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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The principal purpose of p.o.v. is to provide a framework for collaborative publication for those of us who study and teach film at the Department of Information and Media Studies at the University of Aarhus. We will also invite contributions from colleagues in other departments and at other universities. Our emphasis is on collaborative projects, enabling us to combine our efforts, each bringing his or her own point of view to bear on a given film or genre or theoretical problem. Consequently, the reader will find in each issue a variety of approaches to the film or question at hand – approaches which complete rather than compete with one another.

The March 2007 issue of p.o.v. will be devoted to Danish TV and theatrical commercials.

p.o.v.

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Defining Documentary Film

Henrik Juel

Raising a question

When I ask the students in my film classes at the university if they can define or at least somehow describe what makes a film a documentary, they usually come up with answers like this: "It is a type of film that is based on the real world and real people, depicting things as they are or telling about historical events in a supposedly truthful or objective manner." Or they say that it has to do with a certain realism of style and that it is "filming on some real location without actors, artificial props or a pre-constructed narrative." Sometimes they also just cite the title of a classic book on the subject saying that it is "representing reality."¹ And often enough, Danish students go on to talk a lot about "facts" and "truth" as a necessary condition for non-fiction film. Some smart guy may even suggest that it is nothing but the opposite of fiction.

If they tend to agree too much or too early on this (and I have nothing else prepared for a three-hour lecture), I can usually revitalize the discussion by asking if my cousin can be justified in claiming that he is working on documentary films, when in fact what he does for a living is to install surveillance cameras at gas-stations and supermarkets. After all, this does seem to meet the criteria of representing reality, of filming without the use of actors, and recording as truthfully as possible what is actually there – and it is not fiction.

At this point, some students will begin to argue that certainly this mechanical type of recording and displaying video does not make the

¹ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Indiana University Press, 1991).

man a documentary filmmaker; we need to see some artistic point of view, a message of some sort, a moral or ideological ambition with the film made – in short, a wish to make a difference, to change the world, or at least the way in which some relevant audience will look upon the world or themselves. A documentary film director may adopt the so-called "observational" mode of filming or try to be like "a fly on the wall" – but this is a process demanding a lot of choices both in the recording and in the editing phase. It is not just about recording what is there; it is also about selecting and presenting and editing in such a way that we see present conditions as wrong and begin to look for alternatives that should be brought about. Documentary film-making – and also the reception of documentary films – is all about ethics, politics and an aesthetic approach, and as such it is a highly subjective or personal matter, it is now argued.

To counter this I can ask whether we could not say the same about most fiction films: are they not all very personal, do they not have some sort of moral or even ideological viewpoint built into their characters, action and location, and are they not intended to qualify as artistic and aesthetic products making the world a little better and the audience a bit more enlightened about human life?

Definitions and definitions

At this point I have usually caused a lot of confusion in the classroom – and in my own mind as well – about the nature of documentary films. Can the concept be defined, or is it just some slippery term that we happen to apply in many different ways. "And so what?" a student may ask. Well, I still think it is important, at least as an academic exercise, to try to pin down what we mean by "documentary." And not just

in academic discussions about film theory does it make a difference how we conceive of a major genre or label a specific film: in everyday life we navigate through the schedules for TV-programs or film festivals using terms like fiction, documentary, drama, reportage, comedy, and nature film. We seem to know quite well and instantaneously what a documentary is and would probably call it ridiculous and feel cheated if someone labeled the recent Disney production *Pirates of the Caribbean – Dead Man's Chest* a documentary. But why so? After all there were pirates in the Caribbean once, were there not?

Definitions can be of many sorts, depending on how strict we want to be. A proper definition (or a definition of essence) would characterize exactly what it is that makes up this group of films, and would spell it out in such a clear way that it would be easy to assess whether a specific film belonged or did not belong to this group or genre. What are the necessary and sufficient features? How does this type of film differ from other types of film?

Reality, representation and presentation

The example above with the surveillance camera indicates that "recording reality" is too vague a criterion, and not just because "reality" sooner or later becomes a very difficult concept to narrow down (just think about "reality-TV" programs in which almost everything is a construction). The continuous mechanical recording of a raw tape lacks the touch of someone selecting and editing for the purpose of expressing or communicating something to someone. Both fiction and non-fiction films differ markedly from a simple mirroring or duplicative function. This is among other things revealed through the camerawork, i.e. all the intentional changes such as camera moves, cuts, composition, all sorts of adjustments that come from human intervention, and through the post-production process of organizing

various sound tracks and visual tracks into a whole that was not there before. Time may be condensed and the chronology changed, music, subtitles, or voice-over added, shots may be interlaced or interrupted by wipes, etc. As a rule of thumb, a film is hardly a film without camera work, cuts or editing, and it is neither a fiction film nor a documentary if it is nothing more than a "re-presentation" of what happened to be in front of a lens and a microphone.

A film is not a mere representation, but a willed presentation of something made by someone in a specific way and for someone. The phrase "representation of reality" is utterly mistaken as a definition of documentary, because the idea of film as mirroring is a false one and a very misleading ideal. Also the term "reality" is confusing: it may have the straightforward positive connotations of facing reality and seeing things as they really are, but often enough it is interpreted by students in theoretical discussions as just filming "normally" in an "objective" way without being creative or manipulative. Just the facts.... But trying to make "a correspondence with actual facts" and "objective and neutral reproduction" the core characteristics of documentary is naïve in the sense that it has the same weaknesses as philosophical positivism. To believe that reality is made up first by objective facts and secondly by subjective or personal sentiment is to make you yourself blind and deaf to the prevailing power structures and ideologies of this world. "Let us stick to the facts and not be subjective and emotional" – that is the anxious mantra of those not wanting or daring to work for any change or a proper overview and perspective on things.

Truth and creativity

This however does not mean that it is all right to disregard facts or to tell a lie in a non-fiction film. But it must be noted that the "truth" of a film can be understood in other ways. A lot of facts or statements about facts that can be verified may be present even in a fiction film. The whole story may be pure fantasy, the characters fictitious and the behavior of the actors may consist of incredible stunts – but still the film may be striving for "truth" in another sense of the word: true emotions and perhaps even to illustrate some more general truths about human life.

Lacking a good definition of its essence, it could be an idea to look at the etymology and history of the term. The word documentary has its root in the Latin word "*docere*" which meant to teach or instruct. We also know the more modern and common phrase that something is "a document" (e.g. an important piece of paper presented in court) and we may ask someone "to document" his identity or statements. Within film history, the term seems to have been used first by John Grierson who wrote about Robert Flaherty's film *Moana* (1926) that it had "documentary value." And indeed it can be a nice academic exercise to go through the records of how different film critics and writers or even film directors themselves have used the term.

John Grierson, known as the founder of the classic British documentary movement in the 1930's, coined the phrase "creative treatment of actuality." It often comes as a surprise to my students today to see that even at that time, the creativity of the documentary enterprise was underlined. They generally assume that that is a modern invention. Also I can usually surprise them with the highly poetic and almost rap-like ending of the classic film *Night Mail* (1936) as well as with the meta-filmic approach of Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929).

Working on a clear picture – a positive approach

But after all this confusion I owe it to my students to come up with a more positive approach as to how to define documentary films. What I suggest then, is not a proper definition of essence, nor a canon or list of traditionally accepted masterpieces, nor do I give up completely and say that you may call anything a documentary. What I offer is a list of points to consider, almost like a doctor's list of symptoms to be checked before prescribing a certain medicine. We do have in our trained minds a certain general picture or idea of what the term "documentary" means or how it is used by our friends or scholars, but in applying it to a specific film we have to make an individual assessment, looking at the pros and cons. The specific film should meet most of the criteria on the list, but it is hard to say how many or which is the most important.

No single criterion seems to qualify or disqualify a given film. For example, it is often considered that actors belong to fiction films and not to a true documentary (unless, of course, they are portraying themselves). On the other hand there are exceptions that we are ready to accept, such as a TV-documentary using professional actors to re-enact a crime scene in order to make us understand how something may have happened. Indeed it would be immoral to have the real criminal perform another knife-stabbing on the real victim – even though that could be said to be more true or closer to the original event.

My list of points to consider

So here are some of the features to be considered before accepting the label "documentary." I'll start the list with some points that underline the great variety of the genre. Some of the different modes may even be seen as partial descriptions of subgenres:

Functions of the film, metaphorically described (by personification):²

A documentary film can be seen to function as a prophet – explorer – painter – advocate – bugler – prosecutor – observer – catalyst – guerrilla – performer – therapist – spin doctor. (I once misspelled "bugler" as "burglar," but perhaps that might be another possibility for the filmmaker.)

Possible modes³ or narrative strategies:

Expository: lecturing, overtly didactic, e.g. with a personal presenter or an explanatory voice-over.

Observational: like a "fly on the wall," the camera, microphone and film crew seem not to be disturbing the scene or even to be noticed by the participants.

Participatory or interactive: the film crew takes part in the action or chain of events.

Reflexive: the film exposes and discusses its own role as a film (e.g. the ethics or conditions of filmmaking) alongside the treatment of the case or subject.

Performative: the film crew creates many of the events and situations to be filmed by their own intervention or through events carried out for the sake of the film.

Poetic: the aesthetic aspects, the qualities of the form and the sensual appeals are predominant.

Ways of being true. Documentaries seem to have a certain obligation towards "truth." This may be understood, however, in different ways:

Correspondence: statements and details of film are not lies or fiction but in accordance with actual or historical facts, events and persons.

² Inspired by Eric Barnow in *Documentary - a history of the non-fiction film* (Oxford University Press, 1974).

³ Based on Bill Nichols' work, e.g. *Introduction to Documentary* (Indiana University Press, 2001).

Coherence: the film constitutes a well-argued, non-contradictory whole.

Pragmatic or conventionalist view: the film is in line with predominant views and general, long termed discursive practice.

Relativism or constructivism: as you like, or how we make sense of things.

Illumination theory of truth: to become enlightened, to see and hear and understand more, to become inspired and gain insight (perhaps recollection).

More points to consider:

Intentions of the filmmaker: enthusiasm and commitment, the filmmaker wants to explore, to probe and to show us something important or otherwise overlooked; devoted to a cause or to people, trying to make a difference (not just making money, having fun or exposing herself).

Subject matter, themes or content: something of importance and relevance; historical, social or natural phenomena; persons and places of significance. (Note, however, that modern TV-audiences seem to find significance in what critics may call rather trivial "everyday documentaries" (in Danish "hverdagsdokumentar."))

Expectations of the (general) audience: authenticity, insight, disclosure, something about real people and problems, learning something.

Target groups (implied): general public (public service), or segments with a more specialized interest and knowledge on the subject in question.

Ethics: we expect truthfulness, not lies or distortion, even when the film is committed to high ideals and values. Propaganda is over the line (difficult to define too, my provocative suggestion is: "propaganda is a documentary made by my enemy"). The documentary may be engaged and enthusiastic, but should be open about its preferences, sympathies and presuppositions. "Neutrality" or "objectivity" should be understood as problematic, but a well-balanced view is welcomed. The film may reflect its own intervening and perhaps ethically

problematic role in relation to participants and general context. Carefulness, but also boldness in addressing tabooed subjects.

Communicative function: to inform, discuss, engage, enlighten, intervene, explore, express, disturb and commit – more so than to merely entertain, amuse, distract, conform or confirm (e.g. a religious or political community).

Labeling: sponsors, critics, distributors, professionals, scholars, curators, librarians, editors of TV- and film-programs would characterize this as a documentary.

Popular, lay opinion, everyday language: films received and talked about in accordance with the tradition, similar to other so-called documentaries or non-fiction films.

Context of actual use: education, public service (as image or part of an obligation for the distributor), debate forum, campaigns, discussions and pastime entertainment (e.g. in the cabin on an airplane flight).

Style and form: often realism, perhaps with a reportage-like style, interviews, a rough style, lighting and settings and sound appear natural and not carefully controlled (contrary to smooth and slick lighting, camera movements, montage and continuity of classic Hollywood style). Often an argumentative, exploring or investigative attitude, often thematic more than dramatic.

Relation to major genres and art: it is not fiction, it can be seen as belonging to one of the main genres of rhetoric: judicial, epideictic or political. It may be highly artistic and poetic, but seems more like art with a purpose than art for art's own sake. Epics, lyrics and drama seem to serve the didactic aspect.

Recordings: on location, authentic settings and props, real time, real sound, no actors or acting, but actual people (or animals, in nature documentaries) being themselves. Drama and narrative appear not imposed on the scenes, but emerging from the actual (pro-filmic) events.

Editing: the rhetorical structure appears to be more important than ordinary dramatic continuity; the rate of manipulation and rearrangement of picture and sound seems low. A voice-over commentary or text-streaming is more likely than extensive use of non-diegetic music. The mixing of heterogeneous

material (e.g. recordings from a different time or location) is accounted for.

Context of viewing or distribution: e.g. the Discovery Channel, educational TV, TV-slots or festivals announced as documentary, educational institutions, films shown within organizations and companies.

Importance and evaluation: In terms of context and communicative qualities, the film makes a considerable contribution towards a better world...

To be continued

With the last entry here about the importance of a film in a larger context, I may be crossing the line between describing documentary and prescribing what I think it should be. But actually I believe this is in harmony with the ambition of both past and present documentary productions – that is, those of a certain quality, of course.

