924). By describing the varying institutional, exhibition, and discursive contexts of these films according to an account published in an early educational film journal titled *The Educational Screen*, I hope to show that these films are closely related forebears to later documentary films. Yet they do not neatly fit any one category, but rather move freely between categories, revealing the cultural centrality of nonfiction films in the 1920s and the motion picture's ambiguous place along the spectrum of entertainment and education.

Tom Gunning argues that actualities, the precursors to documentary film, were rooted in the pleasure of visual spectacle. Early cinema emphasized the appeal of the image itself rather than any narrative or rhetorical structure. According to Gunning, nonfiction films made prior to

World War I were governed by what he calls a »view aesthetic« that is related, but distinct from later documentary film. Drawing from his previous argument about »the cinema of attractions,« he writes: »early actuality films were structured around presenting something visually, capturing and preserving a look or vantage point« (Gunning 1997, 14). In the tradition of the cinema of attractions, the emphasis is less on content than on the display itself. The pleasure of the moving image is the voyeuristic pleasure of looking; that is, in early actualities the »camera literally acts as a tourist, spectator or investigator, and the pleasure in the film lies in this surrogate of looking« (Gunning 1997, 15). This can be seen best in nature films and travelogues that offer unusual views not accessible to audiences outside of the cinema. According to Gunning, the simple »view aesthetic« in nonfiction films persists up through the 1920s, stagnating stylistically at a time when fiction films progressed to more complex narrative structures enabled by advances in editing techniques. In simple travelogue narratives, such as the early works by Martin and Osa Johnson,[2] images do not serve as evidence supporting a rhetorical point of view. Instead, the »social attitudes here are pre-existent rather than argued« (Gunning 1997, 19). He contrasts this with World War I propaganda films that take on an evidentiary function: »[t]hey employ film images in order to prove a thesis whose main claims are carried in an accompanying verbal discourse« (Gunning 1997, 21). Here Gunning reifies the distinctions held by Nichols and others between general nonfiction and early films that are more akin to documentary film proper. Significantly, he is using a distinctly Griersonian notion of documentary film, pointing to specific compositional elements—evidentiary editing, rhetorical structure and voice-of-god commentary—to retrospectively distinguish a clear lineage of documentary film that brackets

2 Martin and Osa Johnson are famous for their filmed expeditions across exotic landscapes. Their early work, such as *Jungle Adventures* (1921) filmed in the island of Borneo, employ simple editing techniques pairing intertitles containing detailed descriptions with images of various animals, people, and landscapes encountered along their journey. Their principal purpose is to show audiences the visual spectacle of exotic locales.

out much of early nonfiction filmmaking. In this account there is little discussion of the development from actualities and travelogues to the Documentary Film Movement. As a result, the World War I propaganda films seem aberrant against a backdrop of simple »view aesthetic« films that do not share some of the later techniques that we eventually associate with documentary proper. While I do not disagree with Gunning's analysis of early nonfiction cinema, I wonder how more loosely defined educational films fit within this historical trajectory from the earliest uses of evidentiary editing in the 1910s and the renaissance of documentary film in the U.S. and abroad beginning around 1929. It is not until Grierson and his contemporaries retrospectively point to the films of Robert Flaherty that we get a sense of how nonfiction cinema moved from actualities to something eventually to be called documentary. Yet the distinctions Grierson and others draw between the documentary aesthetic and earlier films oversimplify the nonfiction films circulated during the missing decades between World War I and World War II.

In a series of essays originally published in *Cinema Quarterly* from 1932–1934, Grierson refines the distinction between documentary film and earlier nonfiction, arguing that scientific and natural actualities are mere »description« whereas documentary films are skillful »interpretation« of the world through moving images. He writes:

> So far we have regarded all films made from natural material as coming within the category [of documentary film]. The use of natural material has been regarded as the vital distinction. Where the camera shot on the spot (whether it shot newsreel items or magazine items or discursive ›interests‹ or dramatized ›interests‹ or educational films or scientific films proper or *Changs* or *Rangos*)[3] in that fact was documentary […] They all represent different qualities of observation, different intentions in observation, and, of

3 In this passage Grierson is referring to *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack 1927) and *Rango* (Ernest B. Schoedsack 1931), films that might be best described as dramatized travelogues falling somewhere between fictional narrativization and factual observation.

> course, very different powers and ambitions at the stage of organized material. (Grierson 1947b, 99)

Here Grierson wants to make a distinction between different categories of nonfiction film. For him, these early educational films, called »interests« in the above passage, are mostly »novelties« or »tit-bits.« They are »boring« or simply »flippant« compared to the films of Robert Flaherty, Dziga Vertov, Basil Wright, Joris Ivens, and others. Conversely, in documentary »we pass from the plain (or fancy) descriptions of natural material, to arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of it« (Grierson 1947b, 99). In other words, raw footage of real people and events is not enough to constitute documentary, but rather the fashioning of this footage toward an overarching rhetorical purpose. For Grierson, it is its formal qualities, not its perfect reproduction of the »real,« which constitutes documentary as its own unique form.

While I rely heavily on Grierson as one of the most outspoken figures defining the form and purpose of documentary film, he was not the only one. Others writing in the 1930s share Grierson's views on the power and necessity of documentary film, including his emphasis on form as it relates to function. Indeed, the relationship between form and function seems to be the key factor that distinguishes documentary film from both fictional narratives and »mere« educational scenics and topicals for Grierson's contemporaries. Several articles in *Sight & Sound* argue that the documentary is different than theatrical fiction film because there is »no individualised human story,« »no star to present,« and no »vulgar« emotion. Instead there are »types, types of social groups, symbols of the many.« And unlike scenics and topicals, documentaries force upon their viewers a new point of view, or »theme,« through their style of presentation (Schrire 1934, 123). This theme is a social truth revealed through shocking juxtaposition that enables the viewer to see the world anew in true Modernist fashion. These sentiments attest to the perceived direct relationship between a film's formal qualities and its social function. Cinema, it is argued, should be put in the service of uniting all people under the nation and a set of common ideals (Orr 1932, 19). In addition to differentiating documentary from narrative film, advocates of the former

also attempted to differentiate documentary from other modes of non-fiction, arguing that unlike newsreels and topicals, documentaries have a »truer journalistic sense.« The failure of the newsreel is that »There is no intentional propaganda on the part of the editors« and this is a sign of »laziness« (Fraser 1933, 89–90). For these writers, newsreels are considered nothing more than streams of unconnected information. The average citizen is assumed incapable of discerning the important from the unimportant, the truth from the lies, thereby necessitating the need for documentary to shape information into a clear argument that citizens can act upon, presumably for the betterment of society. The image, in other words, is capable of being both deceptively opaque and of revealing greater human truths; either way it shapes human perception, for better or for worse.

But these arguments are not new in the 1930s. In fact they reflect a similar tension that emerged in debates surrounding early educational film. In the preceding decades, advocates of the use of educational film oscillated between the need for films that have a serious, informative tone and the opposing viewpoint that educational films should be entertaining and narrative-driven as a part of their attraction as an educational tool. This debate was constructed around concern that educational film distinguish itself from ›frivolous‹ fictional films exhibited in theaters. This ambivalence is one factor in the long »justification period« before the use of educational film in the United States became a staple of the American classroom after World War II (Orgeron et al. 2012, 24–26). As part of this justification period, the nature of cinema and its capacity to educate—and by extension the very meaning of the term ›education‹—becomes a prominent part of public discourse. In the following section I hope to show that these arguments toward defining documentary as its own unique form were not new at the time of their writing in the 1930s. Indeed, much of the language used to distinguish documentary film was used much earlier to advocate for another kind of film—educational film—and part of this project was the very redefinition of the term ›education.‹

As my case study I will be looking at a series of films produced by the Illinois state government during the 1920s. These silent films (explicitly designated »educational« motion pictures by the Illinois government), defy the problematic division set by film scholars between documentary films of the 1930s and nonfiction films released prior to the Documentary Film Movement. Specifically, I hope to demonstrate that the changing discursive, institutional, and exhibition contexts of the Illinois state films help slide them across categories, from ›industrial films‹ to ›educational films‹ to ›propaganda films,‹ the latter designation more often associated with documentaries of the 1930s and '40s.

In the early period of cinema the word ›education‹ meant less the intellectual pursuit of knowledge than conditioning the viewer to become a productive, morally righteous, and healthy member of society. Significantly, this is the value and purpose of early (and later) educational films, while also the cultural origins of documentary. Indeed, Grierson uses the term ›education‹ liberally in his writings in the 1930s when referring to documentary film, blurring the very distinction he is attempting to draw between documentary film proper and earlier nonfiction film styles. Early documentary films have been largely recognized as propaganda pictures building public support for the war effort abroad (as in Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series, 1942–1945) or advocating for new social institutions and practices on the home front (as in Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke's popular film *The City*, 1939). Yet in early publications of *Sight & Sound* (U.K.) and *The Educational Screen* (U.S.) the terms ›educational‹ and ›propaganda‹ seem conflated. In the introduction to the first issue of *The Educational Screen*, the editors explain the significance of their publication: »The screen educates—for better or worse—wherever it hangs« (»To Our Readers« 1922, 3). In this context, »to educate« means precisely to condition the minds of viewers. This broad cultural view regarding the power of cinema is addressed in Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible's opening chapter to their anthology, *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (2012). They write:

> An array of theories and rhetorical tropes began circulating in the early twentieth century regarding the powers of the moving image,

> especially over children. Some argued that the motion picture possessed hypnotic powers; others argued that moviegoers—especially children—were getting daily theatrical doses of harmful and corrupting ideas; others claimed that going to movies at night resulted in eyestrain and, more generally, in children being less able to learn at school the next day. (Orgeron et al. 2012, 22)

It is the power of moving images to influence and potentially corrupt that instigated the desire for more socially progressive, educational cinematic options.

The Illinois state government specifically set out to ›educate‹ its rural public using cinema. In 1924, under the administration of Governor Len Small (1921–1929), Illinois launched the Educational Film Library »devoted to the portrayal of facts connected with various phases of state government« (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 6). Before Small, Governor Frank O. Lowden approved the making of a short silent film by the state Division of Dairy Husbandry entitled *The Foster Mother of the World* (1919) in order to promote the Illinois dairy industry. Writing in *The Educational Screen,* Maie Lounsbury Wells, Assistant Superintendent of Charities of the State of Illinois, described the film's circulation: »Its educational usefulness extended over a period of four years, during which time it was viewed by more than two hundred thousand farmers. The stimulating educational effect of this picture was greatly evidenced by improved dairy conditions throughout the entire state« (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 6). Arguing that education does not cease with the issuance of high school diplomas, Lounsbury Wells advocates for state involvement in the continuing education of its citizens, for, as she asserts, good citizenship is directly related to education. Education, in this sense, is less about intellectual growth than about teaching the public how to be more productive, morally upright citizens. In effect, motion pictures become a means of Taylorizing citizenship training, helping to efficiently organize society for a better future. The cultural redefinition of ›education‹ to mean something more akin to ›propaganda‹ can be partially attributed to the larger cultural changes taking place concurrent to the evolution of cinema. Lounsbury Wells, from whom I draw most of my information on

the Illinois state films, situates educational film within the larger narrative of the Progressive Era: »Knowledge plus Understanding equals Progress« (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 6).

During the Progressive Era, many Americans believed in the inevitability of modern progress toward a better future, yet simultaneously possessed great anxieties about the rapidity of the changes happening at the turn of the 20th century. Not only were mechanical advances such as automobiles, electricity, and the telegraph speeding up human interaction, social and spatial changes such as urbanization and immigration were causing an unprecedented mixing of genders, ethnicities, and economic classes in public spaces without the supervision of moral superiors. Incidental to these developments, this period marks the rise of social sciences aimed at the study and management of the masses. Even psychology, ostensibly a science of the individual psyche, was rooted in anxieties about the ›passions‹ that sway the public. The proliferation of mass media exacerbated the worries of progressives. Movie theaters and other forms of lowbrow entertainment, it was feared, were exposing the working and immigrant classes to images that might stimulate their lurid and criminal baser instincts. Worse, like their working class counterparts, by the 1920s the middles classes were also enjoying movie theaters and other forms of public entertainment, producing further concerns about the descending tastes of Americans at all socio-economic levels. For these reasons, while there was tremendous excitement about the educational potential of motion pictures, many people were also dubious about its application, harboring anxieties about the introduction of this new medium. In light of these concerns »visual education was being pitched as essential to the modernization of America. Indeed, the modernization of education was intimately tied to national improvement, innovation, and health« (Orgeron et al. 2012, 30). In other words, at the same time that the cinema was feared to be a corrupting force, it was simultaneously seen as a potential tool for social improvement as long as certain enlightened institutions were responsible for the creation and dissemination of films. Indeed, it is partly their institutional context that makes educational films distinct from their fictional counterparts, an aspect that Grierson would

later formalize by establishing the film division of the General Post Office in Great Britain.