I am well aware that this is not a systematic list and that several points could or should be improved upon or added by others.⁴ Probably this list is also subject to change not only as we become wiser, but as the history of the genre develops further. But whether it is the content or the label that is subject to change when we consider the historical development of documentary film – well, I'll have to ask my students about that...

⁴ Some suggestions and tips for further study:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_film
http://www.dfi.dk/dfi/undervisning/fatomdokfilm/1_1.htm

An interview with Bertrand Tavernier on documentary filmmaking

Isabelle Meerstein



Bertrand Tavernier

NB. I would like to dedicate this interview to the memory of Ms Laure Ecker-Tripier, the late Cultural Attaché of the French Embassy in Dublin.

On Thursday March 9th 2006, after the screening of 'Holy Lola' I went to introduce myself to Ms Ecker-Tripier. A dark haired, dark eyed French woman elegantly clad in a black "tailleur", her face reflecting an intense sensitivity and a sharp intelligence, she surprised me by almost immediately admitting she was very tired. She dropped into an armchair in the lobby. I walked away, to let her rest. A few moments later, spotting me standing awkwardly in the queue of admirers waiting for autographs, she got up, walked over to me and introduced me to the French film veteran who was on a UK and Ireland tour to promote his 2004 feature.

A few minutes later we were all walking in the strangely mild Cork night. I found myself ambling on the pavement beside Mr. Tavernier, and expressed the wish to interview him. The old Lyonnese master looked down at me (he is very tall, and I am not) and snapped in a gravelly voice: "Come on, you want an interview? Here's your chance; fire away!" My mind went blank with fear, I stammered a stupid question, finally uttering loud and clear my refusal to continue. In spite of her exhaustion, Ms Ecker-Tripier heard me and undertook to intercede in my favour: swiftly and skillfully, she got her guest to agree to a fair meeting the following morning, for breakfast.

As you can imagine, when I arrived at 9 o'clock on Friday morning at the Clarion Hotel, I was not as relaxed as I would have liked to be. But to my delight, as the interview went on, Bertrand Tavernier changed his attitude and became more cooperative, finally becoming the passionate man we know, and he didn't mind my pressing him with questions. Twenty-five minutes later, we left on good terms.

Shortly after this, I learnt that Ms Ecker-Tripier had suddenly died of a cancer-related illness. That Thursday night was the only time I saw her, but I had time to appreciate the kind of profoundly human being she was.

I would also like to thank the President of the Alliance Française of Cork City, Ms Nora Callanan, for her hospitality.

Mr. Tavernier, thank you for accepting this interview on the morning of your return to Paris. I would like to ask about your documentary work. What is your approach to editing for the documentary; how much footage do you discard, how much do you keep in the finished film?

Well, that depends on the film. Generally, we are faced with a lot of footage, and I am no exception to this rule. And so we need sometimes to take our time to find out how to organise the material.

For *La Guerre sans nom* (*The Undeclared War*, 1992), I had 40 or 50 hours of material that I reduced to 4 hours. I cut and cut. Some things are easy to discard, such as uninteresting moments or people. So, there are those things that at first glance you have to get rid of. They amount to 20% or 30 % of all the footage.

And then, you have to discover organically the structure of your film, it's in there, somewhere. That architecture cannot be imposed from the outside. We hadn't decided on a structure before the shoot. We were not merely illustrating a point when we were shooting *War without a Name* or *De l'autre côté du périph* (*The Other Side of the Tracks*, 1997). You have to find your structure at the editing stage. We applied to both films more or less the same principle: switching between two ways of narration. Going from an all-encompassing one that tells a collective story to an individual story, so you tell the story of the group and then you interrupt it suddenly to focus on one single experience. Then you go back to something more general, before switching back again onto one single person, and so on. And so, at some point in our editing process, for both *La Guerre sans nom* and *De l'autre côté du périph*, we had discovered recurring topics, which in turn introduced us to so many parts under so many themes. For instance, in *La Guerre sans nom*, the following themes emerged: grub, fear, exactions; torture, and seeing one's fellow soldiers dead. So you find your structure little by little.

But there are certain things that escape a clear discrimination, I mean when something forms the core of a subject, it shows up both in a theme and in a character, so you leave it in both. You leave those things both in the collective drama and in the individual drama. In short, that's it. It requires you to grope your way, it takes time to reach it, to find it. Time to manage to keep that impression of paths that cross. Ultimately it's that individual emotion.

Do you always work with the same editor?

Well, I try... but sometimes, there are things in the way of that. For example, both *La Guerre sans nom* and *Au-delà du périph* were edited by Luce Grunenwald, but she died just after finishing that second film. She died because of a mistake during a liver transplant, so I could no longer work with her. Then I took Sophie Brunet. Very often I take people who can go from documentary to fiction, people who are able to alternate between both, and who take pleasure in doing so. That's Sophie Brunet to a T. Luce had been the assistant of my editor Armand Pseny for years, and then she became my editor. As for Sophie, I met her when we were producing *Veillée d'armes* (*The Troubles We've Seen: A History of Journalism in Wartime*, 1994) by Marcel Ophüls. She was the editor of Marcel Ophüls. So I told myself that if she could survive Ophüls, then she would be able to survive me! And that was it.

Can you tell me, please, about the use of sounds in your documentary practice, live sound and those background sounds that are so present in your films?

Very often, I go back to a place to try and get more. In *La Guerre sans nom* I was working with the sound engineer who works on all my features. We had gathered a lot of live sound; great ambient sounds, individual sounds very useful for the editing. While shooting in Algeria, the Algerian sound engineer had little experience of live sound

because at the time, in Algeria, most was done in post-sync. If they needed a live sound, they would ask a French guy to come over. And yet, he managed two or three lovely ambient sounds.

There are times I want to keep the ambient sound even if it is aggressive. That sometimes compels us to be acrobats! And sometimes, in my documentaries, this led us to make mistakes; sometimes the mikes were badly placed; we were less experienced but in the end, it all came out all right.

There is always quite a strong texture, with music too...

Yes, I work a lot with musical moments. The purpose is to give some breathing space, to offer openness, calm, distance, and lyricism inside the narrative. I also include a lot of songs. In *La Guerre sans nom*, there was no original music. Instead, we had songs the participants were referring to, like songs the soldier told me they used to listen to during meal-time. They were listening to Gloria Lasso singing *L'étranger au paradis*. Or Yves Montand; I included several of his songs. The soldiers also listened to Sydney Bechet's *Petite Fleur* a lot.

But there was one thing I did not do. I ran into a conflict over a song with an executive of the production company that was doing *La Guerre sans nom* – not Mr Guérin who was great, but someone else. There was a man, a male character in the film, a worker, who said that prior taking part to all those battles [The French State called the Algerian war of Independence (1954-62) “*les événements*,” *The Events*; *The Troubles*’; hence the title of the film], he used to sing all the time. He worked in a factory. And there was a song he used to sing often, *C'était mon copain* (*He was my buddy*), the famous song by the late Gilbert Bécaud. And then, there came a day when, having seen so many of his buddies dying in the dirty war, he said: “I will never sing again.” And *that* exec

was telling me that I *had* to include that very song in the film! So I told this person: "That's the very thing I will never do." When a bloke says he will never sing that song again, I won't put it in, no way. He refuses to sing it. I would use another song; I used *Un jour, tu verras* (*One day, you'll see*) sung by Mouloudji. I believe I was getting the same result, the same melancholy. There is a guy who says: "I cannot bear to hear that song ever again" and then you include it!? I find that despicable! All of a sudden, you just would violate the private life of one of your characters. I am very reluctant to do such a thing. Oh, it would certainly have "paid off" emotionally, the viewers would have had tears in their eyes, but the price to pay was very questionable to me!

And this leads me to another question about the way you approach reality. You are obviously not a TV person who seeks to induce a very strong emotion, a shock in the viewer to get attention. How do you bring about an emotion? What is an emotion made of, according to you? How do you seek it, also, regarding your characters?

I try to understand, yes, I do. I try to let someone speak, to give my characters the time they need to speak at length. And, yes, that gives a style that is not even remotely fashionable nowadays on TV. What is hot on TV is this: people you let utter only two or three sentences, you try and get them to say two or three very striking things. That's all fine for TV shows such as *Envoyé spécial* [on the French public channel France 2], for reportages. But for a documentary, I think that's not it at all! A documentary involves coming to an understanding of your characters. I very often deal with people who have never been given a voice, I mean an opportunity to say things in their own words. With them, I cannot just take a sentence, just like that, just for the sake of the point I want to make. I must respect their way of thinking, of reacting, and sometimes, their hesitations. Because a hesitation in their speech is the very thing that will give the scene its emotion, that thing they find

hard to say. If I shoot and keep only the emotional sentence such as someone crying and if I don't show the way he/she holds his/her tears, struggles with their emotions, I lose very important things: what I lose is that very groping for one's thoughts. I lose a palette of sentences, of words, which belong to his/her profession, to his/her origins or culture and so, no, I don't feel like cutting it out! In *Histoires de vies brisées* (*Stories of Broken Lives*, 2001), I even went very far in that direction. I was a bit compelled to do so because some material we had shot went missing: cutaways. We had characters, men and women who had been hunger-striking for 40 days. There was a great urgency in them. They wanted to speak. They had to speak. Everyone could see it was very difficult. I didn't have to encourage them to speak. I *had to* let them speak. I had to respect them. It had to go far, they had to get to the bottom of what they wanted to say, to release it all. For example, at the beginning of the film, one of the participants is speaking. And little by little it builds into an extraordinary emotion. But it becomes such an intense emotion thanks to the fact that we have taken our time, that we have given them all the time they needed.

There are people who work for public channels in France who tell me: "We will buy your film when it has been turned into an audio-visual product." That is to say when those moments of listening have been cut out. That makes me really mad! I am also enraged by the fact that in our world, we are so scared to just listen to someone who is speaking, so scared that we want to turn that into "cinema," into a *show*! And so, we cut instead to documents such as photographs, archive excerpts, objects. Ah, I can't believe it! When someone speaks, don't you know? You just do *not* interrupt them. Ah, but in some TV talk-shows, what do they do? They make it a priority to interrupt people non-stop! In some broadcasts, it's even become a trademark. There are presenters

who have built their notoriety on interrupting their guests systematically! I am for letting the viewers listen to those who are speaking. In daily life too. I like to be listened to sometimes and other times I feel like giving someone else the space to speak and be listened to. It really is worth taking five more minutes without interrupting, without cutting it out, in order to try and understand what is happening. And that is always *complex*, it *cannot* be summarised into five or six striking sentences.

From a practical point of view, where do you position yourself physically in relation to the camera and sound recording, when you are in that process of listening?

I *never* hold the camera. First of all, I am not a good camera person. A few times I happened to hold the boom, yes, and to deal with the sound recording, but it's not my thing, really. What I want is to be close to people, and to look all around me in order to see the context, and to catch a good cutaway opportunity. What matters to me is to be the one who is listening. Often, I have by my side my son, Nils, who, unlike me, handles the camera very well. He's great. He's very quick. Sometimes, he would cut too soon. And yet, once he did not listen when I said: "Cut!" and he was so right. There was someone who burst into tears in front of the camera and he let the camera roll and that was good because that moment when the person was weeping was excellent. I trust Nils very much. I'm relaxed with him. I let him shoot the way he feels like it. Now and then, I would ask him for a specific shot but generally I focus essentially on what's happening in the scene. To answer your question more precisely: I am beside Nils. Sometimes also, I am opposite the person I am speaking with so as to let her/him see me and not speak and gaze into the camera lens! I need to be in contact with the person I am listening to. Or at other times, the camera

is behind me with a long lens. Or a wide angle if I need to appear in the shot. And also, Nils moves around. He moves in. Or if the camera is on a dolly, he zooms in with a similar effect, and he frames the shot in several different ways, maybe over-the-shoulder, or close-ups if that's what he feels the shot needs. But very often, he will position himself so as to be comfortable. He will handle the camera, carry it or put it on a tripod, then he feels something is going on or I signal to him to go closer and so he does. We get on really well. It's special. The shots he did for *De l'autre côté du périph* or for *Histoires de vies brisées* and the shots other people did, nobody can tell the difference. So it means on the one hand that there is a great, obvious unity, and on the other there is a way of seeing, a common vision in all those films.

Another thing that is very important: as far possible, I try not to meet the participants prior to the shooting. I try to avoid meeting them in order to prepare them, to talk with them beforehand. I really think this is bad for a film. That is the lesson I learned from Marcel Ophüls who used to say: "You must never meet your protagonists and talk with them before the shooting."

In the case of *La Guerre sans nom*, how did we select the participants? We still had to see if their story was a bit interesting, so there was someone whose job was to determine this. Georges Mattei was the researcher on that film. You see, if you have someone telling too much of what they have lived through, when we reach the shoot, this person will feel he or she has already said it all. That has happened to me. I remember that man who had practised torture in Algeria. He had in later years been so disturbed by his experience that he had seriously envisaged becoming a monk. And he said that to us before the shoot. Of course, when the camera was on, he would not say it again. We tried hard to get him to repeat his experience, but to no avail.

It was just too late. The moment had passed. So you've got to be extremely careful with that kind of stuff, you must never dry up your witnesses, your participants. You must take great care. And if when you are shooting, you don't get anything because it's too early, your participants and you don't know each other yet, it's too close to the first meeting, what do you do? Well, of course you see them again, but you won't speak of *the* matter. One, two or three months later, you get back to them. [You have had time to build trust in the meantime.]