Lounsbury Wells reflects the prevailing attitude of the period in her conviction that the visual medium of motion pictures has the power to sway public beliefs and behaviors. She prefaces her discussion of the Illinois state films with this telling description: »the State Administration decided to test the power of picturization to convey to the receptive minds of Mr. and Mrs. Average Citizen, just what was taking place« in the government (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 6). Here images are said to penetrate the »receptive minds« of the average citizen. Significantly, this same belief also motivated Grierson who wrote several years later, »everywhere the new dramatic methods of appeal are being used on a colossal scale to crystallize men's sentiments and so affect their will.« He continues, »Today's propaganda concern is that we should feel this and not that, think this and not that, do this and not that« (Grierson 1947c, 251). Rather than eliminating or censoring the propaganda potential of the cinema, however, Grierson advocates that film should be an instrument of the public, whom he sees as confused and manipulated by an overwhelming amount of mostly worthless, if not destructive, visual information. By contrast, »[w]hen [film] has proceeded on the lines of explanation and elucidation and understanding, and when it has had the good sense to strike beyond party differences to the deeper loyalties of civic understanding and civic cooperation [film can become] education in a world where the State is the instrument of the public's enterprise« (Grierson 1947c, 256). I suggest this statement reflects the sentiments of Lounsbury Wells and many of her contemporaries. Indeed, in an essay titled »Propaganda and Education,« Grierson weaves together his endorsement of the documentary form, mass media as propaganda, and visual education—telling evidence of the slippages between these terms during the period. Rather than the individual pursuit of greater understanding, Grierson defines education as »the process by which the minds of men are keyed to the tasks of good citizenship, by which they are geared to the privilege of making a constructive contribution, however humble, to the highest purposes of the community« (Grierson 1947a, 229). But it is

my argument that the link between visual education and good citizenship well precedes Grierson. Educational films might be seen as a first attempt to activate this socially uplifting potential of cinema.

It is the notion of the motion picture as a powerful, manipulative tool for shaping human minds that instigates the desire for further educational films, considered more ›wholesome‹ than their fictional counterparts. Concerned about the negative effects of mass media, progressives of the period, as part of a philanthropic desire to uplift the working and immigrant classes, believed in the need for teaching the public how to discern good films from bad. Progressives who did not want to shut down theaters entirely believed that »education-through-the-eye« will transform society into a new and better social order (McClusky 1923, 3). They saw educational film as naturally ›good‹ and fictional films as frequently ›bad,‹ believing educational subjects were a means of appealing to the middle classes, thus attracting this sought-after audience to the theaters while simultaneously shaping the working and immigrant classes through the guise of entertainment. Writing about the popular social hygiene film exhibited in theaters, *The Fly Pest* (1910), author Bill Marsh argues that

> educational moving pictures—as highbrow alternatives to lowbrow film offerings—would help gentrify an industry troubled by its ›working-class profile‹. A ›better films‹ movement in the late 1910s would formalize earlier efforts to market educational pictures as inducements to middle and upper-class patronage. (Marsh 2010, 23)

The aptly named »better films movement« was taken up largely by women's organizations, such as the Women's National Democratic Club of New York City. These groups aimed not to censor films, but to help »educate the motion picture public to the necessity of encouraging the production of better pictures of the artistic, educational and character building type« (»Notes and News« 1926, 34). In other words, film was not seen as inherently bad, but was a tool that could be used for good in the hands of the right people. Nontheatrical films became a primary means of ›educating‹ the public about proper taste, as theaters tended to

exhibit supposedly lusty romances and violent action films rather than more wholesome fare like nature films, social hygiene films, and travelogues. Bill Nichols famously described documentary films as adhering to a »discourse of sobriety,« but, as *The Fly Pest* demonstrates, pre-documentary educational pictures served a sobering function as well, setting clear precedence for the Documentary Film Movement of the 1930s (Nichols 2010, 36–37).

While many early educational films were designed to be uplifting, the Illinois dairy films were less about building audience tastes than about promoting and improving a certain industry. Still, the films were designed to indoctrinate the public in order to become more efficient, healthy, and productive for the betterment of the American body politic in the State of Illinois. Following the enormous success of their first film, the Division of Dairy Husbandry produced a second short film entitled *The Dawn of a New Day*. The film contrasts old methods of dairy husbandry with new technologies, foregrounding increased production and better care for animals. Lounsbury Wells estimates that around 400,000 people in the state of Illinois viewed this second film. According to government officials, there was an increase in the purchase of purebred dairy sires, a tripling of the production of butter fat in a span of five years, and the near eradication of bovine tuberculosis in the state of Illinois; for them evidence that the films successfully impacted public understanding of proper dairy production and consumption practices (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 7). It is evident the dairy films are designed to educate the general population in one basic sense—through moving pictures they can learn about the duties and responsibilities of the Division of Dairy Husbandry as a government institution. They are also educational in an important secondary sense—the films are a form of persuasion, arguing implicitly that 20th century advances in farming technology and techniques are progressive and that the dairy industry itself is necessary and beneficial for the nation. It is hoped that audiences will therefore act on this new information for the betterment of the industry and society as a whole. In this respect the dairy films are not mere ›description,‹ as Grierson wants to define educational films of the 1910s and

'20s, but were understood as effective ›propaganda‹ tools, even though none of the Illinois state officials overtly categorized them as such.

The Illinois state films were not just about industrial promotion; they were also couched within a socially progressive philosophy similar to many of the canonical documentary films of the 1930s. With the success of the dairy films, Governor Small ordered all Illinois state departments to produce films explaining the workings of government to the public. Films produced by the state between 1920 and 1925 include: *Mining Coal, Mining Flurspar, Deep Waterways of Illinois, The Last Visit of Lafayette to Illinois, Charm of the Mississippi Valley, The ›Egypt‹ of Illinois, The Country of Lincoln,* and *Starved Rock and Rock River Valley*. From these titles it is clear that these films are meant to be both informative, illustrating Illinois' primary industries and natural resources, while also propagandistic, mythologizing Illinois as part of the grand American narrative. For example, as part of this initiative the Department of Public Welfare produced a film titled *Illinois, the Good Samaritan* under the supervision of Judge C.H. Jenkins. The film sutures the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan with the expected role of Illinois citizens, specifically their duty to pay for special institutions designed to help the poor and disenfranchised by paying state taxes. Quoted from an unknown Illinois newspaper, one editorial reads: »The taxpayers who saw the picture ›Illinois the Good Samaritan‹ will meet the tax gatherer more cheerfully this spring because of their new appreciation of the work being done by the state for our unfortunates« (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 9). This quote, whether fabricated by the film advertisers or not, situates the film within a left-leaning socially progressive atmosphere that values state welfare initiatives, much like the films of Pare Lorentz or Basil Wright produced a decade later, while simultaneously adhering to a more conservative narrative of nation-building that defines what constitutes good citizenship.

According to accounts in *The Educational Screen*, the film *Illinois, the Good Samaritan* depicts the practices of care at the Illinois state hospital and the state penal system where »the prisoner is taken through the different forms of identification, period of observation, final classification and assignment of work needed to cope with the particular form of the pris-

oner's behavioristic problem« using a so-called »Progressive Merit System« (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 8). The film then depicts the State School for the Blind, the School for the Deaf, the Illinois Soldiers Orphans Home, and finally a state training school for ›delinquents.‹ An assemblage of social hygienic institutions devoted to controlling deviancy in the spirit of the Progressive Era, this film is clearly doing ideological work in the guise of education. Itself a form of education-as-propaganda, the film can be seen as a continuation of the work being done by the institutions it depicts. In other words, the film is designed not only to depict the machinations of a progressive society, but also to reinforce these ideals.

Unfortunately we must rely on written descriptions of the Illinois state films. However, other films produced around the same time period, such as the film *General Health Habits* (1928) produced by DeVry School Films, Inc. (also in Chicago, Illinois), are illustrative of the type and complexity of the work that was being done by educational films before the emergence of documentary proper. *General Health Habits* is an appropriate comparison because it most likely exhibits a similar tone and formal aesthetic as *Illinois, the Good Samaritan.* The film visually contrasts urban and rural living environments, advocating the social and individual health benefits of living in rural settings. Juxtaposing images of jostling, crowded cities with sunny, pastoral farm scenes, the film asks of the viewer in intertitles: »What is lacking here?« or »What conditions promote health here?« The intertitles are accompanied by handwritten health tips such as »sleep with the window open« and »hike once a week,« which are drawn in real time in black marker on a white background emulating the procedure of a teacher writing on a chalkboard in a school classroom. Concerned with juvenile delinquency and urban blight, the film advocates a certain set of lifestyle practices to promote good social hygiene. For example, in one segment of the film, scenes of teenage boys fighting in a back alley are contrasted with a group of boys hiking and camping in an open forest. Through the technique of visual contrast and direct address, the film insinuates that young boys in urban

environments do not have fresh air and active lifestyles to channel their energy, leading to some of the delinquent behaviors we see in the film.

The film *General Health Habits* is striking in its similarity to the canonical documentary film *The City* (Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke, 1939). The film displays some of the evidentiary editing techniques described by Gunning, while at the same time making implicit ideological assumptions not stated outright. The movement of the camera borrows conventions from the »view aesthetic,« such as the slow pan of an otherwise stationary camera, or mounting the camera on a moving vehicle to capture people on the sidewalk as the vehicle passes by. Yet the use of intertitles that pose open-ended rhetorical questions evoke the direct address style exhibited in later documentary. Stylistically, the editing technique is not nearly as sophisticated as the avant-garde ›city symphony‹ films being made during the same period in Europe, such as *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), which are already recognized as influential to the Documentary Film Movement.[4] In *General Health Habits*, the style is less experimental and dynamic, but the social purpose and institutional context is explicit. In the ways I have just described, educational films seem to straddle the divide between actualities and documentaries. *General Health Habits* illustrates the way in which educational films of the 1920s were educational in two senses: the film is working to be both informative and persuasive, while it is also civically and socially engaged, both reflecting and attempting to augment prevailing attitudes about public health and well-being in its style of propaganda. It is not simply novelty or mere description of the world, but is clearly interpreting the world for viewers according to a socially progressive ideological world view.

4 For a discussion of city symphony films and their relationship to the Documentary Film Movement, see MacDonald, Scott. 2010. »Avant-Doc: Eight Intersections.« *Film Quarterly* 64 (2): 50–57.

In this final section I will elaborate on how the distribution and exhibition of early educational films demonstrates their liminal status between actualities and the Documentary Film Movement. Notably, before the more famous government-sponsored films of the 1930s, the U.S. Federal Department of Agriculture produced 28 educational motion pictures in 1925, bringing their film library up to a total of 1,862 reels available for distribution to public institutions throughout the country. A »conservative« estimate is that some *nine million people* had viewed these films by the end of 1925 (»Notes and News« 1926, 25). Based on this figure, it seems that educational films were primarily distributed by government institutions at the state and federal levels, though not necessarily exhibited in government spaces. The fact that these so-called educational films are being produced and circulated by a government institution is further evidence that education and propaganda are closely intertwined during this period, and that educational films and documentary films are closely related.

Significantly, the purpose of the circulation of the Illinois state films was not just to convince audiences of the proper practices of dairy husbandry or social behavior. Part of the state project was to teach audiences *how to be persuaded*. Put differently, it was an effort to expose the public to motion pictures, which were seen as powerful new tools of mass persuasion. Lounsbury Wells explains the role of cinema as a state tool for social management: »we believe in the State of Illinois that the logical and efficient method of disseminating facts essential to good citizenship—and after all individual good citizenship is the foundation upon which rests our American supremacy—is by means of the cinematograph« (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 61). The article estimates that in 1921, at the time *Foster Mother* would have been circulating, 60 percent of rural audiences had never before seen a motion picture (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 7). For these audiences, their first exposure to the new medium was not the Edison nickelodeons, nor D.W. Griffith's heavily studied *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), but educational films that have been virtually ignored like those that would have been shown via portable suitcase projectors in rural exhibition spaces. One can therefore make the argument that *Foster*

Mother and *Dawn* were simultaneously propaganda pictures using artful arrangement of images in order to advocate for state industries, and a kind of ›cinema of attractions‹ viewed by virgin audiences who may have consumed the films as pure spectacle, minimizing their educational purpose and taking pleasure in the novelty of the moving image itself. In other words, exhibition context and audience reception within those contexts can help determine whether a film can be more appropriately categorized as ›view aesthetic‹ or ›documentary,‹ and not exclusively a film's form and function. This blurs the boundaries between distinctions currently made in the film studies discipline.

Exhibition spaces for nonfiction film in the early 1920s would have been very diverse and ephemeral, making them difficult to track down today. Yet exhibition context is very important for understanding the way early audiences might have encountered these films, and in fact Grierson himself felt very strongly that non-theatrical spaces help shape how audiences perceive nonfiction subjects. When looking at Grierson's contribution to the development of documentary film, most scholars discuss the production history and the formal composition of early documentary. A notable missing piece of the discussion is Grierson's belief that institutional context is significant for both the production *and* exhibition of nonfiction film. Grierson firmly believed that documentaries should not be seen in theaters, but in public spaces. It is imperative, he argued, for documentaries to leave the theater and go out »into the factory and the field« (Grierson 1947a, 237). For him the theater is a space of entertainment where the masses are more susceptible to passivity, whereas the classroom and the church prime viewers with a collective consciousness. He writes:

> The degree of civic conscience varies with classes and theater types and with the sense of duty on the part of exhibitors. An industry based on mass entertainment has to be cautious. […] This gives the theater only a limited place in the educational picture […] happily, men are creatures of mood. The very people who are united in relaxation inside the theaters are otherwise united in terms of their professional and specialized interest outside the theaters. It is

> in this latter field that the educational picture is filled out: in schools and colleges, in civic social services, trade unions and professional groups of all kinds. (Grierson 1947c, 262–263)

Documentary films, he believes, should only be shown in public, civically associated spaces, otherwise audiences will not be engaged and the films will not have their intended impact. Notice too, in this passage Grierson refers to his documentary films as »educational pictures,« further demonstrating that educational purpose, propaganda form, institutional context, and exhibition space are all intertwined during the gestation period of documentary film prior to World War II. But films had been exhibited outside of the theaters well before documentary film. Indeed it is documentary film's relationship to previous educational films that may have made it difficult for documentary filmmakers to get theatrical distribution for their films. Many theater owners were wary of nonfiction topics, fearing that audiences would not pay for informational or persuasive documentary features (»See Topical Films« 1940, 12). It wasn't until the emergence of art house theaters in the late 1950s that documentary films would start to be regularly exhibited in theaters in the United States.

Like documentary films of the 1930s, there was no single space that audiences might have encountered the two dairy films discussed above. *Dawn*, for example, was screened at numerous agricultural meetings for local farm bureaus, breed associations, dairy conventions, public meetings of the Division of Dairy Husbandry, and state educational exhibits at various county fairs. Yet all of these spaces carry institutional meanings that helps shape the ways in which audiences would have interpreted the film along the spectrum of education to entertainment. In the case of *Illinois, the Good Samaritan,* the Illinois Educational Film Library lent the film to women's clubs throughout the state who would rent auditoriums to hold special screenings for public exhibition. These could be in town halls, schoolhouses or churches. Other organizations exhibited the film for their members, such as the Elks Lodge, Kiwanis Club, Lions Club, and various Chambers of Commerce. These non-theatrical spaces would presumably cue the public to be in a civic mindset as they watched, ready to be persuaded by the film's content.

Furthermore, films such as *Illinois, the Good Samaritan* were also exhibited at county fairs throughout the state. Surprisingly, Lounsbury Wells indicates that there were 80 state educational exhibits at fairs in 1925 alone (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 8). These exhibits took the form of a large black tent that covered a space 30 feet by 70 feet. The state provided the county fair with chairs, a silver screen, two portable projectors, and electric fans for ventilation.[5] It is estimated that 200,000 people viewed *Illinois, the Good Samaritan* in this setting (Lounsbury Wells 1926, 9). Indeed, state fairs were one of the major ways that nonfiction films reached audiences in the 1920s. It is important to consider how the fair setting shapes how audiences understand films. Fairs have always been a mixture of education and entertainment, emphasizing the pleasure of curiosity, novelty, and spectacle paired with the Modern pursuit of scientific knowledge with an eye toward the advancement of society. In short, these films weren't just educational, they were also *fun*. What does it mean when propaganda becomes a source of innocent pleasure, placed next to other informational exhibits, visual spectacles, interactive games, food, and crowds? When these films become a small slice of everyday life as it is lived? In this exhibition context audiences may have enjoyed the films as pure visual spectacle or seen them as convincing propaganda within a setting promoting other socially progressive state projects. Regardless, exhibition space—like formal composition or production history—is a factor that should be considered in the evolution of American nonfiction film from 1920s educational films to the 1930s Documentary Film Movement.

In summary, I hope this paper has shown how Tom Gunning's distinctions between the early ›view aesthetic‹ and later documentaries and John Grierson's unconvincing distinction between educational films as mere ›description‹ and documentary proper as complex ›interpretation‹ both

5 At the time many, people feared the threat of fire from overheating projectors, particularly when screening educational films in schools or churches. This is one reason that educational film did not take off in public schools until the 1940s, when flame-resistant film became much more prevalent.

fail to fully account for the complicated ways that American nonfiction film evolved from the 1920s through the Second World War. Looking at a specific case study, the Illinois state films produced between 1919 and 1924, it is clear that educational films of the period share many defining features with Griersonian documentary films of the 1930s, and much of the discourse surrounding educational films preempt the appeals made by Grierson in his 1932–34 papers. I have demonstrated four significant factors that challenge the distinctions drawn between early educational films and documentary film proper:

(1) Educational films, like the first documentary films, were based on the assumption that moving images are a powerful tool for shaping the human mind.

(2) Educational films, like the first documentary films, emerged out of a Progressive Era ethos that sought to align public attitudes and behaviors with middle class morality and the social expertise of the educated elite.

(3) Educational films, like the first documentary films, were largely funded and distributed by government institutions.

(4) Educational films, like the first documentary films, would have been encountered by audiences in varied and short-lived exhibition spaces that would help shape their interpretation of the film, either as entertainment and visual spectacle or as persuasive social propaganda (or perhaps as some mixture of the two).

The very discourses used by Grierson in order to separate documentary film from earlier nonfiction were iterated nearly verbatim by Maie Lounsbury Wells, several years before his most famous writing. Indeed, it is the conversation started by Lounsbury Wells and others that would establish the cultural and technological foundations for the Documentary Film Movement to come, including a redefinition of the term ›education‹ as it relates to motion pictures. Despite this continuity between 1920s and 1930s nonfiction film production and distribution, the cinema of the 1920s was in a period of dynamic change. While we can retrospectively draw a connection from the Documentary Film Movement to the Illinois state films, it is important to acknowledge that the Illinois

state films transformed their meaning and purpose as they shifted from one viewing context to the next. Rather than isolate the films in any single category, I argue that it is necessary to look at how these films defy categorization in their everyday use—precisely because they are situated within a larger network of diverging social concerns influencing Americans during the period.

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Documentary Film in Media Transformation[1]

Thomas Weber

New documental forms in a differentiated media system

Nowadays, we encounter innumerable documentary forms in cinema, television or even on the web; a barrage of material that calls into question every conventional definition of the documentary. Since the 1990s in particular, we have seen an unprecedented boom in documentary films, sophisticated news features and reports, magazine programs and »docu-soaps« on German television, particularly reality TV or pseudo documentaries. And we must also consider special practices such as those of industrial films, scientific documentaries in medical contexts, or the practice of recording witness testimonials, for example by the Shoah Foundation. Furthermore, we are submerged by a rising tide of documentary material on web platforms such as YouTube. Given all this, it has become somewhat problematic to find a common denominator for all these different forms of documentary expression.[2]

1 Translation by Rebecca M. Stuart.

2 In German academic discourse, there exists a threefold differentiation of the notion of »documentary.« I use the terms employed in the following senses: Firstly, »documentary« is used in the sense of the documentary film (*Der Dokumentarfilm*), i.e. a certain type of well-known film mostly shown in the cinema, or on late-night TV. Secondly, the term »documentary film« is employed to describe films which are not necessarily documentaries *per se*, but possess some strong documentary features (*dokumentarische Filme*). And, thirdly, what I label »documental«—a more abstract notion which includes all gestures and procedures of documentation (*das Dokumentarische*), i.e. a certain mode of expression.

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This quantitative expansion is accompanied by a change in our basic understanding of what constitutes the documentary form. Is documentary film a genre, a class or category, or is it more of a gesture or a rhetorical figure? Should we define the documental by its intentions or by certain inherent structures?

How do we deal with films that defy traditional classification? What do we do with reality TV formats that do indeed sometimes have a documentary character and, at other times, are scripted reality shows, often without actually informing us of this fact? The lines are blurring and the audience doesn't seem to care. It becomes difficult even to classify documentary films as such when they are seen in different media. At first glance, a movie like Dylan Avery's *Loose Change* (Dylan Avery, USA 2005), about 9/11, seems much like a traditional documentary film. However, the fact that it was distributed via the internet and made for an extraordinarily small budget, as well as the fact that it was subsequently corrected, indicates that it was made less as a documentary film and more as a cinematic form of questioning official positions—a form able to react to criticism of what it depicted by releasing a new version. Web-specific formats, such as that used for *lonelygirl15* (Web series, EQAL, USA 2006), only gradually become recognizable as pseudo documentation. At this point, even films made for traditional outlets such as television—I am thinking here of a film such as *Prüfstand 7* (Robert Bramkamp, Germany 2002)—have become difficult to classify according to familiar criteria (perhaps the best choice would be to call them essay films). So the question is how we can localize the Documentary Film, or how we can map that which is documentary in a film, when the medium and the aesthetic shape are constantly changing.

Consequently, one of the greatest current challenges in any academic examination of documentary film is to describe the dynamics of this aesthetic differentiation, since it evidently no longer conforms to the principles that have, in recent years, been the basis for an academic typology of documentary film.

What I will discuss here is not about replacing the old system of classification with a new one. The issue is rather whether we can discern differ-

entiation in documentary film as a result of the proliferation of media and the concomitant differentiation of our media system, and how we can analyze the structuralization of media that ensues.

Thus my analysis is not directed at re-classifying a variety of phenomena (and, in doing so, abandoning established classifications, which would be unlikely to work). I do not wish to say that those existing, and well-established, criteria have lost all their explanatory validity and power. Nevertheless, I posit, in the context of the current multiplicity of media one can detect differentiations in modern documentary practices in which those criteria are increasingly unfit to provide sufficiently distinctive and valid results.

Hence I intend to provide a modern description of the documentary in the context of an ever-changing, refined media system. My goal is to examine how transformations in media have affected the documentary field. While adherents of semio-pragmatics, in particular Roger Odin, recognized the reading mode first and foremost as the central category for conferring the status »documentary film,« nowadays we should assume a modalization of the documentary's status by the practices of different media milieus.

Beginning in the 1990s, academic discourse on documentary film has grown ever more differentiated. Repeated attempts have been made to determine what defines documentary film, its essence, how it sets itself apart from other forms of cinematic expression, and so on.

It would go beyond the scope of this article to attempt even a conservative inventory of all discussions of the documental that have taken place in that time (never mind the wide range of documentary films themselves). On that score, I would kindly refer the reader to the German Research Foundation (DFG) project, »History of the Documentary Film in Germany 1945–2005,«[3] which is dedicated to a thorough inventory of developments in documentary film and the discourse surrounding it.

3 See http://dokumentarfilmforschung.de/dff/cms/?cat=15 and http://www.doku-film.medienkulturforschung.de. Accessed April 23,

Even at first perusal of the academic discourse in recent years, certain trends—primarily characterized by a fundamental shift in the appraisal of documentary films—are noticeable. I want to stress that this work's aim can be neither to reconstruct those debates, nor will it go so far as to elaborate on seminal works or tendencies,[4] nor will it dissect important exemplary case studies. Rather, this work wants to provide a brief overview of the field at hand in order to contextualize my argument which, at this stage, can only consist of a brief outline of the most important theoretical trains of thought.