With my documentaries, there are a few very clear rules: the participants know, I tell each person each time we are filming that they can come back whenever they feel like it if they realise they have not said something they wanted to, or if they are unhappy with something, we would always welcome them. The people can also watch the rushes, they can drop in the editing room to see how they have done. They let me know what they think, and I take them onboard – or not! But I do not hide anything. I tell my participants: "This film is also *your* film, so you have to feel we haven't come here to film you against your will, or that we are going to distort what you say. You can check." The greatest compliment I got came with *La Guerre sans nom*. After the screening, all thirty participants said they felt we had *perfectly* respected what they wanted to say, even though we had cut so much out. They could recognise themselves in the film. They had not been misrepresented. There was nothing they had regrets about.

That is a compliment indeed. And finally, I wanted to ask your definition of a critical mind?

A critical mind is something you must keep ticking on at all times when you make a documentary. It is to tell yourself: "What this person is telling me, it's great, but is it accurate?" It is so only when you can

back it up with one, two, three or four other people. So exercising your critical mind is not to sacrifice everything straight away and accept immediately a detail that can be striking, or funny, or tragic. Or suddenly very shocking so as to make a show. It's about constantly questioning everything, doubting everything. Not "Is he telling me the truth?" because that's too simple, because there are always several kinds of truth. It's to tell oneself: "Isn't he painting too black a picture of the situation?" or the opposite: "Isn't he embellishing the facts?" Or: "Isn't this too picturesque a detail?" For example, the fact that quite a few French conscripts were given World War One rifles in the Algerian War of Independence. But then you hear the same story from a guy who did not and could not have known the first guy. And a third, and a fourth who was somewhere else. So you tell yourself: "Ok, that's not *too* good to be true. I can keep that." And anything that has been told only once, I mean by one single person, I discard. So to have a critical mind is this: to tell yourself that the person you are filming, who is certainly innocent, is he or she to be believed just like that? No, you have got to get to the other side, to hear the story from the opposition. When the young lads were complaining about the police in *De l'autre côté du périph*, we got to hear what the other party had to say. You must get the other version, the other point of view!

Clarion Hotel, Cork, Ireland

Friday 10th March 2006

Translated from the French by the author

Documenting the Middle East

Irit Neidhardt

The Middle East is probably filmed more than any other region in the world, especially Israel/Palestine. The predominant images of Palestine show shootings and mass demonstrations (at funerals) – which are usually pictures from the news – as well as images of veiled women, poverty and guerilla training camps when it comes to reportages. Who is creating these images and what or whom do they represent? What kind of documentaries are made in Palestine and which ones are screened in the Western world? Which images do Western viewers expect to see? I will discuss these questions on the basis of my experience in distributing films from the Middle East and teaching workshops about issues related to Palestine and/or Israel and film.

As this article focuses on the reception of documentaries from the Middle East, mainly from Palestine, in the Western world I should say a few words about fictional movies as well. In too many cases fictional films are not read as fiction, storytelling or fantasy but as testimonies of real life. This applies for example to Tawfik Abu Wael's *Atash/Thirst*, winner of the International Critic's Award in Cannes in 2004, which most viewers read as the factual story of a real Palestinian family rather than as a study about the emotional constitution of five members of a family that lives with a taboo. Consequently, many Arab festivals in the West do not screen the film because they are afraid of contributing to the negative image of Arabs. Many theatres decide not to show the film as it is not really about Palestine, and even raising production funds had been impossible in Europe because funding institutions said that

nobody would want to see such a story from Palestine.¹ The same applies to Annemarie Jacir's award-winning *Ka'innana Ashrun Mustaheel /Like Twenty Impossibles* (2003) that deals with the psychological damage experienced by a team of filmmakers crossing checkpoints in the occupied Palestinian territories. When the sound-man of the fictional film crew is searched by the army, there is no sound; without the cameraman, there is no image; and when the director is taken away for searches, there is relative chaos. It happened more than once that a festival called and complained about the bad quality of the copy as though there was a technical problem with the sound and image. Selection committees let me know that they selected the film but asked me to be sure to send a good copy, since on the preview tape the image disappeared at a certain point.

We understand and categorise images on the basis and in the context of our knowledge about a specific subject. Concerning the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict and wars, we derive our knowledge and ideas from the media as well as from the Christian narrative, as the following example shows. In 2001 I taught a seminar on *Jerusalem in Film* to post-graduates in Germany. I asked them to discuss the questions: "What images of Jerusalem do you have?" and "Who made these images?" The first man answered enthusiastically that he has his images from Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*, which inspired a woman to add that she has her images from the Bible, too. Regardless of the various confusions these answers implied, more stories of childhood memories came up, private and emotional memories connected with places and events in historical Palestine. The naivety and honesty were disarming and eye-opening. The next question was about the images

¹ Ironically the film was financed only by Israeli funds and cable-TV. There is hardly any Arab funding in general and the Europeans approached were not interested in the subject.

they expected to see in the film excerpts I was going to show from Palestinian and Israeli works. Nobody thought of images of daily life or social problems such as poverty, street kids or prostitution. The majority of the post-graduates expected the Palestinian films to be about Islam or Muslim fundamentalism and war. They were not clear about what to expect from the Israeli films.

Two documentaries about the day-to-day-life in Jerusalem just around the beginning of the second Intifada demonstrate different approaches to documentary film-making in Palestine as well as the reception of the works by the West: Alia Arasoughly's *Hay mish Eishi/This Is Not a Living* (42 min.) and Tawfik Abu-Wael's *Natreen Sallah el-Din/Waiting for Sallah el-Din (Saladin)* (52 min.), both produced in Palestine in 2001. Coincidentally the introductory parts of both films were shot at the same street in East-Jerusalem,² one in August 2000, just before the Intifada, and one in October 2000, just after the outbreak of the Intifada. Both portray four people in their daily routines. *Hay mish Eishi/This Is Not a Living* opens with scenes of East-Jerusalem which are quite familiar to those who watch the news somewhat regularly. The streets towards Damascus gate (the main entrance to the Old City from the Eastern part of town) are crowded with people on their way to prayer (most probably the scene was shot on a Friday); there are lots of armed police, partly on horses, people are screaming and there are incidents of Israeli police hunting down or beating up Palestinians. The music underlines the threat, here and there people who are rushing give a short interview and let their anger out. The four portraits of women that follow show how their daily lives are destroyed by the ongoing

² The Palestinian part of the city, which was annexed by Israel in 1982. Residents of East-Jerusalem have the so-called Jerusalem Status, which gives them more rights than Palestinians in the West Bank or Gaza but not Israeli citizenship.

violence, closed roads and shortages caused by the occupation. By portraying mainly middle-class women the director, who herself comes from an upper-middle-class family, clearly corrects an image – dominant in the West – of Palestine in general and of Palestinian women in particular. A class that was also absent from the Palestinian screen until the middle of the 1990s. The film was initiated and mainly sponsored by the Swiss feminist Christian Peace Service (Christlicher Friedensdienst) and is clearly addressed to a Western audience. Despite the correction of the image of “the” Palestinian or Arab woman, it provides no new images or approaches. The population is nothing but a victim, which does not really enable the viewer to identify with individuals, and the Palestinian case seems hopeless if not lost. This tends to inspire a feeling of pity for the “other” and in this way confirms certain Western as well as Arab views.

Natreen Sallah El-Din/Waiting for Sallah El-Din opens with a short text introducing Sallah el-Din.³ The first image is of the moon followed by a close-up of the ear and cheek of a sleeping man. A place-seller who is soon getting up for his shift in front of the Israeli Home Office, which is situated in East Jerusalem. The Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem have to apply for everything at the Home Office: identity-cards, travel-permits, birth-certificates, marriage-licenses, death-certificates... The queues are long and those who can afford to buy a place, as is known from other societies that suffered from shortages or military occupation. The camera is with these cool, small-time criminals and an old man who came in the middle of the night to ensure himself a place on line. This time he does not want to wait in vain; he needs his papers for the pilgrimage. He does not understand why there should be thirty

³ An Arab leader of Kurdish origin who succeeded in uniting the divided Muslim-Arab state and conquered the crusaders in Palestine, liberating Jerusalem from their rule. His name was immortalised in the history of the Arabs and became the symbol of the expected leader.

people in front of him, he sees only three youngsters. Another old man is sitting on the sidewalk with his typewriter. He helps people with the forms that need to be filled out in Hebrew and not in Arabic. These scenes happen every night during the week. From off-screen a voice reads a Palestinian poem about waiting as a Palestinian, waiting for everything, being trapped in a state of immobility. The portraits that follow show people and their daily struggle to keep their dignity. To finance himself as a student at the film department of Tel Aviv University, Tawfik Abu-Wael sold books from door to door in East Jerusalem. Having Israeli citizenship, his status is different from that of East Jerusalemites. The society is fragmented and most Palestinians from the different areas (inside Israel, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza) do not know much about each other due to the political situation. Selling children's books in East Jerusalem, Abu Wael found himself again and again in the situation of advising people *not* to buy the books as they could hardly afford their food. His approach to the film and the story he is telling is not related to a specific time or event but rather looking at long-term issues. Regarding the question as to whether the outbreak of the second Intifada changed the situation of waiting, he replied in an interview: "Arabs/Palestinians still live in a constant state of waiting. The 'second Intifada' is a political expression, most Arabs/Palestinians are suffering in silence, like people in other places around the world."⁴ *Natreen Sallah el-Din/Waiting for Sallah el-Din* is Tawfik Abu Wael's graduation film. He was not interested in what Israelis or potential Western spectators would say about it but rather felt an urge to tell this/his story. Other than Alia Arasoughly, Abu Wael had no connections to Western institutions by that time that could have sponsored the film.

⁴ Interview with the author for the press-kit of the film.

As far as distribution is concerned, *Hay mish Eishi/This Is Not a Living* was screened at many festivals around the world and one could say it was quite a success. *Natreen Sallah el-Din/Waiting for Sallah el-Din* was hardly ever selected. As distributor of the film, I had many conversations with festival and TV programmers about their decision. Most people could not get connected to the film, the pace was too slow, the images too foreign, the subject seemed irrelevant. Why waiting and why boredom, why ordinary people's boring lives? Instead of seriously considering these questions, they were used as arguments for turning the film down. In some cases programmers found it a work of high cinematic standards but either not fitting in with the other films they intended to show from the region or too demanding of their audiences – an argument that I hear quite often when it comes to unfamiliar images from the Middle East.

Before dealing with more familiar images and films, I would like to tell a small story concerning familiarity. In a workshop about Palestinian and Israeli women filmmakers as part of a larger conference, I asked each of the German participants – well educated, politically interested middle-class women – to give the names of five filmmakers from any country, dead or alive. In the next round I asked for the names of five female filmmakers from any country. Even helping each other, they could think of only three names.

A documentary that is doing very well internationally at the moment is *Badal* (2005) by Palestinian Ibtisam Ma'arana. The film is an Israeli production, and Ma'arana an Israeli citizen. “‘A *Badal* deal marriage’ usually means when a brother and sister from one family marry a sister and brother from another family – interlocking the two couples forever. Divorce on the part of one couple will immediately lead to the divorce

of the other part of the deal. This is common practice in Muslim families in the Middle East. The film follows a family during the process of putting such a deal together. It portrays the lives of Palestinian women living within Israel: their difficulties and struggle to be a part of their traditional society vs. the quest to maintain their full rights as women, and citizens of a Jewish state.”⁵ Ibtisam Ma'arana herself run away from a *Badal*, and the family she is portraying is her own. This adds credibility to film, in case that is needed, as the film reconfirms the view dominant in the West of Arab and/or Muslim society, mainly in terms of the characterization: Arab/rural/traditional/oppressed women vs. Western/urban/ modern/free women. This synopsis describes the work precisely. What the film lacks, for example, is to explore why the director's aunt is arranging a *Badal*, if it has such negative effects. Does it give her an influential status in her community? Was she, who had a *Badal* made as well, married happily? We learn nothing about the contradictions the *Badal* involves and we are left with the impression that Arabs just live with bad traditions.

Films we see from or about the Middle East often confirm our image or deliver the exact opposite of our expectations.

Most of the representations/ images coming from inside the Arab world are mere reactions to the misinterpretations/ images coming from the West, a fact that only consolidates the Eurocentric thought and vision. The result is culturally repulsive; there is no dialogue (a term so much in fashion recently), or exchange of views, no discussion, or mutual recognition. There is only a flat assertion of many positive qualities and features. These assertions, easily made to consolidate images, do not affect the West's claim to an absolute authority in shaping the 'other' and in producing knowledge.⁶

⁵ From the online catalogue of the film's World Sales Agent, Cinephil.