In light of a growing tendency toward what is usually characterized as hybridization, essentialist arguments—that is to say, approaches that attempt primarily to define the fundamental nature of the documentary film—become increasingly irrelevant. On the other hand, studying the context of documentary films increasingly gains in significance.

My argument will consist of three central theses:

1. An essentialist definition of the documentary (for example, as the opposite of the fiction film) leads us into a trap, since such a definition is closely linked to the idea of an inherent structure underlying all documentary film. In the final analysis, that cannot be proven. Or it results in umbrella terms like »hybridization,« which are too broad to describe the situation with any precision.

2. In the theoretical discourse about documentary film, we can see a shift from essentialist definitions to examining the procedures of reading, producing or even distributing the documental. These procedures are also different than those for fictional genres.

3. The central criterion for the documentary is the stability of its reference to reality. Therefore the most obvious way to classify the different

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2013. This work's author heads the project »Themen und Ästhetiken des dokumentarischen Films« (Subject Matter and Aesthetics of the Documentary Film) at the University of Hamburg.

4 See Hißnauer 2011, in which the author briefly introduces the major debates up until 2010.

forms of documentary films is an analysis of variances in this stability due to the interplay of various actors in different media milieus (production, distribution, and audience reception).

Essentialist definition of the documentary film

Essentialist approaches to defining documentary film posit that the documental has characteristic traits; an unavoidable structure, anchored in an objectively recognizable reality, which is a clear indication of the documentary nature of a film.

Within that, we can distinguish between two oft-repeated arguments:

1. The indexical argument assumes the existence of unequivocal signs indicating that a film is of a documentary nature, or at least signaling to the audience that they are watching a documentary film.

2. Documental is the opposite of fictional.

The indexical argument[5]

One of the most popular and well-used arguments for essentialism of the documental is its indexicality. This approach assumes there are unambiguous signs or identifiers—i.e. indicators—that make the documental recognizable as such. This argument appears in two variations:

Technical indexicality

This form of indexicality is attributed to the technical production process. It is, of course, indisputable that the process is determined by a chemical reaction that can only be initiated by an external stimulus, particularly in the traditional method of exposing film. And even if that reaction can be manipulated, it is always triggered by a stimulus stemming from external reality, as Siegfried Kracauer described in his theory of film (See Kracauer 1960).

5 The terms indicator (or indexicality) and reference are not primarily used here in the charged manner common to linguistic philosophy or semiotics (as in Peirce: see. Olsen 2000); their meaning here is to be inferred from the contexts described.

This argument refers to the technical nature of cinematographic material, which is claimed to always display a trace of external reality. In other words, via the manufacturing process, film salvages a reference to an external reality, in the form of an actual trace registered in the film material itself (See Wortmann 2003). This reasoning is meant to prove that documentary film has an essentialist link to reality.

But the shoe does not really fit. First and foremost, in the era of new technological production processes, particularly with digitization, indexical trace is meaningless. Moreover, such a trace of external reality cannot be called representative solely of documentary film, because it is present in both documentary and fiction films (See Latour 1999).

Aesthetic indexicality

The other indexical argument seeks to find specific aesthetic structures that can function as indicators of a documentary film. The assumption is that there are certain aesthetic peculiarities that necessarily signal a film's documentary character. Such an aesthetics would include peculiarities such as imperfect, contorted photography, blurred, out-of-focus or poorly exposed film, and/or poor-quality sound, among other things. This theory interprets such elements as indications of the difficult, and therefore real, conditions under which a documentary film was shot. Even if we assume that such an aesthetics—developed with Direct Cinema and the use of the handheld camera that was so new at the end of the 1950s—exists, it should at most be regarded as a set convention, not as an essentialist trait. Those inherent structures or properties, however, are not real evidence for the documental character of a film. The same structures have been used over and over to undermine established conventions—I would mention here a few films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sánchez, USA 1999), *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, USA 2008), or scripted reality TV formats; all of which have lately used the same aesthetic conventions to create a documentary look.

Fictional—Factual

When essentialist definitions come into contact with the actual forms of documentary film, we observe a certain difficulty in providing cogent explanations for the ongoing dynamics of the differentiation of its

forms. We are generally presented with two arguments, both linked to the concept of an opposition of the fictional and the factual.[6]

The first argument implicitly assumes that the factual represents reality. However, the notion of »representation« itself is not without problems because it does not, by a long shot, clarify what reality is actually supposed to be and it remains unclear whether the documental can represent that reality.[7]

However this argument tries to sidestep an epistemological debate about what reality is by simply stating that the factual is the antithesis of the fictional. This is a subtle device used to avoid a definition of reality, but it leads to several epistemological problems.

Regardless of my omitting such debates, this epistemological discourse has certainly been taking place (here I would briefly refer to the works of S. J. Schmidt (Schmidt 1990) and Niklas Luhmann (Cf. Luhmann 2000), among others). The school of so-called Constructivism in particular has taken on a normative paradigm within German media studies discourse, proclaiming that media do not represent reality, but rather create their own reality. Or to put it more precisely—through the act of using a medium, each media user creates his or her own reality. With that, we have launched a debate that will most certainly not be cut short by designating the factual as the opposite of the fictional.

The second argument in favor of an essentialist definition of the two entities is the attribution of the fictional to everything that is made or staged, and of the factual to everything that shows a trace of the material

6 See Hißnauer 2011, 20. Hißnauer emphasizes a quotidian, pragmatic manner of handling the terms, similar to the manner intended in the semio-pragmatism formulated by Odin.

7 Roger Odin pointed out that the reference to reality is a problematic criterion because one is forced to define how one would like to understand the notion of ›reality.‹ According to Odin, this ultimately leads to a precarious debate about the Real and the Imaginary, the True and the False; in short, to a debate about the status of our model of reality; see Odin 1998.

word. In other words, the fictional is a staged entity, the factual is not. But this thesis may be somewhat weak. As Hißnauer pointed out, no one has ever denied that documentary production has always been staged to a certain degree.[8] Even the choice of *techné*, i.e. the selection of equipment, is a form of molding and staging. Anything recorded and carried by a medium has been transformed by that medium in a specific way. Therefore, staging is not an argument for the fictional, nor is the absence of staging a specific sign of the documentary.

Furthermore, it is highly questionable whether fictional and factual are really opposing entities (is an apple really the opposite of a pear, or just another fruit?).[9] Maybe we shouldn't look at the fictional and the factual as entities, but as two different kinds of cinematographic expression that may even complement each other.[10]

Any film can carry elements of both fact and fiction, and if we talk about a fictionalization of the documentary, we must also concede a factualization of the fictional form—as it can be perceived in many reality TV formats.

Hybridization and contextualization

The difficulty in identifying the borderline between the fictional and the factual has, in the last few years, led to another line of reasoning that either posits a hybridization of fiction and documentary, or at least puts more emphasis on context.

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8 See Hißnauer 2011, 18. Hißnauer's work provides a good overview of the newest discourse on the documental.

9 See Heller 2001; Heller's piece is one of the first academic articles to describe the transitory character of documentary films.

10 The first step towards such a misunderstanding is perhaps the attempt to define the documental and the fictional as inherently opposite, although they actually are only different forms of expression which can also complement each other. This misunderstanding is usually linked to the idea that fictional and documental are characteristics that are inherent to a specific piece of work.

In recent years, the dynamic of the ongoing transformation of the documentary is often explained by citing exceptions or special cases, or by simply enhancing the underlying definition (of the documentary) with the element of hybridization (See Hißnauer 2011; Mundhenke 2010; and also Murray and Ouellette 2008), which seems to have become the favorite go-to argument. The latter idea has even been developed further, as if it were a *passe-partout* to solving the problems of an essentialist definition. Nonetheless we need to ask whether it actually offers a solution, or is just a way of re-fashioning the essentialist definition. The hybridization argument asserts two opposing entities that are now intermingled in one way or another, but a notion of hybridization does not really enable a new approach to the problem. Quite to the contrary: old categories are kept alive by avoiding a definition, or even analysis, of the dynamics of the development.

Indeed, hybridization (as an umbrella term) does not exactly lead away from essentialist reasoning, since any theory of blending implicitly assumes two opposites—and concurrently the purity of each original entity. And this leads us back to the essentialist argument. Only if we consider hybridization in a manner that is more closely linked to the context of production, distribution, and audience, does a new and—in the final analysis no longer essentialist—perspective emerge.

As a rule, however, the hybridization discourse so far has remained on the first level. The normal, conventional use of the term hybridization in the field of aesthetics covers all and nothing, and is no more than an update to the old cliché of an opposition between the fictional and the documental. A wide circle of academics, and even audiences, subscribes to this note. Or, as Annette Hill puts it:

> Hybridity is now the distinctive feature of factuality. The boundaries between fact and fiction have been pushed to the limits in various popular factual formats that mix non-fiction and fiction genres. Popular factual genres are not self-contained, stable and knowable, they migrate, mutate and replicate. (Hill 2007, 2)

In her comparative study, Hill gathered data from thousands of Swedish and British broadcast media users. Her aim was not to predefine the categories used in the study, but rather to examine how people make use of those categories. With this approach, she reproduces conventional, familiar reasoning.[11]

Hißnauer adds, not without irony: Fiction and documentation are ›classically‹ understood as opposites. Even the currently popular discussion about a disappearance of the boundaries between fiction and documentation in docu-hybrids, docu-dramas or semi- documentary film and television productions basically perpetuates that opposition—it reproduces the idea of categories that can be distinctively separated […].[12]

As charming as such a hypothesis of hybridization might be—a hypothesis that takes into account the changing media landscape and its concomitant new aesthetic forms and formats—it fails to provide clarification in the essentialist sense.

Where it gets interesting is the moment in which we expand our view beyond the aesthetic level; when we include other aspects along with hybridization, thus providing for greater context. So far, however, very few authors have suggested such an expansion.[13]

The term hybridization can also be used in a broader sense, as Paul Soriano has proposed in reference to French mediology (Soriano 2007, 5–26). In Soriano's work, hybridization covers not only aesthetic phenomena, but also those aspects of technology, economic strategies, institutional conditions, social structures and/or political issues, which he assumes can all become hybridized.

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11 Hill assumes a set of unquestioned, conventional ideas, which influence the questionnaires. That is to say, she does not address the specific quality of TV formats. Instead, her questions reproduce conventional terminological classifications.

12 Quote translated by Rebecca M. Stuart. See Hißnauer 2011, 17.

13 Until recently, I too subscribed to the idea of hybridization in such an expanded, mediological sense. See Weber 2009.

Once we add the context of audience reception, distribution, and production, including the economic, institutional, social, technical, and material circumstances, a much clearer context for our understanding of the documental is revealed, in particular of the dynamics of new TV and internet formats, which are marked both by new economic capabilities and by new technologies.

So far, these integrative approaches have largely only been paid lip service (See Weber 2008), rather than being actually put into practice. Of late, they have usually been subsumed under one of the aspects listed above. As Hißnauer stresses in his work, particular importance has been attached to the semio-pragmatic approach of Roger Odin (Odin 1998), which draws primarily on the context of the specific »reading mode,« meaning the expectation of the reader. It is thanks to Odin that the discussion nowadays focuses mainly on paratexts and context. The primarily interest of Odin himself is audience reception and what he calls a specific »documentary reading« (See Odin 1998, 286). That documentary reading is programmed by a large number of institutions (See Odin 1998, 294) and the paratexts they produce (See Kessler 1998, 66; Eitzen 1998).

The Analysis of Production approach

While Odin focuses primarily on the audience, the other contexts of production or the often closely-associated aspect of distribution, are often neglected. Work on the analysis of production has become ever more important in recent years and is currently directed at the economic and institutional context, and at specific players.

Production analysis draws on the varying production processes, i.e. the differences between players and their interplay in various production milieus. By production milieu I mean the self-contained and self-stabilizing interplay of players participating in a specific media »production« (in a broad sense).[14] With that interplay, the players create and preserve a

14 »An institutional framework also imposes an institutional way of seeing and speaking, which functions as a set of limits, or conventions, for the filmmaker and audience alike.« Nichols 2001, 23.

specific milieu, from which the production arises (See Latour 1999, 113–144). A theatrical film is created in a different milieu than, say, a magazine show for TV. Production analysis establishes differences between various modes of production that then become the basis for the differences in production aesthetics. This can lead to either categorization of media entities within a media specific field, or to attempts to derive an essentialist determination of specific forms of aesthetic expression from production practices.

Research on production aesthetics, which has been experiencing somewhat of a boom in the US since the 1990s in the form of production studies,[15] has only in recent years become part of the discourse in Germany, generally via the introduction of English-language discussions (Schmidt 2012). The form the discussion takes in Germany ranges from »making of« studies of theatrical or television film, or field research including interviews, to the analysis of production files, contracts, legal documents and/or production methods.

In Germany, we can identify some early academic work that sought to give more weight to the production conditions of documentaries. Eva Hohenberger, for example, writes:

> At the institutional level, the documentary film differs from the fiction film via alternative economics. It is produced in a less capital-intensive manner, has different distribution channels, and a different public (one linked, for instance, to educational institutions).[16]

Bill Nichols has a set of particularly pertinent ideas.[17] He has commented, »we can get more of a handle on how to define documentary by

15 See, among others, Mayer et al. 2009 and Vonderau 2010. Since the 1980s, the approach of »new film history« has also had its eye on this aspect in a more general sense.

16 Quote translated by Rebecca M. Stuart, Hohenberger 1998, 20.

17 Nichols 2001. Nichols, who abandons predetermined definitions of the documentary, also highlights another aspect: »More than proclaiming a definition that fixes once and for all what counts and what does not

approaching it from four different angles: institutions, practitioners, texts (films and videos), and audience.«[18] Nichols believes that »documentaries are what the organizations and institutions that produce them make« (Nichols 2001, 22). As a result, he posits »an institutional framework« that imposes »an institutional way of seeing and speaking, which functions as a set of limits, or conventions, for the filmmaker and audience alike« (Nichols 2001, 23).

I do not intend to delve deeper into the methodology of production analysis here. Rather, I would simply like to generally point out that production milieus in documental film show a large degree of fluctuation in terms of how they shape their relationship to reality. They all play with a reference to reality, or more precisely, with at least the expectation or pretension of a relationship to reality. This »reference« to reality is the common characteristic of all documental films—not the »representation« of reality, but the gesture of referring or pointing to reality.

The stability of the reference as the criterion for distinguishing media modality

An analysis that describes the hybridization of its object, or that maintains that context is crucial, can only lead to a continuous changing of the criteria for defining the documentary film. At that point, an essentialist definition is replaced with the threat of a relativism that no longer allows us to discern any stable criteria for defining the documentary film.

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count for a documentary, we need to look to examples and prototypes, test cases and innovations, as evidence of the broad arena within which documentary operates and evolves.« Nichols 2001, 21. Abandoning set definitions can well lead to a felt arbitrariness, which can no longer be described analytically—a problem Nichols does not seem to be aware of. On the other hand, he opens up the discourse for a close analysis of the field in which documentary films are produced.

18 Nichols 2001. In his more recent texts, Nichols no longer addresses questions of definition or process methodology. Instead, he has developed a more heuristically-oriented division into six different documentary styles, which he consolidates under the term »voice of the documentary.«

Thus, when looking at the development of documentary films, it is inadvisable to focus on the perpetual change that becomes an ongoing condition, but rather on what remains stable throughout the transformation processes.

To make a long history short, that stable element is the reference to reality,[19] on which I would now like to concentrate. It constitutes a very large field of the documental, in which various practices of treating the reference to reality cannot be ignored. The reference is preserved at each level of production, distribution, and audience reception, but according to different rules and conventions in each case.

This refers to an allusion to an external reality or, more precisely, the practice of alluding to reality—i.e. the way in which the cinematic treatment and exploitation refers to reality, and whether it steadily maintains that allusion or how it becomes modified. Films can be differentiated by the particular practice they employ to make this allusion. Thus documental and fictional films are not ontological opposites, they just differ in their methods of production.

Here I would like to mention Bruno Latour, whose writing has yet not often been applied to this context. His research into science and technology, however, presents a comparable reference problematic. One could say that documentaries are part of a chain of transformations intended to maintain an unbroken reference to reality. Following Latour,[20] we can say that it is crucial to be able to trace the reference to reality back through each step of those transformations.[21] Latour calls this a

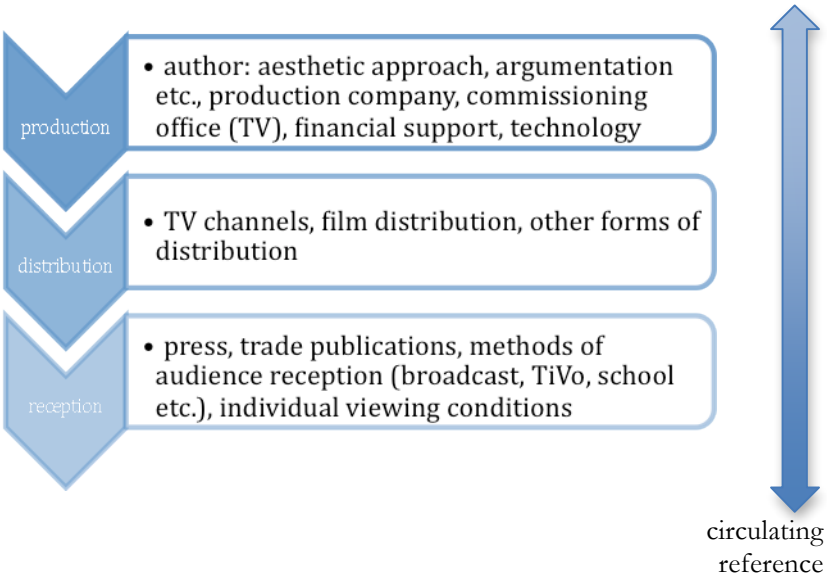
19 The reference to reality can also be described in terms of various other concepts such as »authenticity« or even »credibility,« which are actually just discursive modifications of the same thing.

20 According to Latour, the truth of scientific discovery can only result from a process, the individual steps of which must always remain both comprehensible and reversible. See Latour 1999, 70–72.

21 The object is »to preserve at all costs the ability to retrace the steps that led to the findings.« Quote translated by Rebecca M. Stuart; Latour 1999, 48.

»circulating reference,« because it can be followed in either direction (Latour 1999, 52).

In the same way in which, say, a scientific reference such as bibliographic entries ought to be made both comprehensible and retraceable, references to reality should be made comprehensible and retraceable within a documentary. All involved parties in a media milieu - authors, production companies, film distribution and/or television outlets, film and TV guides advertising the newest releases, and journalists' critical reviews - work towards a stability of these references; the above-mentioned comprehensibility and retraceability.



These references not only entail what Roger Odin once labeled ›paratexts‹—elements which surely play a certain role within this reference to reality—but also comprise both discoursive and non-discoursive practices that devise and create such a reference. Odin's point of view therefore would lead to, for example, an interpretation of erroneous TV guide advertisements—a modified paratext—as a modified, altered reading. When analyzing the reference to reality, one should not only

look for reading »modifications« (!) (of an implied reader), but rather for a »modalization« (!) of the documentary based on discoursive, as well as non-discoursive, practices in a media milieu. What changes is not only the reception, but the whole relational system of actors and thus the criteria of credibility.

While a loss of source-traceability in academic works can cause a devaluation of the underlying work, a lack of stability of a given reference-claim to reality within the documentary field leads to a modalization of documentary film; and here lies an important difference between the field of the documental, and that of the academic world. Modalization means a specific transformation of the reference-claim to reality, which then results in an alteration of plausibility strategies. The form of modalization varies depending on the sort and degree of guarantee for the stability of a reference-claim to reality. When applying Latour to the field of documentary film, I will not focus on his »circulating reference« as a criterion of truth, but rather on a dissection of differences between specific figurations of actors, and corresponding forms of media milieu-specific strategies of authentication and plausibility.

Such differences will hardly become recognizable in malfunctioning elements of the underlying system (e.g. the earlier-mentioned »erroneous« TV guide ad)—but will rather manifest themselves in established practices of a variety of media milieus. From a research-pragmatic perspective, this means that one should therefore focus on the reconstruction of specific media milieus' documentary practices, while simultaneously considering the plausibility criteria that have been applied.

Detached from essentialist thinking, this approach provides a new perspective and remains open to concrete analyses of historical practices of the documentary. These practices have varied, especially with regard to guarantee of or authority for the stability of their reference to reality.

Therefore, I propose that the stability of any given practice of referencing reality in a field or »milieu«[22] of production, distribution, and audi-

22 The term »milieu« is very broad, because it covers concepts like those of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984) as well as, with minor modifications,

ence reception be taken as the central criterion for the description and categorization of the documental.

If we apply this approach to the practice of documentary film, we can observe different models of implementing the reference to reality (see simplified scheme below). That is to say, practices to ensure this reference do vary. While references to reality in the field of the fictional remain optional, we see reliable methods in the documental field to ensure those references. Nonetheless, those procedures vary in a deontological sense; differing professional codes and ethics do exist or, at a minimum, a variety of conventions. Modified versions of those codes or conventions are also operative for distribution and audience reception.

Examples for different production milieus	**Type of reference guarantee**
TV Journalism	binding, editorial, constituent
Documentaries	binding, personal, constituent
Reality TV	non-binding, editorial, optional
Web documentaries	non-binding, personal, optional

The various media milieus evidently cause varying forms of references to reality as a way of enacting media modalities, which in turn cause a change in the degree of the relationship to reality in the course of the production process.

Those media milieus can be differentiated by their differing documentary practices, within which it is crucial to point out the importance of the processuality of production, distribution, and reception as well as the corresponding interplay of respective actors. From the specific manifes-

those of other authors such as Bourdieu's follower Bernard Lahire (Lahire, 2011). Lahire for example, replaces the idea of the milieu by the stability of the players' actions in a certain field. That is the sense in which I like to use the notion »milieu« in this context—as a self-stabilizing interplay of actors in the practice of production, distribution, and audience reception.

tation of this interplay, the type of realization will later develop, in which the stability of reference to reality will either be guaranteed or modalized.

Here I would like to provide a paradigmatic outline of some of these milieus:

1. Everyone working in TV journalism (at least in an idealized form of TV journalism) is anxious to respect professional guidelines. Authority for the reference to reality stems directly from stringently following those guidelines, and a guarantee for this reference is provided by the institution of the TV broadcaster.

Even if a journalist fails to follow those ethical guidelines, they nevertheless have a normative character, and consequences such as legal action, if necessary, can be inflicted upon those who do not comply by either the audience or by colleagues. A TV feature that does inadequate research or even presents facts that cannot be proven may soon face many problems.[23]

2. The claim of individual filmmakers is comparable to the journalistic deontology. In contrast to TV journalists, though, they do not work with predefined and standardized formats or normative aesthetics. They are bound to finding their own way or method to ensure a reference to reality. The result is an individual aesthetics or style. The reference to reality is not guaranteed by an institution, but by the filmmaker alone. Someone like Michael Moore, for example, is responsible for everything he presents in his documentaries with his name and his crew.

3. In the milieu of the producers of reality TV, reference to reality is an optional aspect of their work. The manner of establishing this reference to reality is neither constitutive for the producer, nor for the commissioning editors, the press, or even the audience. The film's or show's authors may or may not reference reality.

23 In reality, there may be exceptions. In the last few years, we have observed a certain decline in ethical TV culture at TV broadcasters such as Fox.

Consequently, a reality TV format will not have to fear cancellation because it has been revealed as scripted, and often there are virtually no measurable differences in audience ratings between a format where the public has learnt that it has been scripted and staged or a format that has been shot in an authentic way.