⁶ From the paper presented by Shereen Abou el Nagain entitled “Image creation as a problematic” at the conference: Cultural Mobility in Near Eastern Literatures. Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, 28 to 29 April 2005. www.wiko-berlin.de/kolleg/projekte/AKMI/culturalmob/cult

Most of the documentaries from the Middle East that are screened in the West are Israeli films; some are Palestinian and very few come from the other twenty-one Arab countries. The majority of Israeli films screened (not made) deal with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or the situation of Palestinians and consequently present, and to a certain extent define, Palestinian life. Those films in which the directors ask what the occupation or repressive laws do to the "other," like Anat Even's and Ada Ushpiz's *Asurot/Detained* (2001) or Ayelet Bechar's *Acherei haChatuna/Just Married* (2005), for example, are still an exception. And also here problems of representation arise. Geographically Israel is obviously situated in the Middle East, but culturally it represses its Middle Easternness.⁷ Israel is represented at the European Song Contest and its soccer teams take part in the European Champions League. Politically it is affiliated with Western states and seen as the only democracy in the Middle East. With an Israeli passport traveling in the Middle East is only possible in Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, which people visit, if at all, as tourists. Only in very rare cases do personal contacts exist. The Arabs that Israeli film-makers know are Palestinians, a people that lives under extreme conditions and has, due to the ongoing occupation as well as the unequal position inside Israel, no chance to develop a *self-determined* culture and life. The urban centres, Jaffa and Haifa, were destroyed in the 1948 war, the Israeli War of Independence and the Palestinian Naqba. The population either left the country or was pushed towards the hinterland, if they survived at all. The cities are lost and with them the urban culture they represented.

As far as Palestine is concerned the above-mentioned characteristics are true to a certain degree, but not for the other Arab countries. Cairo,

⁷ I mean the Palestinian culture as well as the contribution of those Jews who emigrated from Arab/Muslim countries. Together the two groups make up a majority of Israeli citizens, and they are under-represented in decision-making positions.

for example, is the largest city in the world. Not only is one Arab country different from another, but also inside each countries there is great richness of diversity. A new generation of Arab filmmakers is emerging that is making use of this, that is telling personal stories that open doors to a new approach to political questions and new views – not only about that region.

However true the story of a documentary is, we need knowledge of it's context in order to read the film. So far the familiarity we have with subjects related to the Middle East is a home-made one which represents only a small part and certain viewpoints of the region. To get a better picture, and sometimes works that are cinematically more interesting, we need to see a greater variety of films from the region and to dare to confront ourselves with images that might confuse and disorient us at first.

Danish Top Politicians Underscored

Iben Have

On the 22nd of April 2003, the documentary about the Danish prime minister, *Fogh bag facaden*, was aired by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR 1. (Literally the title means “Fogh Behind the Façade,” but the program’s official English title is “The Road to Europe.”) The following day the same channel showed another documentary *Mogens og magten* (“Mogens and Power”) and thereby gave the same amount of audio-visibility to the opposition leader. Since then Danish public service television has broadcast at least another seven documentary portraits of top Danish politicians.¹ Four of them deal primarily with the general election campaign that preceded the parliamentary elections on February 8, 2005.

Portraying currently active top politicians is not new in Danish television documentaries but the intervals between the broadcasts of this type of documentary have decreased during the last few years, and I believe it makes sense to describe it as a documentary sub-genre; a sub-genre that arises alongside an increasing demand on politicians’ visibility in the media and an increasing focus on the person behind the politician. The tendency toward the personalization of politics and an interest in backstage politics are reflected in a wide range of Danish media products today: (auto-)biographies and fiction, fiction films and homepages.² Together with politicians’ media per-

¹ In addition to the five documentaries mentioned in this article (cf. the diagram on p. 46), other broadcasts of this kind include *Mimis sidste valg* (“Mimi’s Last Election,” Michael Noer, 2005), *Exit Brixtofte* (Guldbrandsen, 2002) and *De første* (“The First,” Guldbrandsen, 2001).

² Cf. the novels *Kronprinsessen* (“The Crown Princess,” 2002, also made as a TV drama in 2006), *Kongemordet* (“The Murder of the King,” 2005) by Hanne Vibeke Holst, the

formances in talk- and game shows this tendency blurs the boundaries between private and public, between politics and entertainment, and between the political leader and the media celebrity (Corner & Pels 2003).

Style, personality, appearance and authenticity have become important qualities for a politician in a modern democracy in which citizens have become political consumers who no longer buy ideological party packages but vote for a person they find genuine and in whom they feel confidence. Journalistic documentary programmes in general have a great influence on the formation of public opinion, and portraying functioning top politicians in this serious normative, journalistic documentary genre in national television's primetime gives the programmes an important democratic role. No statistics show as yet how much these portraits influence the polls, but respected political commentators pointed to *Fogh bag facaden*, when explaining why the Liberal Party lost 8% of their (mostly women) voters in the year after the film was broadcast. The film portrayed Fogh as a strong chief negotiator but also as a cold-hearted, arrogant man with an extreme focus on precision and control.

Not only is the style of the mediated politician important for the recipient's impression, but also the way the presentation of the politician is orchestrated by the audiovisual style of the documentary. This essay will focus on one of the aesthetic style elements, the underscore music, in order to raise some questions about non-verbal political communication in modern democratic society.

The aestheticized and emotionalized politician

The documentary portraits of politicians illustrate and are themselves examples of the mutual dependency between politicians and journalists/media. Showing the backstage life of a celebrity is considered suitable material for television. On the other hand it is a unique opportunity for the politician to achieve visibility in the media for more than the usual few seconds in a news interview. And visibility in the media, personalization and aesthetification are a condition you cannot afford to deny as a politician today (Thompson 1995). This dilemma is a main theme in most of the portraits. The press release for *Evas store udfordring* ("Eva's Big Challenge") presents the production in this way under the headline "Politics and emotions":

Eva's Big Challenge is the story about the marked change happening in Danish politics during the last decades. Today ministers do not only have to be clever, visionary and powerful politicians with insight in a special area. The ministers of today must appeal to the hearts of the Danes with their whole life and life story. Politics is not just sold with arguments, it is also necessary to reach the voters' feelings. Therefore it is essential how politicians look, how they live their lives, how their families look, how they are together with their children, and it is of crucial importance that they are capable of communicating exactly the right message about themselves in the media. [...] Television 2 follows the struggle of Eva Kjer Hansen to break through the media as a future top politician. [My translation from the Danish.]

And the press release for *Lykketoft finale* points to the same changes in political communication:

Lykketoft finale is a film about a political system in a period of rapid change. The presentation, the political slogan, has defeated the political argument. Mogens Lykketoft is trapped between his idealistic self-image and the press' portrayal of him as an elitist power-seeker. In this way the film unfolds the modern Danish election campaign as a media spectacle, where the form and the presentation are crucial. The political consensus is created from the ability to speak in headlines in front of the camera. *Lykketoft finale* is the exit of the idealist. [My translation from the Danish.]

Thus the programmes thematize how orchestrating the politicians' image in the media is a constant balancing act between the private and

the public, emotion and reason, style and substance. But at the same time the documentaries themselves are media exposures of politicians in a genre that itself balances between each pair of concepts. A genre that builds on credibility, objectivity and impartiality, but also wants to reach under the skin of the recipients, and therefore uses a number of aesthetic devices for achieving an emotional involvement.

Music is one of those aesthetic devices that are usually said to be eminently capable of generating or reinforcing feelings and emotions in audio-visual media. How and why it does so is however seldom considered. This very same ability often gives rise to a critical attitude towards using music as an aesthetic device in serious documentaries. It is accused of being a means of manipulation, undermining the objectivity and authenticity that are so essential to the genre. But judgements of that kind are due to a very one-sided definition of the factual and documentary genre. Accentuating the impartial, objective presentation overlooks and ignores the fact that emotions, experiences and aesthetic appreciation play a central role with regard to experiencing reality. I believe the feeling of manipulation arises particularly because recipients are not familiar with how and what underscore music communicates. When we consider audio-visual media consumption, most people in the modern world are extremely able listeners, as far as decoding background music in films and television is concerned. However, we are rarely aware of this ability because it takes place at a pre-reflective level of consciousness.

I have earlier carried out a theoretical and analytical study to investigate and conceptualise some of the cognitive and emotional structures underlying our intuitive experience and appreciation of background music in an audio-visual narrative exposition (Have 2004). In the following I will briefly point to links between music and emotion

and argue that music can add a kind of reality dimension to documentaries, representing some qualities of experience that cannot be communicated only visually and orally.

Different communicative levels in underscore music

Music develops in time as do film and television, and has a natural structuring function in the narrative progress making beginnings, endings, connections and special points. But the structural function can never stand alone. The expressive and communicative potentials of the music will always accompany it. Despite the non-representational, abstract nature of musical expressiveness, I believe it is possible to point to some inter-subjective structures in the perception of music – both cognitive and emotional – which derive from common bodily and cultural experience. I will argue that we fundamentally experience musical expressivity on the basis of our bodily, physical experience of movement, objects and intensity. It is these qualities that guide the metaphorical descriptions of music as heavy, light, grainy, smooth, suspense-filled or releasing, or descriptions of tones as high or deep, or scales as rising or declining, which again can relate to fundamental cultural values such as “up is good,” “down is bad,” “light is good,” “dark is bad,” etc. (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980). The metaphorical experience of musical structures has a direct relation to experience of the emotional structures – not categorical emotions as we usually understand them, such as fear, joy, love, hate, etc., but a continual, dynamic flow of feelings, which we experience as tensions and relaxations, as flowing, exploding, fading, bursting, dull, energetic, etc. The developmental psychologist Daniel N. Stern calls these feelings *vitality affects* (Stern 1985), and even though he developed the term in a totally different context when studying the non-verbal communication

between mother and child, I will argue that it can be used to explain the intimate connection between music and emotions. We fundamentally experience musical structures as auditive vitality contours of movement, objects and intensity, which we intuitively transform to vitality affects – whether we register them as belonging to a person or a situation in a film or feel them ourselves, or both. When these structures function in combination with moving images and a narrative, more focused experiences of categorical emotions can arise, because this context enables us to understand the structures in relation to a person or a situation (cf. Langkjær 2000). Music alone cannot communicate Lykketoft's nervousness before he makes his speech (cf. the analysis below) but it can communicate nuances like tensions, trembling and the rawness of this feeling, and thus make the feeling more real and the experience more vital.

Underscore music can also generate culturally coded para-musical associations – coding that to a great extent is made and/or reinforced in the audio-visual media. For example when the finale movement of Beethoven's symphony No. 9 (now known as the EU hymn, "*Ode an die Freude*") associates to the EU, or as traditional classical music connotes high class and sophisticated culture; or when a bossa rhythm connotes South America, or a didgeridoo evokes Australia; or when specific jingles connote the sitcom *Friends*, a weather report or a special shampoo from a commercial. We can also talk about a more indexical level of musical meaning when tones sound like rain falling or heartbeats; or about a more personal level when a particular tune reminds us of an old love affair.

So the way the music generates meaning is complex and dynamic and it becomes even more so in the audio-visual context where it interacts with other levels of meaning both in time and space. And just

as the music works as a chameleon that changes colour according to where it is moving along, it also colours the context and makes a difference for the reception.

The Sound of Danish Top Politicians.

I have listened to the underscore music – and whenever possible tried to identify it – in five documentaries from the Danish Broadcasting Corporation and TV2, which portray functioning Danish top-politicians. The diagram on p. 46 lists relevant data about the programmes and their music, and summarizes the analysis. Considering the length of this essay it will be a brief review and short analytical description of the musical communication at different levels. The following review of the five programmes will not be uniform, since it is a work in progress.

In *Fogh bag facaden* the music is pre-composed, symphonic classical-romantic music. The music plays in 20% of the programme and is heard 28 times in the form of four themes that were composed respectively by Beethoven, Rossini, Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky. The rising grandiose Beethoven Finale (“Ode an die Freude”) with choir and full symphonic orchestra is only used at the beginning of the documentary, celebrating the official announcement of the enlargement of EU and the speech by Fogh Rasmussen. The documentary’s most restrained theme is from Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*; gloomy church music with a dark and muddy tone, generating suspense in the sequences of news montages from various European television channels. The Tchaikovsky theme, “The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” from the ballet *The Nutcracker* is played on a special instrument, a celeste, sounding like small bells or like children’s mechanical musical boxes. The theme is only used once, when a restless Fogh Rasmussen

is waiting for the national leaders of Italy and Finland outside the meeting room, impatiently keeping an eye on his watch. The music here emphasizes and reinforces the focus on mechanical time but also childish teasing. The last and most interesting theme is the one by Shostakovich. We never get behind the façade of the private person Fogh Rasmussen in this documentary, but only behind the façade of the political processes. Most of the time he is surrounded by many people, but the scenes where he is most alone and private, in Goffman's words most "backstage," (for example in his office or running in a park in Berlin) we hear the theme from Shostakovich's "Vals No. 2" from *Jazz Suite No. 2*. It is an ambiguous theme, at one and the same time communicating something sad, with the declining minor scales and dark brass instrument, and something comical and decadent, with the circus-like saxophone and the waltz rhythm. Together with a close-up on Fogh Rasmussen's face in a thoughtful moment, the theme *could have* generated a feeling of getting closer to the man, but the camera keeps a distance, and it is the comical aspects that become apparent, for example in the scene where the elevator does not arrive, or the one with the bodyguards exercising with Fogh in the park, and one of them can't keep up with the others. This music was also used as the main theme in Kubrick's film *Eyes Wide Shut* with Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise and associations from this film might influence the reception further.

Generally the music in *Fogh bag facaden* does not generate emotional intimacy but ironic distance, which corresponds to the general impression of Fogh Rasmussen in this documentary. The music helps us keep a distance to the Prime Minister. It does not take us under his skin but celebrates him from the outside. And as such the music is very different from other kinds of television documentary underscore.

In *Mogens og magten* the music is the exact opposite of Fogh's. It is simple electronic music played and composed by Jens Krøyer and improvised over anthems of the Social Democrats. The music fills about 25% of the programme and is heard 20 times. The melody is mostly played with a delicate flute sound, and the music thus seems a contrast to the story. Unlike the other four, this documentary is critical, leaving Mogens Lykketoft in a bad light. In the introductory scene, Lykketoft and his wife Jytte are interviewed about the necessary "brutality" and "cold-bloodedness" you must have when working as a politician, and about Lykketoft's hot temper. And the programme is introduced with the text "Welcome to the double regicide," which refers to Lykketoft being the head of two chairman battles in 1992 and now again in 2002. At the same time we hear this lonely powerless flute melody in a declining movement, which generates a counterbalance to the verbal level and signal from the beginning that the power of this politician is weak. As in the Beethoven example the music in this introduction has different levels of meaning. First and most obviously we hear a melody that we may recognize as "*Danmark for folket*" ("Denmark for the people"), which is an anthem of the Social Democrats and is therefore very easily connected with Lykketoft as a leader of that party. But the musical structures also communicate the more hidden level of meaning described above.

Lykketoft Finale also portrays Mogens Lykketoft, but leaves a very different impression of the man. The (probably original) music is composed by Søren Siegumfeldt and we hear five different themes, turning up a total of 12 times and filling about 20% of the programme. The most identifiable theme, which is used most frequently, is a relatively loud, slow, sad and simple melody for cello and viola in a minor key –

a melody that hesitantly tries to move upwards in triads but after three attempts gives up. This theme occurs in the recurring sequences where Lykketoft prepares his farewell speech in his apartment, when his party lost the election in 2005. The structures of the music support the main message of the film: a lonely politician, who fights for the good cause but fails (cf. the quotation from the press release above). The music promotes a feeling of authenticity via the acoustic dark string sound, but not like the symphonic music in *Fogh bag facaden*. The music is delicate and fragile and the friction between the bow and the strings makes a trembling, rough sound. In the five portraits this is the one where the music takes us closest to the private person behind the politician, and might even be a source of the feeling of sympathy for the man.

In *Evas store udfordring* it has not been possible for me to trace the origin of the music and TV2 does not have the information. The music is heard about 35 times and fills 68% of the programme, and we hear three different themes, generally following the narrative themes and segments. We follow the young Minister of Social Affairs and Gender Equality and – also important to remember – the mother of three younger children. When Eva Kjer Hansen is with her family in her home in Southern Jutland we hear a laid back electric guitar, some underlying synthesizer sounds and a dominating drum beat. This music (with more or less drum dominance) represents the most typical music in Danish TV documentaries (Have 2004). In the scenes of her working life among colleagues and journalists at Christiansborg (the Danish parliament building), the music is usually aggressive hard rock accentuating the fast-paced and rough life of a top politician. The third space connects the two others and establishes a kind of meta-level in the documentary, during interviews made in the official car between

Eva Kjer Hansen's home and Christiansborg on Election Day, the 8th of February 2005. These scenes are accompanied by single piano tones with plenty of space-effect together with deep drones, while Eva Kjer Hansen in close-up reflects upon her divided life, the demands of media visibility and why she agreed to make this programme. The diegetic sounds are toned down; light is misty and blue-tinted and promotes together with the music a space for emotional resonance and reflection about Eva Kjer Hansen's opinions. A very honest and authentic space is created – almost sacred.

In *Ballets drønning* we follow Pia Kjærsgaard, the leader of the controversial, right-wing but powerful Danish People's Party. She is accompanied by five motifs all from the track "*Überholen hat kein zweck*" from the album *Mafia* by the Danish hybrid band EPO-555. The music is heard more than 20 times and fills almost 40% of the programme. The motifs have the same character even though they are different. A mix of "real" instruments and electronic effects and synthesizers gives the music a very modern sound in addition to the ambient, dreaming, meditateness. It thereby has similarities with the "home theme" in *Evas store udfordring* and TV documentary music in general. It is characteristic that this kind of semantically open music does not generate para-musical associations but mostly communicates via the musical expressiveness and vitality affects. In this case it is a constant vibrating unrest and introverted loneliness, most of the time attached to Pia Kjærsgaard, but not in an empathetic way like the dark strings in *Lykketoft finale*. The electronic non-melodic sounds keep us at a certain distance to identifiable emotions. Like the celeste-theme's marking of Fogh's focus on time, a rising piano scale points three times to Pia Kjærsgaard's vanity, playing when she is doing her hair or

make-up in moments of “backstage” acting. In a key scene all the party leaders are together with the press in a relaxed bar after a TV election debate, but all turn their back to Pia Kjærsgaard. The diegetic sound fades out, and a musical theme consisting of two motifs occupies the auditive space. Just after Lykketoft, Fogh and Bendtsen (leader of the Conservative People's Party) turn their backs to her, a happy, jumping flute-motif is replaced by a slow violin-motif reminiscent of the cello-theme from *Lykketoft Finale*. The vitality affects communicated by slowly playing strings are able to generate a sad, melancholy mood, and in this scene they are immediately attached to the emotional state of Pia Kjærsgaard in such a way that the viewer might very easily feel a moment of pity for her.

This brief sketch shows how differently the politicians are underscored, and how that can influence the reception of the respective programmes. But music is just one aesthetic device among such other factors as light, cutting, scenography, sound effects, voice-over, camera movement, etc., that all interact in reinforcing emotions and situations, generating sympathy, identification and intimacy, ironic distance and reflection. The music's communicative role changes dynamically in the narrative flow, and the reception depends on a number of subjective factors as well: the viewer's political conviction and preconceived attitudes towards the politician, the viewer's general state of mind, the physical situation, etc.

At a general level the music adds a further dimension of vitality and thereby creates a more realistic exposition. Often the auditive vitality affects are experienced in relation to the emotional states of the politician, and as such are experienced as deeply integrated in the narrative level. But the music can also be experienced as having a more

distanced relation to the narrative, as a voice of the producer, making a comment (cf. most of the music in *Fogh bag facaden*). Finally the music can establish an auditive space of reflection and evaluation, both emotional and intellectual. That happens especially when there simultaneously is a pause at the verbal and visual level, and in transitions from one scene to another – a very common way of using music in TV documentaries (Have 2004).

Programme	Portrait	Underscore music
<i>Fogh bag facaden.</i> (Fogh Behind the Facade) Christoffer Guldbrandsen, DR 1, 22/4 2003	Heroic portrait of Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen (the Liberal Party) leading the negotiations for the enlargement of EU during three weeks in December 2002.	<i>Symphonic classical-romantic music</i> Beethoven, <i>Symphony No. 9</i> , Finale movement. Shostakovich, <i>Jazz-suite 2</i> , "Vals No. 2". Rossini, <i>Stabat Mater</i> . Tchaikovsky, "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy", <i>The Nutcracker</i> .
<i>Mogens og magten</i> (Mogens and the Power) Poul Martinsen, DR-dokumentar, 23/4 2003	A critical portrait of the leader of the Social Democrats, Mogens Lykketoft, following him during the change of party leadership in November 2002.	<i>Electronic flute and some jazzy improvisations.</i> Played and composed by Jens Krøyer over anthems of the Social Democrats.
<i>Lykketoft finale</i> Christoffer Guldbrandsen, DR 2, 22/5 2005	A sad portrait of the leader of the Social Democrats, Mogens Lykketoft during the last weeks of the election campaign, January 2005.	<i>Slow dark string music</i> Composed by Søren Siegmundfeldt. Arrangement for cello and viola.
<i>Evas store udfordring.</i> (Eva's Big Challenge) Lars Høj, TV 2 Reportage, 30/5 2005	A portrait of the young Minister for Social Affairs and for Gender Equality, Eva Kjer Hansen (the Liberal Party) showing a life divided between family and career, and following her from her ministerial appointment in August 2004 to the election in 2005.	<i>Lounge music, hard rock and dreamy piano</i> (Origin unknown).
<i>Ballets Dronning</i> (The Queen of the Ball) Helle Faber, TV 2 dok., 30/1 2006	A heroic portrait of a powerful, self-willed and vain leader of the Danish Peoples' Party, Pia Kjaersgaard. The queen that no one will dance with. Following her for three weeks during the election campaign, January 2005.	<i>Modern electronic ambient music</i> EPO-555, "Überholen hat kein zweck", from the album <i>Mafia</i> . A mix between the rhythm-boxes of the 80's and dreamy shoegazer music

Questions in a broader context

Even though the underscore music seems very harmless in the five portraits, these brief analytical observations are a part of the more general debate about the aesthetification and personalisation of politics and politicians in the media – and what consequences this may have for democracy. A debate about how far we as private citizens vote more for a private person than for his or her political ideology, and furthermore about the degree to which complex political problems are reduced to a question of personal and emotional confidence in an eloquent, well dressed and “well sounding” politician. This is something that gives rise to the worries of pessimists about the decline of the public and de-democratization. But from a more positive position you can argue that political emotionalization and aesthetification in the media have a potential for democratization in that they make politicians, political issues and processes more accessible to more citizens. And underscore music has a unique ability to promote emotional engagement, which from my point of view, is better than no engagement at all. But there are still some critical questions to be raised.

The feeling of sympathy and identification may not be very far from a feeling of confidence and trust, which is essential for representative democracy. And is it possible to disagree with a person for whom you feel empathy? When Lykketoft is making his speech in *Lykketoft finale* (a speech which has been accompanied by dark strings through the whole programme), can we as recipients avoid believing in him and thinking he is right? And when Eva Kjer Hansen in the car-sequences is surrounded by the pure space of dreamy music and blue light, does that not make her words sound more openhearted and her person appear more trustworthy – also when we hear her speak as a

politician outside the documentary? Therefore it is important to reflect upon the means by which these portraits are orchestrated, and try to analyse what is communicated, also at a non-verbal and non-visual level.

Another related question concerns the degree to which aesthetics and emotions shape our confidence and trust in politicians. If you look at the portrayals in some of these documentaries, style and feelings often count more than argument. Lykketoft could not succeed via political arguments, because he denied the importance of form. And Eva Kjer Hansen might have become a minister because as a young mother from Southern Jutland she fits into the image the Prime Minister and his government are trying to rebuild after losing the many female voters in the aftermath of *Fogh bag Facaden*, and not because of her knowledge and stances. But we still need to know more about whether and how these aesthetic and emotional factors influence voters.

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Narrative Journalism: Subjectivity, No Longer a Dirty Word

Nancy Graham Holm

It started with James Agee and John Hersey. Then came Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese and (maybe) the late Hunter S. Thompson, journalists who wanted to tell Americans the truth about themselves beyond the framework of conventional objectivity. It is called *narrative journalism*, or what some prefer to call *literary journalism* because it demands a standard and quality of writing found only in literature. Offshoots are ethnographic or feature-travel journalism, reportage that doesn't pretend to be objective but does try to be fair. Narrative journalism is popular in America and in some circles it is reaching messianic dimensions. Pulitzer prize-winning journalists passionately defend their craft and some claim it is only beginning to reach its potential. They reject the notion that narrative needs to be soft and explanatory. "Its greatest unrealized potential is to communicate the hardest news – the crucial questions of social justice. Grim subjects, destitute characters; complicated wrongs need narrative so people will read them and give half a damn."¹

Narrative journalists have a social conscience and they claim their mission is to remind us what it means to be human. Information alone, they say, does not inform. In the postmodern age, journalists must assign meaning. Participation in events and subsequent interpretation are required to break down the psychological barriers of apathy and cynicism. Numinosity – Jung's term for emotional attention and heightened psychological awareness – is necessary for understanding.

¹ Katherine Boo, Pulitzer prize winning journalist from the Washington Post, quoted in "Overview: Aboard the Narrative Train" by Bill Kirtz. Poynteronline, www.poynter.org.

A farmer closes the door on his farm for the last time. A baby dies from having an HIV-positive mother. A daughter scores the winning point in a soccer game. A gay couple is officially married. A terminally ill man chooses assisted suicide to end his life. How does it feel? What does it mean for the rest of us? "Report for meaning," is what narrative journalists say. "Reporters shouldn't fear evoking emotion. Show, don't tell is a good rule, but sometimes you have to tell the reader what it means. Detail makes stories come alive. Details are always action, making readers either laugh or cry. Without them, it's just another love story or lost dog story. Reporting is truth, not superficiality, so the reader realizes this story is not like all other lost dog or love stories."² Narrative print journalism tells a story in this fashion.

What about the film and video documentary? Practitioners and media analysts will probably disagree on the definition of a documentary film since the concept is always reinventing itself to serve the purposes of its creative producers. Purists claim a documentary must challenge the smug assumptions of the existing establishment and disrupt the status quo. Other documentary makers without a political agenda refuse to apologize for their preoccupation with baboons, orchids or bushmen of the Kalahari Desert. Apparently, documentaries come in all sizes and shapes. It was the application of documentary making to television news journalism, however, that introduced a concept loaded with rules. *Objectivity was assumed. Objectivity was demanded.* This severely separated the traditional point-of-view documentary from the journalistic one.

How does print narrative journalism relate to film/television documentary journalism? The answer: very carefully. It is a growing movement but not without its critics.