The optionality of this reference to reality does not however mean that there are no examples where either a TV network or general public interest claims or calls for a reference to reality—shows such as *Big Brother* (Season 1, 2000 RTL II, Germany) or *Frauentausch* (Season 1, 2003, RTL II, Germany; the German version of *Wife Swap*), a show which was even advertised as a »social experiment« by the German network RTL II, come to mind. But, nonetheless, this cannot hold true for all seasons of such a show—and on no account for the huge variety of existing formats. Even within *Frauentausch*, the boundaries between unscripted depictions of reality and scripted content become »blurred« (See Weber, 2009), i.e. questions of cinematographic choices should already be seen as »stagings« or rather be perceived as mere »improvements« of what is already happening in front of the camera. These differences become even clearer in fully-scripted formats that simulate recordings of real events, such as *Abschlussklasse 03* (Season 1, 2003 Pro7, Germany) or *Lenßen & Partner* (Season 1, 2003 Sat1, Germany)—where the audience is sometimes informed about the staged nature, and at other times kept in the dark. In short: A reference to reality may be part of a network's strategy but does not have to be, because the reference to reality is neither binding for the reality-TV format, nor is it as constitutive an element as it is, for example, for the News format. 4. By this point, web 2.0, with online video platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo, contains a virtually unfathomable barrage of film and video material, whose origins and production methods can no longer be reconstructed. A considerable portion of that material is of an apparently documental character. But nobody can guarantee its reference to reality. The examples mentioned earlier, *Loose Change* and *lonelygirl15* only serve to emphasize that on the internet, much like in reality TV, the relationship to reality has become optional. At first, *lonelygirl15* was perceived as the true representation of

teenage girl Bree's video diary. Only a few months later did the online-community learn that Bree was a character played by a professional actress, and that *lonelygirl15* in fact was a scripted web series.

Although realized in a different way, the status of the documentary was also employed by the documentary film *Loose Change*. A guarantee of reference to reality was deliberately held back by the producers. Made available online right from the start by director Dylan Avery, the movie, in comparison to other 9/11 documentaries, did not set out to develop its own conspiracy theory, but was content with questioning the officially-sanctioned sequence of events. Corresponding hypotheses consisting of a mélange of speculations and noteworthy questions were intentionally kept open for discussion—so much that the producers—facilitated by the open distribution model over the internet—could react to feedback and critics' objections, which led to multiple re-edits and resulted in four different final cuts of the documentary.

Therefore, the optionality of a guarantee of reference to reality within web 2.0 does not mean that the material provided will not be traced responsibly, and edited in a transparent and reliable way. It only means that - with identities often completely obfuscated in the online world - nobody wants to be held accountable for said guarantee.

Conclusion

The strategy chosen by different media milieus to express plausibility varies according to how they transform documentary material. The same medial mode of expression employed in different milieus may result in different forms of modalization. For documentarists and Cinema Direct disciples such as Richard Leacock, with his 1960 movie *Primary* (USA 1960, R. Richard Leacock; Robert Drew; D.A. Pennebaker), a hallmark of authenticity was shaky, underexposed shots with a correspondingly poor audio track—a sign for the difficult circumstances to which the documentary crew was subjected during filming sessions. In today's reality TV, and in scripted formats in particular, those same elements have taken on a completely different, mostly dramaturgical meaning (See Weber and Elias 2009).

Only through observation of the specific techniques of transformation will the modalization of the documentary's denotation become apparent. As has been noted earlier, differentiation of the variety of practices suggested here is not aimed towards a new classification of the field, but rather towards an analysis of media modalization for documental films in various media milieus. This results less in implications for familiar forms and genres (insofar as we understand that as a semantically-negotiable term) than it does for our understanding of the documental film's status. Consequently, with an analysis of media modalization, we learn something about the transformation of credibility criteria, implying that we also learn about the cultural value of documentary films.

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Postcolonial Historiography in the Essay Film: ›De-Colonizing‹ Sound and Image

Tanja Seider

›De-Colonizing‹ sound and image

Historical documentary films must deal with the established historiography of the events that they portray. That is, the viewers' perception of historical events is already shaped by historical and scientific studies, past and present political discourses as well as filmic patterns of representation. In particular, documentary films that deal with colonialism must often work with historical images and recordings that convey stereotypes and clichés of the colonized. How might it be possible to gain new insights from audiovisual material that reflects the colonizers' point of view? Can such material be framed in a filmic way which re-tells history in a new, non-hierarchic documentary form?

This work reveals the possibilities offered by essayistic documentary film for a critical postcolonial presentation of history by analyzing a recent German documentary film, *The Halfmoon Files*, directed by Philip Scheffner in 2007. The film revolves around the colonial practice of recruiting Indian soldiers to the British Army in World War I. Some of these Indian soldiers were captured during the war and detained in a prison camp in Germany. At the camp, the soldiers' voices were recorded as part of a scientific project. Today, these recordings are kept at an audio archive at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Scheffner's film is concerned with the construction of a historical account of the experiences of those prisoners of war based on the recordings. I argue that this film demonstrates a way in which the essay film's non-realistic conventions of representation can overcome a traditional historiography and thus establish a postcolonial approach. There is some similarity between the approaches of postcolonial historiography and of the essay film—both

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forms process real events in a way that expands the limits of conventional realistic and scientific discourse. This expansion is achieved by using new methods of narration. First, in both approaches narration does not unfold in a model of linear cause and effect that tends to reduce complex interactions to one single explanation. Second, both approaches question our ability to reach objective knowledge and true explanations. Essay films convey knowledge as provisional and subjective (Scherer 2001, 14). Their narrative involves different points of view and bits of information that do not always fit neatly together; they are more like a collage than like a straight line. The information is provided through various single plot units instead of a teleological narration; the essay film undermines the tendency to connect events in a causal chain of development that produces a sense of closure at the end. Likewise, postcolonial historiography aims to re-construct the past in an entangled narrative (Conrad and Randeria 2002, 17–19) that enables reflection upon power constellations within history, and thus provides an alternative to the historical master narrative. An additional aspect shared by the essay film and postcolonial historiography is that they both question the validity of their own historical sources. They often strive to expose the political, social, and cultural influences on the creation of historical sources, thereby raising questions with regards to the objectivity of the sources.

The first section of this paper provides a general outline of postcolonial historiography, and the next section describes the historical context of *The Halfmoon Files*. This is followed by an analysis of various components of the postcolonial approach applied by the film. The final section presents conclusive remarks on the possibilities that the film reveals for postcolonial filmmaking.

Postcolonial historiography

Colonialism and its ideology of dominance left its traces in the popular culture of the Western countries as well as in their system of sciences. Historiography in particular justified colonial thought within its epistemology, as its project of interpreting Western national pasts prepared the

ground for an ideology of national dominance, colonial expansion, and inner processes of exclusion. These developments affected not only traditional history's content, but also its scientific methods themselves. Many works that can be categorized as postcolonial consider both the content and the methods of traditional historiography to be ›contaminated‹ by the ideology of European dominance (Conrad and Randeria 2002, 35). Therefore, although historical sources that were generated in the era of colonialism seem to be based on a naturalistic documentary realism, they cannot be accepted as a neutral and objective tool of scientific description. This criticism also affects the historical documentary film, because it shares a common tradition with historiography. Both documentary film and historiography are committed to the factuality of the world, i.e. they process real events through their historical traces. And both—due to their documentary nature—are part of the tradition of evidence-based discourse (Hohenberger and Keilbach 2003, 8).

A documentary film that deals with colonial history faces several challenges. It deals with a historical process full of violence which created structural inequalities whose after effects still have a strong impact on today's patterns of representation. This violent quality of the colonial past left traces that can be considered traumatic. The realistic narrative and the realistic representation of traditional historiography, as well as of documentary film, aim to create one single causal explanation with an overall meaning that tends to suspend disbelief and ›tame‹ history (Friedländer 2010, 24). Yet dealing with historical events of extreme violence can be seen as a challenge since their ongoing traumatic legacy makes it difficult to process them into a historical narrative which is complete, linear, and unified (LaCapra 2001, 3).

A postcolonial history offers a different historiography than the traditional approach, in that it recognizes the absence of the histories of marginalized groups in the master narrative. In order to make these groups' absent voices audible in the present, new styles of representation have to be developed. These styles deal with the challenge created by the materials' process of generation. Because historical sources and archive material were generated in colonial practices, they are not just objective data

and neutral remnants,[1] but are rather pre-structured by those hegemonic power practices. New forms of representations aim to create some form of presence and agency for once marginalized voices. The filmmaker as well as the historian strives for a non-hierarchical way to stage these voices—not as mere illustrative examples for their own arguments—but in a way that allows them to perform their autonomy as subjects on equal footing in the (filmic) text. In order to examine the postcolonial approach to history in *The Halfmoon Files*, the following section presents the historical context of the film.

Historical context of *The Halfmoon Files*

The Halfmoon Files develops its plot around a large-scale collection of 1,650 audio recordings of prisoners of war that are now stored in the sound archive of the Humboldt University in Berlin. The historical background of this collection is the political setting of WWI. The German Reich and its allies fought in 1915 against the armies of the Triple Entente of Britain, France, and Russia, as well as against soldiers from colonized countries in Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Indian as well as African prisoners of war were interned in special camps near Berlin for political purposes: The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs tried to convince them, by way of good treatment and propaganda lectures, to join the jihad against Britain led by the Ottoman Empire—ally of the German Reich. The goal was to get the prisoners to surrender and fight against the colonial powers in their home countries (Lange 2008, 22–23).

In 1914, at what was known as »Halfmoon Camp« in the city of Wünsdorf near Berlin, about 4,000 soldiers (Muslim prisoners from French

1 In general, historical sources are, of course, never ›neutral.‹ Rather, they are subject to political, social, and cultural purposes. In addition, the selection of historical sources for a research or film may be arbitrary and serve the purposes of contemporary history or culture. However, the creation of the audio files in this case was within a scientific framework (questionnaires about the test person, photographs, etc.) that aimed to turn the recorded voices into ›objectified,‹ standardized sources.

North and West Africa as well as Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs from British India and Afghanistan) were imprisoned. The prisoners were not only politically indoctrinated, but also staged as exotic *Others* and exposed to the voyeurism of their German surrounding.[2] After 1915, the captured soldiers also became the center of interest for a scientific linguistic research project initiated by the linguist Wilhelm Doegen, founder of the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission. Thirty German scholars took part in the project »Museum of Peoples' Voices« in German POW camps and made wax recordings of the imprisoned soldiers' voices in 250 languages and dialects between 1915 and 1918. The film *The Halfmoon Files* concentrates on several recordings of soldiers from the Indian Sikh religion.

The cultural historian Britta Lange found that most of Halfmoon Camp's historical audio sources contain texts of collective cultural origin, such as folkloric and mythological pieces. These were also of ethnographic interest, as they could document the ›culture‹ of the speakers (Lange 2011, 8). Only few of the soldiers' audio recordings contain information that oral history research projects would rely on today, such as personal stories about their lives or information about the soldiers' situation in detainment. Within this scientific linguistic framework, the soldiers themselves were objectified as test persons for research purposes. As can be reconstructed from the taxonomical historical sources that framed the recording process, the soldiers' names were kept on index cards that added some key statistics such as the quality of the test person's voice and the dialect or language spoken in the audio recording. In addition, two standardized photographs were taken of all soldiers, the aesthetics of which were influenced by the contemporary discourse on ›race‹—one from the front and one in profile. Considering these strict taxonomic patterns of colonial practice under which the voices as well as the images of the soldiers' were stolen from them, one key challenge

2 Contemporary photographs show residents of Berlin who traveled to Wünsdorf in order to observe the prisoners in the camps like they did in the racist ethnological exhibitions [Völkerschau] that were popular at the time (Lange 2008, 23).

arises: how can the story of these marginalized voices be re-told in a critical postcolonial cinematic way, i.e. without perpetuating existing stereotypes and hierarchical manners of representation? The following sections examine the way that this challenge is approached by *The Halfmoon Files*, beginning with its exposition, which establishes the centrality of the soldiers' voices.