² Jon Franklin, a two-time Pulitzer winning journalist. *Ibid.*

To start with, picture-sound journalism is a natural fit for the narrative model. *Show me, don't tell me!* is the mantra of the TV medium. Visual proof is the aesthetic language. Indeed, it is not surprising that one of America's most celebrated documentaries falls easily into the genre of narrative journalism. Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, USA* (1976) is an icon of documentary making and doesn't pretend to be objective. Indeed, it gives subjective voice to coalminers on strike against Eastover Mining, owned by Duke Power Company. For four years, Kopple lived periodically among the miners and their families and it is clear that her sympathies lie with the miners and not their bosses. Her camera focuses on the desperate lives of people still living in shacks with no indoor plumbing, working at dangerous jobs with little security and few safety rules. The miners are determined to join the United Mine Workers and the company is determined to break the strike with scabs that are even more desperate than the men with jobs. Had CNN or the CBS made the same story, it would have required interviews from "the other side:" Duke Power Company. Putting the employer on camera, however, would hardly advance the story. The exploitation of coalminers doesn't really have a credible defense. Thus, the "other side" would be predictable and add little information except to document greed. But what about other stories that do have another side? Fast-forward to the new century and one finds several examples of this dilemma.

The elderly engineer who wanted to die

German engineer, Ernest-Karl Aschmoneit is 81 years old, in the early advanced stages of Parkinson's disease and wants to end his life. He is a member of Dignitas, a Swiss organization that provides professional "assisted suicide" through a lethal dose of sodium pentobarbital, offered in a glass to be drunk voluntarily. In 2003, Aschmoneit flies to

Zurich. He agrees to allow TV journalists to accompany him on his last journey because – as he says on camera - he wants other countries to establish assisted suicide programs and he feels his own story can be used effectively for promotion of this controversial practice. CBS arrived in Zurich with a large consortium of producers, journalists and technicians. Two other TV journalists on the story were Christian Degn and Anders Rostgaard, recent graduates of *Danmarks Journalisthøjskole*. CBS produced a traditional journalistic story, a critical examination of the issues that was broadcast on its flagship current affairs program, *60 Minutes*. Degn's and Rostgaard's treatment of the story was narrative and broadcast on TV2's *Dags Dato*. A close examination of the story's two different treatments reveals the positive and negative characteristics of narrative journalism.

Top down or eye level?

Traditional objective TV journalism is *top down* or told from outside looking in. The narrative model is *eye level* or told from inside looking out. In top down stories, the journalist takes responsibility for the story and uses the synchronized interviews in short sound bites only for documentation. Each statement either *supports* the asserted claim of the journalist or adds *color* to it by giving an opinion. In Anglo-American broadcasting organizations, the journalist is frequently on camera: walking and talking; serving as a cut-away picture for an interview edit; asking an on-camera question; or talking directly into the lens in a stand-up (called *piece-to-camera* in Canada or Great Britain). In eye level stories, the issues are told *through people* - not the journalist - using interviews from a case study to define the issues. The journalist is seldom if ever seen but is often heard in a voice-over used to link segments. Top down stories are relatively objective. Eye level stories

are relatively subjective. Top down stories are relatively intellectual. Eye level stories are relatively emotional.

Yes, the narrative model is information-poor, but identification is more important

The mantra of TV journalism is that stories must have three elements: *information, identification and fascination*. Traditional top down journalism is obsessed with *information*, believing that it is the very heart of the organism, the animal called journalism. Narrative, eye level journalism subordinates *information* to *identification*. *Too much information* narrative journalists claim, turns people off. In an era that is the so-called Information Age, getting and keeping people's attention is difficult. Narrative journalists believe that once the heart is engaged, however, more information will be sought. *Identification* is the solution to apathy and comes naturally if stories are told in ways that reinforce our mutual humanity. Ernest-Karl Aschmoneit's story provides us with a dramatic example. Should this 81-year-old man take his own life? Or should he suffer the advanced stages of his illness and force himself to cope with a hell-on-earth quality of life until his body finally gives out?

Predictably, CBS's version is high, very high, on the scale for *information*. The story covers all the obvious ethical issues of which there are many, begging, even screaming to be addressed. Ernest-Karl Aschmoneit is introduced early as the case study but he gets only 50% of screen time. Instead, attention quickly shifts to the founder and director of Dignitas, Ludwig A. Minelli who evaluates all candidates for assisted suicide. The journalist questions his competence and gets him to admit that he makes judgment on instinct. Minelli claims to have no doubts about what he is doing: "Ah, it is not knowing," he says. "It is feeling, and that is much better than knowing." As to

doubts, he says, "I have no bad dreams. I do not wake up with bad ideas about what I'm doing." Does that give him a sense of power? "It has nothing to do with power. It's just humanity. Helping people with pains."

Then we hear from psychiatrist Thomas Schlaepfer, a specialist in depression who is not opposed to assisted suicide but is critical of the way Dignitas operates. "If somebody flies into Zurich Airport, is brought into an interview for an hour and prescribed medication, that's totally wrong," he says. "That's ethically wrong. Legally, it might be OK in Swiss law, but ethically it's wrong." Schlaepfer says it is "totally impossible" to find out in a brief visit or two whether someone is of sound mind.

The most serious question facing Dignitas, however, concerns mentally ill people like Walter Wittwer, a schizophrenic. For 10 years, Wittwer was a member of another assisted suicide group that wouldn't allow him to take his life because he was mentally ill. Then, Wittwer joined Dignitas and three months later, he was dead. Minelli argues that mentally ill people have the same right to take their own lives as others: "You can't say and you shouldn't say that mentally ill people should not have human rights." Then, Helmut Eichenburger, a retired urologist who prescribes the overdose for Dignitas' members, says emotions matter. "A lot of people feel lonely and they say: *Well, I have nothing more. I have no relatives, I have no friends, no life. Why am I still living?* That's when I say that the dying has begun." The debate continues when psychiatrist Schlaepfer, says that suicidal tendencies are often a symptom of mental illness and can be treated. "In this office," he says, "many people said: *I'm totally depressed. I want to end my life* and weeks later this opinion was changed." Finally, we hear

from public prosecutor, Andreas Brunner who believes the law is dangerously unregulated, giving him little room to act. "These days, everyone - even you or me, we - can make assisted suicides," says Brunner, noting that nothing - not even a medical degree - is required to start an organization that helps people kill themselves. After this discussion of the ethical issues, Ernest-Karl is given the overdose of barbiturate, which he drinks behind a closed door and within an hour he is dead. We see his body in a body bag as it is removed from the clinic.

CBS's version is loaded with *information*. TV journalism students who see the *60 Minutes* version rely on the high information content to keep themselves emotionally detached. The result is a substantive discussion of medical ethics, courage, illness and cognitive decision-making. After screening Degn's and Rostgaard's version, however, the majority of students sit in stunned silence. Some literally weep and a brief break is often required before resuming class. Reactions are mixed. Emotions are high. Some students are deeply touched and impressed with the story telling. Others insist that the Danish version is not really journalism. "It's not balanced!" they claim. "It's an advocacy story!" This perception is easy to understand, since in Degn's and Rostgaard's narrative version, the *information* component is, indeed, minimal. Only the basic facts are given to establish context. Ernest-Karl Aschmoneit is the focus and the only other interview in the story is from Ludwig A. Minelli who vigorously defends his organization with animated indignation. In the Danish version, there are no critics of Minelli's role or of Digitas' procedures. There is no in-depth discussion about depression and its relationship to being of *sound mind*. Thus the Danish version is *information* poor, in spite of the fact it is two minutes longer than the CBS story.

In relation to *identification*, however, Christian Degn and Anders Rostgaard win an unofficial Emmy. We meet Ernest-Karl up close and learn a lot about him. He is not a religious man and has no belief in an afterlife. He had a good career as a mechanical engineer and a happy marriage but he is not sentimental and no longer gets inspiration from looking at old photographs. He describes his present life, how he can't sleep and how he dreads the progression of his disease. His intelligence is obvious and there is no problem understanding why he worries about the indignity of losing his mental faculties. He is a sweet man, unexpectedly charming and thoroughly engaging. He "quacks" with the ducks at the pond. He describes how he has cleaned his apartment, put out the trash and placed the key through the mail slot. He talks about the need to carry a suitcase in order to avoid suspicion from the authorities that he worries might try to stop him. In astonishingly good humor, he meets friends at Hamburg Airport to say goodbye and jokes with the ticket clerk who wishes him a good journey, totally unaware why this man is traveling to Zurich. In Degn's and Rostgaard's eye level narrative version, the viewer gets to *experience* Ernest-Karl's decision. When he drinks the pentobarbital, we have personal reactions to his decision. In fact, *identification* is so high, the viewer simply suspends critical judgment about the issues the story raises, which is precisely why narrative journalism is controversial. Did 81 year-old Ernest-Karl Aschmoneit have the right to commit suicide? Does society have the right to prevent it? Is it humane to make people live longer than they want to? Who decides? *And which version of journalism gets us closer to the issues?*

Narrative journalism requires ethical compromises

The *case study* is the blood and breath of the narrative model. Without a strong case study, the story cannot work effectively. Ernest-Karl Aschmoneit was perfect and one can well imagine the journalists' excitement when they heard about him. "Casting the character" is what narrative journalists call it, and it requires time and luck. *New York Times* Pulitzer prize-winning journalist, Isabel Wilkerson took several months to find the "right family" to tell her story about crack cocaine addiction in a Chicago tenement neighborhood.⁸ Television production companies seldom have the luxury for such a search and this presents a serious risk. One recent experience with a TV graduation project at DJH illustrates this well. The story was about a hospice and what it is like to die in a supportive environment. The student journalists found two case studies and got permission to follow them to their death. They spent many days at the hospice but neither of the case studies "cooperated." One person's health improved and he was sent home. The second case study lingered at the edge of death until long after deadline. The story "failed" and the students didn't get the grade they had hoped for. A good portion of the examination was spent talking about the ethical compromises implicit in the choice of their story.

Getting the cooperation of the case study requires skill and patience. At a conference in Århus, Isabel Wilkerson's lengthy and detailed description of how she persuaded her chosen family to cooperate resulted in three pages of note taking. She encouraged narrative journalists to find someone in crisis but to wait until just the right moment to ask for their participation. She drew a diagram to show when the person would be most receptive. Persuasion? Or manipulation? In the

⁸ From a presentation by Wilkerson, October 10, 2003 at a conference on narrative journalism, sponsored by *Center for Journalistik og Efteruddannelse*, Århus.

final analysis, if the story can shed light in a dark corner of society that results in the improvement of lives, manipulation might be forgiven.

Surely manipulative journalists can get what they want, but what if the very best case study is someone with low intelligence? Is their permission and willingness to cooperate ethically valid? In 1998, a documentary was produced in Denmark to examine parental rights vs. the rights of a newborn child. *Er du mors lille dreng?* (or *Born to Lose* in the English sub-titled version) by Lars Høj became a showcase example of narrative, eye-level journalism. Anni gives birth to Jørn. The baby's father, Bjarne is present and in the first three minutes of the documentary, they look just like any new family. Soon it is painfully obvious, however, that Anni and Bjarne are mentally sub-standard. The documentary follows the baby's first four months and we watch Anni and Bjarne angrily interact with patient, long suffering Danish health workers who try to teach them how to nurture their little son. They cannot take proper care of their baby, however, and for the better part of an hour, the viewer watches and cringes as Jørn's development steadily deteriorates. Screening this documentary gets mixed reactions. Some viewers like it very much. Others say they feel like *voyeurs*, watching immature, unpleasant people without dignity or awareness stumble through life while threatening the well being of an infant. Watching *Er du mors lille dreng?* is not easy viewing. It is, however, far more effective in getting its message across than a traditional top-down documentary with a string of talking heads discussing incompetent parenting. The ethical question, however, haunts the consciences of ethical journalists. Does it matter that Anni's and Bjarne's inhumane and emotionally stunted behavior is put on show? Did they know what they were saying yes to when they agreed to cooperate? Does it matter?

Narrative journalism in print is not necessarily invasive. The information might be in the details but the details are described in words. A TV camera with a microphone, however, are unavoidably invasive. If the information is in the details, it means that the details of someone's life must be photographed and recorded. Does the person who is the case study case really understand what it means to allow a TV camera crew into one's life? Some case study candidates will say yes to this invasion because they love the attention. Others will ruin the project by "walking, " often at the last minute. Many narrative TV stories have been hijacked by case studies that change their minds about participation. Can we blame them?

Some broadcast journalists are not likely to adopt the narrative model. The BBC, as one example, does not use it and there is little evidence to suggest this might change. Nevertheless, its value for communication is obvious. It creates *significance* by providing a framework for authentic experience on an emotional level. In today's crush of information, the narrative model calls attention to issues that demand humane solutions. One can only hope that its use will be judicious and fair without too many ethical compromises.

Discovering the Shock of Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies*

Lance Duerfahrd

Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies* (1967) is a landmark of cinéma vérité. It documents the day to day routines within Massachusetts Correctional Institute at Bridgewater, a mental hospital for the criminally insane. The film is notorious for the controversy that surrounded its release, for the trial in which the Commonwealth of Massachusetts brought Wiseman to court in order to prevent any further exhibition of the film.¹ The verdict imprinted itself on this film like a brand: it declared the documentary obscene and exploitive and banned any further public viewing of the film.

When Wiseman was summoned to appear in court, his film was described by the judge as a "nightmare of ghoulish obscenities."² This description leads us to expect the worst: images of Bridgewater that are so explicit that they seem close, almost internal to us, like a dream. We expect a pornography of madness: the detailed rendering of the humiliation of inmates. Perhaps we expect the camera to be instigator to this spectacle, as it was at Abu Grahib.³

What is most striking about Wiseman's film however is how quiet, how *unvociferous* this movie is. True to vérité style, the film never showcases anything as above ordinary, makes no judgment calls for

¹ The complete account of the *Commonwealth v. Wiseman* trial can be found in *Documentary Dilemmas: Frederick Wiseman's Titicut Follies* (Carbondale: Southwestern Illinois University Press, 1991).

² Quoted in Stephen Dobyns, "The Titicut Follies as Comedy" in *Writers at the Movies: Twenty-Six Contemporary Authors Celebrate Twenty-Six Memorable Movies*, Jim Shepard ed., (New York: Harper Collins, 2000) 80.

³ Critics have countered the verdict by championing Wiseman as "a major work of subversive cinema and a searing indictment...of 'the system.'" Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art* (New York: Random House, 1974) 186.

the spectator. It challenges our sense of the everyday by forcing us to observe, and to wonder, what constitutes everyday life at a mental hospital for criminals. Its focus is on violence that is as daily as the newspaper, the unspectacular coercion by which the institution maintains itself. It is the incredible accomplishment of the film to incite us to take up arms against its matter-of-fact presentation and to separate the ordinary from the acceptable. In no other film (except perhaps *Nuit et Brouillard*) do we stare at images of walls so imploringly. In the absence of a voice of objection in the film (there is no narration) we want these walls, as the idiom goes, *to speak*. The film discomforts us for all that it *doesn't* do, the privacy it doesn't breach and the secret it doesn't reveal. We turn to the inanimate objects in the film in order to help formulate our own responsibility as witnesses to the events, the ritual subjection, that we see. We want somebody, something, to react because we have no stand in. The walls within the prison, in this unperturbed and sober movie, become as implacable as the screen we are watching, but in the process also become as charged and animated by phantoms.

David Denby summarizes the sparse style of Wiseman's films in remarking that they "have no music, no subtitles, no narration, or explanation of any kind, and the shooting style, apart from some unnecessary spotting of mouths and nervously tapping fingers, is mostly a level stare."⁴ Wiseman's camera rarely breaks from eye level and offers a kind of unflinching directness of vision without any intervention by dolly, tripod, or harsh tilts. Yet at the same time the camera of *Titicut Follies* does not quite "stare" either. A stare suggests an optical relation in which the object is held, contained, in focus. In the opening scene of *Follies*, we encounter on the contrary a camera that is searching and inquisitive. On stage in front of the orchestra conductor

⁴ David Denby, "Documenting America" in *The Documentary Tradition*, Lewis Jacobs ed., (New York: Norton, 1979) 477.

are eight men of Bridgewater, a mixture of patients and guards, in a tight formation wearing bowties and glittery hats, singing Strike up the Band. The group then spreads out on stage in order to make room for their pom pom display in rhythm with the music. In the process some of the performers exceed the frame. It is this exceeding of the frame, and not the first image that follows the title of the film, that marks the proper opening of the film for the viewer. The moment is reflected as a hesitation in the camera which moves right then left as it is literally outflanked by the spectacle before it. Profilmic space opens beyond the stare of Wiseman's camera. Wiseman cannot pull or zoom back far enough to accommodate the spectacle on stage, and so sets about breaking it apart. This strikes me as a moment of decision where Wiseman's film breaks off from the spectacle on stage after which his film is named. The camera now wanders and acts to precipitate, rather than satisfy, our curiosity: Wiseman zooms in on one of the figures on the left, and he is the first figure presented for our study.⁵ We watch him nervously keep his eye on what the men to the left of him on stage are doing; his eyes seem to register both the rhythm of the music, the gestures of his neighbor, and his own tick-tock pom pom movements. (The typical close up in *Titicut Follies* reveals not an object of intrinsic interest but one lacerated by the context we cannot see: the mouth of Vladimir later, petitioning for its sanity.) The whole body of the stage performer registers his environment in his effort to stay in line with the group: it seems as difficult and maddening as trying to dance by looking at one's partner's feet. This extroversion of the actor, this body repeatedly disturbed by new information, is a small preparation for what this film will be about. It shows us the actor's version of the

⁵ It is interesting that the camera commits to the leftmost fragment of the spectacle, and moves right, face by face. The camera begins in this way to read the space, to invite a reading of space, rather than preserving the spectacle, whole, as a recording.

madman's predicament. The institution of theater, the variety show, that insists on the body falling into rhythm prepares us for a study of the coercive gestures that regulate the rhythm of the inmates at Bridgewater.

As Denby notes, there is very little information to help us with our navigation through the film- no voiceover, no subtitles, no explanations to mediate our relation to what we see. We are on our own in this movie, and it is difficult to make our way through the debris. *Titicut Follies* is a wholly original film in this way. It is a difficult film in both senses of the word: because the images of torment and abuse are insupportable, and because the sense, place, or import, of what is happening is not always clear to us. Wiseman makes the process by which we make sense of the film essential to the way in which the film shocks us. This is wholly counterintuitive, since we assume shock to be shocking, self evident, and not our own work. The film refuses to let us be discomfited in a passive way: shock is not served up on a platter. Let us think of one the complaints the guards make at the time of the film's trial. Their claim is that the documentary "holds them up to ridicule, contempt and scorn in all respectable segments of our society" because inmates are presented as "indistinguishable from the guards."⁶ The camera discloses an ambiguity in this first scene, a stage performance in a mental health institution in which it is difficult to tell the guards apart from the patients. We want to understand the line drawn between the mad and the sane, between the patients and the doctors.⁷ As it is a film we are watching, we may even wish to *see* this difference.

⁶ Quoted in Anderson and Benson, *Documentary Dilemmas*, 83.

⁷ Later in the film we see one patient, Vladimir, arguing with Dr. Ross that the hospital is harming him, that the medications are making him worse, not better. When Dr. Ross in his own defense refers to the tests that Vladimir took that preceded his admittance, Vladimir utters a shockingly inarguable line: "What do those tests have to do with my sanity?" He also says to the doctor, "You are giving me the same story again – 'We are going to help you...' May I ask why I need this help that you are literally forcing on me?"

Yet it is never clear who belongs on which side of this line. Who are these people? It is alarming to have such confusion in the face of a power structure that seems so incontestable. By what measure, by what impression, smile, or physiognomic conclusion do we try to differentiate who is “sane” from who is not? What are we to call the subjects of this institution? Are they patients or prisoners/inmates? Are their supervisors doctors or guards? Do they inhabit rooms or cells? Just to refer to them, the name by which we designate them, relates to the way we understand their treatment. By extension, it relates to the way we treat them. We assume that a prison is a different institution from a mental clinic. Wiseman asks us to unfold, then dismiss, this assumption each time we try to designate the subjects of Bridgewater. Wiseman does not assist our question about how each individual fits into the power hierarchy of the institution. He never shows us the audience to the performance, the audience to these ‘Titicut Follies’ within the film of the same name. He omits these images in order to make the spectators of the film restless with questions. Who is watching the variety show? Can we conclude from the strong laughter garnered by the poor jokes of the MC is a sign of the MC’s institutional, rather than comic, authority? Does the audience feel forced to laugh?

How’s that room going to be tomorrow, Jim?

The film produces a peculiar effect, shock that creeps into our awareness only by our active engagement of the film and our efforts to make sense of its world. A line from Sam Fuller’s *Shock Corridor* is appropriate here: “If you expected a demonstration of insanity, forget it.” Wiseman’s film sensitizes us to the everyday and unspectacular gestures of humiliation and discipline.

The scene with the patient known as “Jim” is particularly difficult to watch. The scene begins as Jim is led away from his cell by the

guards who are going to shave him. We strain to hear what the guards are saying to him because the acoustics of what is known as “institutional architecture” gives every word its own echo and make the statements difficult to discern. In the process of trying to listen in, however, we suddenly hear a scream, almost inaudible, from somewhere in the building. We wonder about the source of this scream: not just its point of emission but its cause, the provocation behind it. The scene with Jim turns out to be very much about listening and answering.

This scream, paradoxically loud yet close to inaudible, walled-in but somehow near to the action, arises between the guard’s question and Jim’s answer. They ask him why his room is so dirty, and Jim screams, “The god dam thing isn’t dirty, is it?” The two guards persist with this question, the question of the day. One guard asks Jim about why his room is dirty, about the condition he left it in last night, and the other guard asks him a question for which no answer is expected, “Jim, how’s that room going to be.” It is difficult to describe the torment of this rhetorical question that is asked ten to twelve times in the course of the scene. At one point during the shave the guard “How’s that room, Jim” and Jim replies, “Very clean. I keep it...” Realizing the futility of responding, Jim doesn’t complete his sentence and the guard asks, “What’d you say? Answer me, Jim”

This dialogue – if that is what it is – seems like it has gone on daily between Jim and the guard for years. The guard’s questions have the same technique, the same repetitiveness, as the barber’s movement. Amnesia thrives at the heart of its cruelty. The guard subjects Jim to an interrogation without desire for any information from him, and they inflict this interrogation with the regularity of a shave. Whether Jim trails off and says nothing or screams an answer to the questions of the guard, the guard gives the same reply: he claims deafness to Jim’s

answer. "What? I didn't hear you. How's that room?" Jim can't answer and can't not answer. It is interesting that Jim tries to make comments about the weather in the middle of all of this. Jim says it was colder last night than the night before: Jim, sleeping without clothes in a cell without furniture, should know. The banality of the topic seems like a radical attempt to establish a shared condition with the guard, a place where their language can meet. In this prison, agreeing upon something like the weather flashes up as a possible respite from humiliation. It is a topic that seems to come naturally as one sits down in the barber's chair. But the guard will have none of it and replies, "What did you say Jim?"

Their questions about his room seem to have produced the results of an actual military interrogation, as Jim bleeds from the corner of his mouth as he tried to answer and not answer during the shave. Before Jim is escorted back to his cell one of the guards says "Take a drink of water, Jim." Leaning towards the rusty institutional faucet that the guard turns on for him, Jim replies, "On the house, isn't it?" This is a shattering joke- it even makes the guards laugh, though they turn on the faucet into Jim's face as if it were a fake flower on one of their lapels. The joke reflects an understanding by the patient of those who shave him, and the institution behind the shave. It suggests that he has perhaps been paying his keepers, paying a cost, and he undercuts their "generosity." The phrase "on the house" is a remnant from the world in which Jim could pursue his own habits. The joke is made as if Jim and the others were suddenly in a bar or a hotel. It is a transcription from the civilized world, a joke made within that world by a man whose overseers do not allow him to wear clothing.

The Transfer Structure

The term “transfer” is multilayered. I’d like to underscore its meaning as it pertains to the controlled and authorized movement of a patient from one institution to another. The transfer of inmates/patients provides Wiseman with some of the longest shots in the film: Wiseman doesn’t cut from admission to the hospital to the interior of the cell. Wiseman’s camera and the guards escort the pedophile from the doctor’s office, to the room in which he takes off all his clothes, then to the cell. At the end of this march a guard asks, “Is he a transfer from King?” “Yes, he’s a transfer.”

This transfer ends with the guard closing the door of his cell and locking it. He lowers the rectangular latch to the window on the door, looks through it at the patient, then steps out of the way so that Wiseman’s camera can do the same. What is so difficult about Wiseman’s film is the proximity, the collusion, it assumes with authority. Far from being a “searing indictment” of the institution, Wiseman moves us in close, non-judgmental, proximity to it. In this moment, Wiseman’s camera gets an affidavit to see. We are given a view sanctioned, opened, and conducted by the guard. It thereby implicates the camera, and us, in the treatment of the prisoner. We think of our act of viewing as a type of treatment.

Wiseman’s film in many ways borrows the structure of the transfer as its editing principle. *Titicut Follies* is a loosely structured film. But Wiseman provides subtle recurrences, a kind of cinematic recidivism, within the film’s thicket of incidence. An example of the transfer movement occurs in the editing between the first and second scenes. At the end of the scene we see Eddie, the guard and Master of Ceremonies for the variety show, telling his “joke,” turning and leaving through the stage curtain behind him to the applause of the audience. Wiseman then cuts abruptly to the scene of men undressing for a strip search.

One gaunt man tiredly takes his t-shirt off over his head. Then, surprisingly, Eddie walks suddenly into frame, in uniform. The transition from variety show to strip search is accomplished by the MC appearing, somewhat randomly, but clearly not a “patient”, in the second scene. This transfer of Eddie underscores our shock at his new context. His appearance sobers us up. The film is structured by this principle of the transposition of figures, a kind of authorized move from one frame to the next. After his impressive monologue, the patient Borges, for example, appears suddenly in the scene during recess. The camera is panning across the yard and suddenly collides with Borges walking in the opposite direction, gesticulating wildly, emphatically. He crosses the scene in surprising silence, out of earshot. Wiseman edits sequences together so as to welcome our recognition of the figure but refuse familiarity with him. We respond to their iterative appearances by saying, “you again?” Transferring means not only bringing characters back to our attention but also leading them away from us, leading them away from our grasp that they are part of a story. The characters are not transferred from one frame to the next in order to have us develop a sense of their private world or their development as possible protagonists. The film establishes a rhythm in which we witness the transfer of patients from scenes in which they hold forth in spectacle to scenes in which they discover their muted status as extra, as subjects of the institution. The scene in which a man sings Chinatown and When I Lost you and wiggles his ears in tune to the melody of a third song heard on the television is followed by Wiseman showing him walking up a drab metal staircase. His literal transference to his cell is also a move away from the moment of song: he is transferred out of the space of performance and back to something harder to grasp, his state of detention. Wiseman uses the transfer to express a kind of movement or transition that is in fact

indistinguishable from detention, stasis, and imprisonment. Transfers are not voluntary moves.