The creation of a postcolonial historical approach in *The Halfmoon Files*

Reviving the soldiers' personal voices

Fig. 1: Establishing the audio files as a central narrator in the exposition (screenshot *Halfmoon Files*, *HMF*)

A film's exposition is like instructions on how to read it (Hartmann 2003, 20).The exposition expresses its documental mode and its aesthetic style; it also introduces the topic and establishes the protagonists as well as the narrator. In the exposition of *The Halfmoon Files,* the audio files are established as the main narrator, so to speak the historical subject *and* the historian of the film. After the title fades in, the image track shows a poetic river landscape in the morning mist. An audio chant in Punjabi opens the film, accompanied by abstract sounds. The images of the landscape and the sound create the expectation of a history with a mystical

angle. The audience hears one of the audio recordings made during WWI at the Halfmoon Camp in Wünsdorf. During the recording the speaker, Bhawan Singh—an Indian soldier—skillfully changes from the recitation of a poem to addressing an imaginary audience. In his speech, he introduces a truth claim about his story and interweaves the information that the story was handed down by a member of the older generation. Both rhetorical strategies are characteristic of storytelling in oral cultural traditions. By choosing this audio file as the opener of the film, *The Halfmoon Files* establishes the recorded voice and the oral history narrative it contains as central. A number of Indian soldiers will speak their voice during the course of the film.[3]

In *The Halfmoon Files,* these audio files of Indian soldiers, forgotten in a European sound archive, are accorded a new updated performance. Unlike their status in the archive, where they are bare material sources, the film transforms the audio sources into a cinematic oral history. In oral history, historians' attention was directed towards oral sources in order to return to subaltern groups that have been excluded from the dominant historical discourse their own voice in history. The soldiers' voices in *The Halfmoon Files* tell a counter-history that highlights aspects of WWI ignored in the German master narrative.

Unlike the majority of the audio files, which contain impersonal content, the Indian Sikh Mall Singh from the Ferozepur district creates a personal oral history testimony in his recording from December 11, 1916. Singh, who was a 24-year-old soldier at the time, talks about his feelings of frustration in detainment in a foreign country and thus gives insights into a history from below that cannot be found in government records:

> There once was a man.
> He ate one pound of butter everyday in India
> And drank one litre of milk everyday in India.
> He joined the British Army.
> This man went to the European war.

3 I would like to thank Philip Scheffner for his permission to use screenshots from *The Halfmoon Files* in this work.

> Germany captured this man.
> He wishes to return to India.
> He will get the same food he used to have.
> Three long years have passed.
> Nobody knows when there will be peace.
> If this man is forced to stay here for two more years
> He will surely die.
> If God has mercy, he will make peace soon.
> And this man will return home soon. (*Halfmoon Files*)

Mall Singh's testimony is a rare one, as it defies the scientists' intentions of objectifying their test persons. Moreover, Singh frames his personal testimony as an expression of a collective dimension by referring to the autobiographical narrator not in the first, but in the third person. It seems as if he speaks also on behalf of his comrades, who do not know if and when they will be freed from their imprisonment. When he refers to his personal experience and his feelings such as homesickness, Singh's recorded voice breaks out of the rigid matrix of scientific acquisition. Thus, the audio file conveys aspects of the POWs' everyday life that were not known before, as the public representation of the camps was managed by the German government. For the government, it was important to emphasize the supposedly pleasant conditions under which the prisoners lived (Lange 2008, 23). The regime aimed to present Germany as a ›good colonizer‹—in contrast to its enemy, the British Empire. Within this framework, Singh's recording, in which he displays a negative perception of the soldiers' condition, contributes to the creation of a counter-history of WWI.

Other prisoners, such as Bela Singh from Amritsar, also used the recording process to tell what happened to him during the war. In his sound file PK-589 from August 12, 1916, Bela Singh reports:

> When we arrived in Marseille, we ate well. This made everyone happy. We were placed in cars and the major gave the order: ›Go now, you lions into the trenches! Fight the Germans! Why are you running back?‹ For two month we sat in the trenches. A few of us lions had had enough of fighting. The German cannons hurled

> their artillery with great force. Everybody ran when they noticed it. There was an obstacle and I couldn't run away. The Germans saw me and used all their strength against me. They took me away violently. Where, they didn't tell me. I had a good laugh when I saw Mr. Walther. (*Halfmoon Files*)

Bela Singh's oral history testimony gives information about the route by which the Indian soldiers came to Europe. Furthermore, it also emphasizes the conditions under which the Indian soldiers had to fight in the European war: they were stationed in the trenches at the front. This was not a coincidence. The colonial powers consciously deployed the units of soldiers from the colonies in this dangerous strategic position (Lange 2008, 23). By mentioning a ›Mr. Walther‹ as a reason for a good laugh, a personal and subversive connotation is created in the testimony. The director, in a voice-over, adds the information that Mr. Walther was an interpreter for Indo-Germanic languages who worked for the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the POW camp. There are more humorous aspects in the collection of audio recordings, such as the sound file of a soldier who—according to a note by Wilhelm Doegen—called an »unbidden ›Guten Tag!‹« into the recording funnel.

By representing these kinds of personal voices and emphasizing their immanent subversive resistance, the film provides the soldiers' voices with a certain kind of agency. Once performed in the film, the archived voices come to life and their counter-histories can be heard by a wide audience. On their way out of the archive into the film, the subaltern historical sources have turned into main protagonists.

Another way in which the film draws attention to the soldiers' voices is in its processing of a ghost story told by Singh, as discussed in the next section.

Fig. 2: Photograph of the standardized choreography during the recording process of the audio files. A soldier speaking into the recording funnel being directed by a scientist (screenshot HMF)

Fig. 3: Photography showing the standardized choreography during the recording process of the audio files (screenshot HMF zoom-out)

Contextualizing the ghost story

In Bhawan Singh's audio file, Singh tells a ghost story that begins as follows: »What is a ghost? How does it live? How many types of ghost exist? How does one become a ghost? This is what I will tell you.« This

direct address towards the audience in the opening of the film adds a general metaphoric dimension to the ›ghosts‹: they become related to the soldiers, whose recorded voices are not attached to moving pictures of their bodies. The self-reflexive quality of this statement (i.e. the feeling that Singh is actually referring to himself and the other soldiers) is also strengthened by the convention of establishing a narrator in the exposition, which instructs the audience to understand this narration as a personal comment. In this way the editing places the recording in a new context in which this excerpt of a former impersonal collective myth is transformed into an autobiographical narrative. The voice of the captured soldier creates a critical comment upon the recording process that causes a separation of the human voice from the soldier's body and personality, and thereby creates a dislocation.

Both the exposition and the ghost story show how the film ›de-colonizes‹ the recorded voices of the colonial soldiers by establishing them as central and by contextualizing them in a different way. The next section discusses another element in the film's postcolonial approach, namely the expression of historical trauma.

Colonialism as historical trauma

The Halfmoon Files portrays colonialism as historical trauma in several sequences, beginning with a relatively early sequence in the film (00:06:25–00:09:00). The sequence opens with a tracking shot that establishes a beautiful metaphor about the relationship between past and present. Slowly the camera moves along the site of a barrack at the Halfmoon Camp in Wünsdorf. The combination of the parallel movement and the image composition establishes a direct relationship between past and present, between history and today, on the visual level. On the image track a fence that surrounds a gray wooden barrack can be seen. The old fashioned design of the barrack, shown in color-saturated images, takes the viewer on a journey to the past: in Germany's collective memory the iconography of the barrack and the barbed wire fence awakens associations with other camps—the concentration camps of WWII. This iconography can be interpreted as a reminder of a discourse

of memory that is charged with a history of violence. The combination of both narratives—the holocaust and colonialism—in one scene creates a feeling of discomfort for the audience. Trauma is not explicitly mentioned as an issue in the scene, but its legacy can be felt by an audience that reacts on a visceral level to the cultural meaning of this iconography.[4] This cinematic method may be seen as expressing the absence of colonialism in the German culture of memory: the violent past is seemingly forgotten and therefore reappears in the film like a haunting flashback and reminder of a historical trauma.

The barrack also serves in the film as a metaphor of past and present clashing with one another. The shot reveals that the barrack consists of an old part, which seems not to have changed since it was used to house the soldiers, and a new part, which was recently renovated in friendly yellow paint and turned into a residential bungalow. The visual clash of the different time periods is thoroughly explored by the tracking camera that moves from the right side of the abandoned old part of the building to the new part on the left. The way the historic object is shown creates a metaphoric image. The tracking shot is a classical element of the cinematography of the essay film, as it generates a dreamlike perspective in which the viewer's gaze follows the flowing movement and seemingly travels with the camera to explore a place. Yet the parallel shot never reaches its desired object of representation, because the distance kept to the object always stays the same. Through this interplay with the viewer's gaze, the parallel tracking shot creates a feeling of inaccessibility. My thesis is that in an essay film about history, this kind of cinematography creates a visual metaphor to remind the viewer that the past in general is

4 According to Marianne Hirsch, members of a culture of memory born after a traumatic historical event adopt collective iconographic images as a kind of »foster memory.« Hirsch developed her theory for descendants of holocaust victims. Yet, she states, that »postmemory« can be seen as a general intergenerational structure in post-traumatic societies (see Hirsch 2007, 114). To a certain extent, it can be assumed that this iconographic reference to one traumatic past by connecting it with an earlier event can enforce certain feelings of irritation, awkwardness, and maybe even guilt.

not accessible—and that trauma as an individual and collective phenomenon can neither be accessed nor represented realistically.

The direction of the camera movement from right to left also takes part in creating a feeling of discomfort and irritation that refers to the legacy of trauma in the discourse of cultural memory today. The images are perceived ›against the grain‹ in a literal sense by European viewers, who are used to reading from left to right. This feeling of irritation is intensified later in the film in an interview with Ms. Heyer, the current resident of the bungalow, who appears as a historical witness and talks about the haunting legacy of the colonial past in present Germany. She reports that she found the names of former prisoners inscribed on the barrack's doors and walls when she renovated it ten years ago. She also mentions that sometimes at night she hears noises in her bungalow and she does not know where they come from.

The Halfmoon Files, by these associative hints, shows how even though all physical evidence of the camp has been removed in Wünsdorf—original tombstones were built over and doors with names scratched on them repainted—the silenced colonial history and its violent components are still present. The film's motif of the ›ghost‹ as a wanderer between past and present serves as a beautiful metaphor for a haunting history, and as a sign for the latency and belatedness of this history, which is colonial and postcolonial at the same time.[5]

This kind of exploration of an abstract concept such as trauma is typical for the reflexive way in which the essay film genre deals with history. It is also typical for the essay film to suggest cognitive associations by tacking on to metaphors of cultural memory. Furthermore, the audience's senses are directly addressed by the use of an unusual film lan-

5 The prefix ›post‹ in the term ›postcolonial‹ refers not only to a temporal delay or a location in an aftermath. It also signifies both a critical distance and a profound interrelation with the troubling continuity of colonialism's after-effects on structural, ideological, collective, and personal day-to-day levels.

guage, such as a tracking camera movement that stages the way in which past and present merge into one another traumatically.

Moving on within the film, no closing narrative is found for the soldiers' destinies. The director cannot explore what happened to the main protagonists, the POW soldiers, after the war and whether they were able to return to their homeland afterwards. This impossibility of finding a happy end to a traumatic story reminds the viewer that history does not resolve itself, but still ›hurts.‹ This lack of closure is common in essay films, which are often tentative endeavors that in general deal more with processes than with making final claims (Scherer 2001, 14).

Fig. 4: Scene showing the barrack (tracking shot from right to left), no. 1.
Unrenovated part of the building that used to house the soldiers in the POWcamp during WWI (screenshot HMF).

Fig. 5: Scene showing the barrack (tracking shot from right to left), no. 2.
Establishing a visual metaphor: past and present merging into one another (screenshot HMF).

Fig. 6: Scene showing the barrack (tracking shot from rigth to left), no. 3.
The past painted over: the former barrack is today a residential bungalow (screenshot HMF).

Having examined the film's treatment of the soldiers' voices and its portrayal of colonialism and its historical traumatic legacy, we now turn to the film's visual techniques for presenting stories of subaltern groups; in

contrast to the traditional historical approach of telling the stories of ›great men.‹

Against the grain of a visual history of ›great men‹

»A democratic future is based upon a past in which not only the ruling voices can be heard,« was the claim in Germany's first oral history project in the 1970's (Niethammer 1980, 7). Yet one challenge that arises when dealing with a history of subaltern subjects is that their ›absence from history‹ coincides with a lack of personal records and visual representation such as typically left behind by the ruling subjects. The approach of ›history from below‹ had to find new ways of dealing with a past full of inequality. In *The Halfmoon Files,* this agenda led to the development of an unusual image and sound concept: the subaltern voices of the past are made audible; at the same time common practices of the visual representation of historical actors are subverted. As the analysis will show, the film seeks to take part in creating a »democratic future« by establishing a film tradition in which not only subaltern voices remain »unseen,« but ruling voices too are left with no representation.

Whenever the audio files of historical actors are performed in *The Halfmoon Files*, the image track only shows a blank black screen. This montage systematically denies the recorded voices a visual counterpart in the form of a body or a specific image and thereby exposes the historic power structures that took part in generating the historical sources (Rothöhler 2011, 59). In the sequence about the barrack described above, two main historical actors of the film—an unknown Indian soldier called Mall Singh whose remarkable audio recording plays a key role in the film and the well-known linguist Wilhelm Doegen—are presented in the same style of cinematography. Both their voices remain disembodied in front of the black screen, although the reasons for this are different, as will be shown.

The tracking shot of the barrack is shown twice, first to introduce Mall Singh and afterwards to introduce Wilhelm Doegen. The film's main protagonist, Mall Singh, is introduced as an Indian member of the British armed forces who was interned in the Halfmoon Camp. While the image

track changes to a black screen, the director's voice introduces him on the basis of the information on the scientific index card that was filed during the recording:

> In 1892, fifteen years after Thomas Edison invented the phonograph, the Indian Mall Singh was born in the village Ranasukhi in the Ferizpur district. At the time he surfaces in the story, he's 24 years old. He's situated far away from his birthplace: In the German city of Wünsdorf, close to Berlin. On 11th December 1916 at four p.m. Mall Singh reads a short text in his mother tongue into the phonograph funnel. In its entirety, it lasts exact 1 min. and 20 sec. (*Halfmoon Files*)

Just at the moment when the camera lens strikes the surface of the newly renovated part of the barrack, a change of time and of perspective takes place. By playing a radio feature on Wilhelm Doegen from the year 1967, the film goes back to the years of the student and cultural revolution in Germany—and shows that even fifty years after the end of colonialism, Doegen is still considered a scientific authority. His lifework is appreciated; society did not develop a critical awareness of his past colonial research practices:

> This musical felicitation by our radio orchestra celebrates the 90th birthday of Professor Wilhem Doegen, the founder of the Sound Archive of the former Prussian State Library. He is writing his memoirs in Zehlendorf. We in the acoustic medium of radio sincerely hope that he will finally find someone to continue his life's work. (*Halfmoon Files*)

By repeating the same tracking shot along the barrack while introducing both actors, the cinematography re-stages the encounter between the two historical actors Singh and Doegen ninety years ago during the production of the audio files. Doegen, who represents ›a great man of history‹ in this constellation, according to traditional historiography, is introduced using the same parameters used for Singh:

> In 1877, the year Thomas Edison invented the phonograph, Wilhelm Doegen, later to become linguist, was born. At the time he

> surfaces in this story, he is 39 years old. He is situated on a wooden barrack in the German city of Wünsdorf, close to Berlin. On 11th December 1916 at four pm, he starts the recording mechanism of his phonograph and records a ›typical example of the north Indian language Panjabi.‹ He assesses the quality of the voice as ›strong and light‹ with ›good consonant‹ and labels the recordings with the register number PK-619. (*Halfmoon Files*)

Both actors remain unseen—yet for different reasons: no pictures of Mall Singh exist, despite the taxonomic photographs of all soldiers taken at the camp. If these photographs still existed, they would reflect the contemporary gaze of racist physiognomic taxonomy: one shot in profile and one from the front. In contrast, it would certainly have been easier to find a photograph of the well-known Doegen, and these images would be suitable for a historical television documentary. But as an essay film that subverts traditional conventions and their inherent power relations, *The Halfmoon Files* refuses images that stabilize patterns of colonial representation. The film neither perpetuates a hegemonic gaze upon the soldier nor presents Doegen as ›the expert and institutional representative,‹ as in traditional visual histories of ›great men,‹ by giving him a ›worthy‹ bodily representation. This unusual sound-image concept helps to make the historical actors visible and audible beyond stereotypical colonial clichés and furthermore challenges the viewer to question the protagonists' social role in history.

The narrative of similarity and repetition created by showing the same sequence twice points out the centrality of the sequence within the movie. In order to emphasize the hierarchical power relationship between the historical actorsin this representation, the filmmaker comments upon the different qualities of agency for both historical actors. In short informative statements, he reconstructs the historical actors' biographies until the day of the recording. Afterwards, he describes the creation of the sound file as a historical collaboration of both actors under unequal conditions. History is presented here as subject-oriented from multiple perspectives, referring critically to the processes of inequality

that influenced the emergence of the historical sources the film is dealing with today.

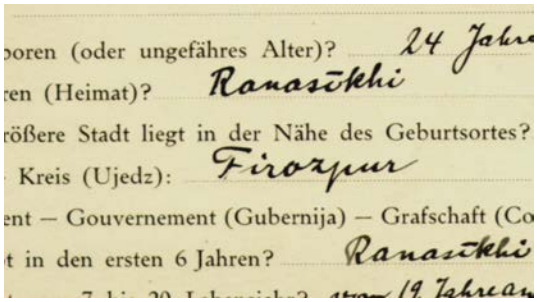

Fig. 7: Scientific index card accompanying the audio files in the research project »Museum of the peoples' voices«
Personal details of the Indian soldier Mall Singh (screenshot HMF)

Fig. 8: Photographs of the soldier Mutilal taken within the scientific research project
(screenshot HMF)

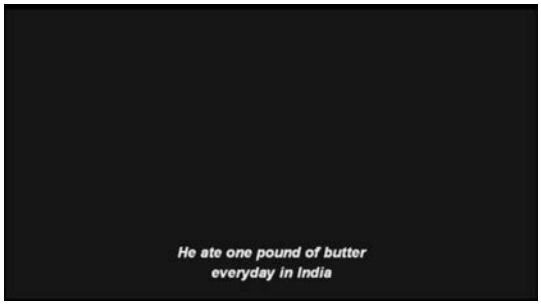

Fig. 9: Representing the historical actors
Performing an absence instead of re-staging colonial representation conventions (screenshot HMF).

Having examined the various filmic tools that are used in creating a postcolonial historical account, the following section shows how the film questions the medium's overall historiographical value through its critical analysis of the use of historical sources within mainstream documentary films.

Questioning the historical sources

One element that the essayfilm and postcolonial historiography have in common is that they seek to reflect critically upon the sources they deal with. This kind of self-reflexive criticism of sources separates the essay film from the realistic documentary tradition which seeks to create as natural as possible a representation of history (Hohenberger 2006, 24). As an example of the film's criticism of historical sources, consider the way the film deconstructs the seemingly natural representation of historical sources in an expository TV documentary about WWI (00:16:53–00:22:45). *The Halfmoon Files* uses a recording of a speech by Emperor Wilhelm II, in which the emperor seeks to convince his people to enter World War I. The recorded speech can be heard in the different stages of its development, providing the viewer with an insight into the recording process of the emperor's speech, which was full of trials and errors. Thus, the grandeur and authority of the emperor's speech is deconstructed by exposing the technical process ›behind the scenes.‹ This decomposition can be seen as an example of how the essay film undermines typical affirmative media representations of the history of ›great men‹ by utilizing a critique of historical sources. It also reveals the differences in practices of representation between the essay film and the expository realistic documentary film.

Furthermore, the film shows that the historical reconstruction in the seemingly realistic documentary in this sequence is actually based upon a technical manipulation. The director's commentary reveals that the historical TV documentary pretends that the audio source is from 1914—whereas it was actually only recorded at the end of the war as a retrospective form of war propaganda:

> There's no film strip of Kaiser Wilhelm II making this historical speech. Actually, there should be one. The Kaiser allowed himself to be filmed almost every day. But of the moment the Kaiser swore in his people to war, there seems to exist only a photograph and a sound recording. There is no microphone to be seen anywhere on the photograph. But the historical sound document, the original voice, exists. The sound recording has the register number

> AUT-1. The person who recorded the speech is Wilhelm Doegen, director of the phonographic Prussian Commission. The recording took place at the Palace Bellevue in Berlin. The recording is dated January 10th, 1918. At this point, the German Reich is on the brink of military defeat. Three and a half years after the original speech, Wilhelm Doegen and the German Kaiser are trying to find the right tone. (*Halfmoon Files*)

Another example of the film's questioning of conventional historical sources is evident in a sequence that opens with a black screen, while on the sound track the director describes archival footage from 1914 that has been edited into the historical TV documentary about WWI. Scheffner's description starts with the laconic comment: »Everything always begins in Berlin, at a big square in the city« thereby alluding to the fact that historical TV documentaries mainly focus on master narratives of the national historiography in which the capital city and the main political forces are at the center of interest. Relying on such sources excludes the stories of soldiers from the colonies due to their peripheral location. The black screen and the director's comment serve as an irritation, and create a vacant space that helps to bring the absence of a transnational narrative of entanglement into awareness.

Fig. 10: Emperor Wilhelm II at the balcony of the Palace Bellevue 1914
Photograph shown in the TV expository documentary in combination with the recorded speech from 1918 as a seemingly realistic audiovisual representation of Wilhelm II (screenshot HMF)

Fig. 11: Insert with Doegen's comment on the challenges during the recording process of the emperor's speech (screenshot HMF)

Conclusion: What are the characteristics of the portrayal of postcolonial history in the essay film?

The analysis of *The Halfmoon Files* shows how the essay film can be a suitable medium for delivering a postcolonial historiography. Yet generalizations should be made with caution, since in contrast to scientific works, the essay film has no standard patterns of representation. Instead, each individual essay film refers to a particular discursive constellation expressed in a specific cinematographic language (Kramer and Tode 2011). Nevertheless, there are some common characteristics of essay films: patterns of narration in these films usually follow a non-linear, collage-like narrative. Thus, instead of creating one single master narrative, the essay film tells history in a non-hierarchical way, including multiple perspectives and space for the questions, reflections, and detours of history. Essay films that deal with colonial history tend to search for entangled European and non-European historical perspectives.[6]

Another one of the essay film's most interesting qualities, which makes it suitable for the application of a postcolonial approach, is self-reflexive-

6 A postcolonial history of entanglement is a reaction to traditional Western historiography, in which Europe is considered to be the center of perspective. In the latter, Europe's relations with the colonial world are portrayed as a one-sided process only, driven by Europe as a force of agency. As an alternative, the postcolonial history of entanglement investigates mutual interactions and relationships of power and dominance for both entities and analyzes how they have changed through their reciprocal influence (Conrad and Randeria 2002, 17).

ness. As opposed to the so-called realistic tradition, the self-reflexiveness of the essay genre allows it to draw attention to the ideological discourses that are inscribed in the material. The tradition of realistic representation uses sources as bare illustrative authentication, and does not break the frame of filmic illusion. Thus realistic documentaries may carry on traditional versions of history without questioning their ethical grounds. The essay film, however, makes a different statement. It explicitly works against the grain of the viewer's perception by breaking historic and filmic conventions of representation. The essay film thereby encourages new and critical readings of historical narratives.

One component of this critical approach to the past is the recognition that the various voices of the film are related to one another in a less hierarchic manner.[7] The voice of the filmmaker appears in a comment that brings his own perspective back into the text and serves as a device for rebelling against the pretense of scientific objectivity and detachment in the voice-of-god narrator of expository documentary films. In the essay film, the protagonists' voices are treated in a non-hierarchical way. This disruption of hierarchy is often accompanied by an unconventional aesthetic staging of the voices, partly in order to create irritation in the viewer by overcoming the medium's established tradition of representation.

Undermining the hierarchical colonial order of historical narratives and sources reveals the power structure from which they emerged. In *The Halfmoon Files*, the audio performances of the marginalized voices of the soldiers from the colonies are altered. Instead of being silenced, they are heard. Therefore the voices of the soldiers acquire a heightened social status in the film—as historians, storytellers and historical subjects. Due to the source criticism aimed at the audio files, the ›voice of knowledge‹ is stripped of its aura of authority—this is true for the scientist as well as for the political voice of the emperor. Nevertheless, these sources are not totally dismissed; their historical value is still acknowledged.

7 See Nichols 1991 on the concept of voice and the social order established by the different kinds of voices in documentary film.

The revival of the soldiers' voices in the film is not entirely satisfying. The question remains: to what extent can filmic representations by others give people their voices back? Within the diegesis of *The Halfmoon Files,* most of the soldiers' voices remain impersonal, with the exception of Mall Singh. Only the running credits in the end reveal the names of the people that were behind the audio files from almost a century ago.

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