The final sense in which the term transfer is valuable to Wiseman's work is in the sense that a decal or logo is transferred from one surface to another. The title of the film is the object of such a transfer. The opening title of the film is followed immediately by the vision of that same title, *Titicut Follies*, rendered in glitter on the wall behind the performers. This transfer of the title from the show to the film itself opens all the ethical questions raised around the film: whether it is a document or a commentary, an obscene film or a film about obscenity. These questions arise in the imprint rendered of this inner title in glitter, in the space of its transfer onto film.

An Inside View of Danish Television

Rasmus Stampe Hjorth

Working as an editor for Danish TV and in that capacity taking part in the telling of stories, offers some real possibilities but involves many limitations as well. While in the past, one aimed for truth in storytelling, today there are other goals that count more, now that ratings are among the important measures of success.

The present article is a personal reflection about the way in which TV is produced today, and a consideration of some of the factors involved in determining its content.

My own work is as a freelance editor for several production companies in Copenhagen and with making programs for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), TV2, TV3, DR2 and Kanal 4.

The human factor

This is the first challenge one encounters when telling stories. It is a matter of getting participants to act naturally before the camera and then making choices during editing.

The expression "cut to the bone" is often used in this connection and in principal means choosing the emphasis for the story. We choose what will be said and how.

A pause or hesitation is often cut out in order to make the statement clear and precise; the viewer must never be in doubt as to what is meant. In this way, the editor makes choices that affect the viewer's understanding of what is said in a program. This streamlining or tightening up can be misleading since we as viewers interpret move-

ments, hesitations, *er's* and signs of uncertainty and when these things are removed, the nature of the statement is no longer the same.

Often words are removed in order to make a sentence even clearer and in some types of programs, the tightening up is so extreme that the original meaning is entirely altered. For example in a Danish reality-TV program, "I have heard that there are some people who don't like Camilla" was changed to "I don't like Camilla." Changes of this kind, which tighten up and simplify statements, are not at all uncommon.

Entertainment value

TV today must be entertaining and this is why live TV is something of a rarity, and programs that are meant to seem like live TV are often edited versions.

One of the reasons for which stories are tightened up is that we have to rush along out of fear that viewers will zap to another channel and the ratings will fall. Engaging the viewer in a feeling or state of mind and letting images come to life, is given a low priority since these are the things considered most likely to lose viewers.

This also means that when a program has to be shortened, it is usually the pauses that are cut out and some programs end up being tightened to such a degree that viewers no longer care to watch. The density of information becomes too great and the viewer can no longer keep the story in focus.

Retelling

Certain TV stations have at any given moment as many new viewers as old ones and that is why the intensity must not decline. This means that summaries and retellings are often used for the sake of viewers who have just tuned in.

Flashbacks and flash forwards are used to remind the viewer of what is going on and what has already occurred and all the best scenes and surprises are placed in the intro in the hope of holding on the audience.

These retellings often have the opposite effect, since we register what we have seen the first time and consider it unnecessary to see things again. At the same time, about 20% or 25% of the program is replaced by intro, teaser, flashbacks, etc. In this way, good material is cut out of the program because of the repetitions and while the precut version could tell its own story, it now becomes necessary to make room for breakers, bumpers and especially speaks since all these things save time and remind us what everything is all about.

About two years ago, this was a tendency people tried to reverse, and TV2 organized a seminar at which the form of their productions was discussed. As a result, the intros or teasers were removed from programs, but just a few months later they were back again. The production supervisors didn't think the stories worked without them.

Bottom line

When a program is made, a production supervisor is assigned to it by the TV station. This means there is an extra filter involved in tightening up the story. The supervisor drops in a couple of times during the production process and without any particular familiarity with the material, he imposes a particular style and certain guidelines on the program.

The production supervisor has a lot of power, and that power is exercised to a great degree without any regard for the stories since what ultimately counts the most is economy and whether one more production is made for the given channel. This power is out of all pro-

portion and individual production supervisors actually decide who will survive and who will not.

So right from the start, form and framework are based on the station's attitude as expressed in such forms as: "we would like a program about homes that will also appeal to a male audience." They are also very aware of where – in what slots – the various programs will be placed, as well as trailers, to ensure the highest possible ratings. For this reason, there are trailers cut for men and placed just after football games while more emotionally charged trailers are placed, for example, after a household program for women.

Since the form of any given program is set by the production supervisor, it is up to the production company to make the best program it can within that framework and the financial possibilities. An agreement is made as to exactly how many days are to be used for the shoot, for editing, etc., and the best program possible is produced on that basis.

New TV channels are constantly established but the problem is that the amount of money available for the programs remains the same.

The competition between rival production companies also means that work is done by shifts around the clock in order to get productions over with as quickly as possible. This is also why the shoots are carefully planned and the producer has surprises up his sleeve in order to induce some opposition. In other words, opposition is manufactured, because there is often neither time nor money to wait for it to happen. A production's workflow where everything is staged results in an attractive program, but often one lacking any edge and credibility.

It often happens however that the desired opposition is not achieved and I have seen some awful examples where an attempt was made to produce the desired story through the manipulate editing of footage. Staging is one thing and using speaks and cutting to produce a

given story is quite another. Speaks in particular are one of the most frequently used methods for manufacturing a story and it is not unusual to find in a 44 minute program around 100 speaks. So one can imagine how little is left of the actual story.

Everything is analyzed and the ratings monitored, in relation to what is shown on the other channels, and a program's success is always measured in terms of ratings. Was the program any good? We'll have to wait until Tuesday to find out when the ratings are in.

Whether it is a need for systems or for measurable facts, I just don't know, but prime-time television is determined by ratings and difficult economic conditions as well as by the fear of failure. This is why the above-mentioned techniques were developed, to maximize the chances of success. It is also why people don't take chances by deviating from the norms.

Both TV2 and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation are currently under a great deal of economic pressure and this can be seen in the degree to which rebroadcasts have become commonplace on these channels. Production companies are hungry for contracts and originality is not the order of the day but rather: "what would you like us to make?" One might hope that economic conditions could result in a willingness to take chances and broadcast some of the more unconventional programs in prime-time. That could give some fresh inspiration to a branch that is bogged down in life-style programs and Friday night entertainment.

On Kieslowski's *Urzad/The Office*

Richard Raskin



Direction and screenplay
Cinematography
Editing
Sound
Production manager
Production company
Academic advisors

Krzysztof Kieslowski
Lechoslaw Trzesowski
Janina Grosicka
Marta Stankiewicz
Tadeusz Lubczynski
Lodz Film School, Poland - PWSTiF
Jerzy Bossak, Kazimierz Karabasz,
Kurt Weber

Other data

b/w, 35 mm, 5 min. 31 sec., 1966

Availability

Urzad is included as bonus material on the Artificial Eye DVD of *No End*.

Synopsis¹

A very interesting attempt to go beyond imposed filmic and social schemas. Shot with a hidden camera at the counter of the (state-owned) Social Security office, this satire on bureaucracy and clerical soullessness is right on target. A queue forms in front of the counter window and the clerk repeats the question: "What have you done in your lifetime?" Image and original sound have an equal dramaturgical function.

The stills from Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Urzad* appearing in this article are reproduced with the kind permission of the National Film, Television and Theatre School in Łódź (PWSFTviT). Lechoslaw Trzesowski was the cinematographer of this documentary film.

¹ This synopsis appears on a number of websites, including http://www.polishculture-nyc.org/kieslowski_documents.htm and http://www.lafilmforum.org/spring2006/5:14/5_14.html

As will soon be argued, *Urzad* could not have been shot entirely with a hidden camera.

Introduction

Urząd was Kieslowski's second film, made when he was 25 and still a student at the Łódź Film School (his first film being *The Tram*, also made in 1966 and also about five minutes long). Despite its extraordinary qualities, *Urząd* is often overlooked in discussions of Kieslowski's films. Even the director himself makes no mention of it in the interviews that were the basis for *Kieslowski on Kieslowski*, ed. Danusia Stok (London/Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993). And *Urząd* was not included in the recently issued DVD set of Kieslowski's documentaries.²

To date only two scholarly articles have, to my knowledge, been devoted to *Urząd*, and both were published in this journal: Ib Bondebjerg, "A Visual Kafka in Poland;"³ and Laurence Green, "Kieslowski's *Grey*."⁴ Both are excellent pieces, and Bondebjerg's study also includes a detailed breakdown of the film into its three main sections.

The present discussion will supplement those articles by focusing on production issues relating to the shoot, some additional thoughts on the disjunction of sound and image, several interpretive parameters, and the running time of *Urząd*.

² Vibeke Sperling, "Kieslowski som dokumentarist," *Politiken*, Aug. 20, 2006, sect. 2, p. 4.

³ p.o.v. – *A Danish Journal of Film Studies*, no. 13 (March 2002), pp. 75-83; accessible at http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_13/section_3/artc2A.html

⁴ p.o.v. – *A Danish Journal of Film Studies*, no. 13 (March 2002), pp. 85-88; accessible at http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_13/section_3/artc3A.html

The shoot

The shooting of *Urząd* was carried out on the basis of a scenario Kieslowski had written, as indicated in the final credits. And this would be consistent with a statement he made in connection with *Hospital* (1976), and which presumably applies to *Urząd* as well:

In those days we had to write scripts for documentary films – quite rightly so. You never know what's going to happen in a film but thanks to the fact that we were forced to write a script, we were compelled to put our thoughts into some sort of order.⁵

The boundaries between documentary and fiction are not as sharp as was once believed, and even documentaries which strive to be utterly faithful to the subjects they present generally involve some degree of staging rather than simply recording what is there.

In an illuminating discussion of *First Love* (1974), Kieslowski explained to what degree manipulation, prompting and the preparation of camera set-ups and lighting for specific shots were all necessary for the production of this documentary. For example, concerning the young couple in *First Love*, Kieslowski stated:

I wanted them to read a book called something like *Young Mother* or *The Developing Foetus*. So I bought them the book and then waited for them to read and discuss it. These situations were clearly manipulated (*Kieslowski on Kieslowski*, p. 64).

On the other hand, he also pointed out:

...I had to manipulate the couple into situations *in which they'd find themselves anyway* [...]. I don't think I ever put them in a situation in which they wouldn't have found themselves *if the camera hadn't been there* (p. 64, emphasis added).

In *Urząd*, the camera had to be visibly positioned in advance for shots of a clerk sharpening a pencil or inserting the plug of her electric kettle into a wall-socket, and then brewing and drinking tea. No

⁵ "The Unique Role of Documentaries," *Kieslowski on Kieslowski* (op. cit.), p. 69.

hidden camera was used for these and other bits of action that had to be carefully arranged for filming, and carried out with the knowledge and consent of a cooperative office staff. But though agreed upon in advance with the director, these are presumably things the clerks would have done anyway, even if the camera were not filming them, though the clerks were not necessarily aware of the purpose these shots would serve in the documentary: to show them concerning themselves with their own practical needs while their clients are put on hold. When the tea is sipped, the clients have been told "Please wait" and are then allowed to stand around in silence for a substantial amount of screen time (over thirty seconds), corresponding to considerably more story time.



The pencil and tea shots described above were not the only ones made with the camera in full view. While the clients are waiting for the clerks to finish their tea, one elderly man looks right into the lens, and as Laurence Green has pointed out, "Up until this point, a viewer could easily assume that *Urząd* was almost entirely shot with a hidden camera" (op. cit., p. 86). So the claim in the synopsis quoted at the start of this article, that *Urząd* was shot with a hidden camera, should be taken with a grain of salt.

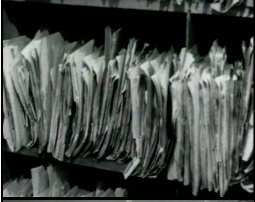
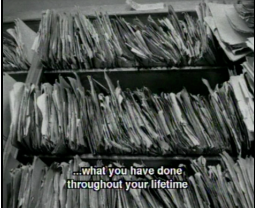
While some of the action was necessarily arranged, the recorded voices heard in the film were undoubtedly authentic in the fullest sense of that term. On the other hand, Kieslowski certainly knew in advance what kinds of exchanges he was looking for and there is no way for us to know whether those selected for inclusion in the film were the only kind recorded during the shoot.

The disjunction of sound and image

One of the striking features of *Urzad* is that few spoken lines are accompanied by synchronous images of the person speaking or the person listening.

Nowhere in the film is this more evident than in the final sequence, filling approximately the last minute of the film, and which might be represented as follows:

IMAGE	VOICE OVER
	<p>WOMAN CLIENT</p> <p>Please. I've just left the hospital. When will I get the pension?</p>
	<p>WOMAN CLIENT</p> <p>I'm without means.</p> <p>CLERK</p> <p>You can apply now.</p>
	<p>CLERK</p> <p>Complete the form. State what you have done...</p>
	<p>CLERK (cont.)</p> <p>...in your lifetime. Give all the dates and state where you worked.</p>
	<p>WOMAN CLIENT</p> <p>I have no documents.</p>
	<p>CLERK</p> <p>Give all the dates and state where you worked.</p>

	<p>CLERK</p> <p>All questions must be answered 'yes' or 'no'. State what you have done...</p>
	<p>CLERK</p> <p>...throughout your lifetime.</p>
	<p>CLERK</p> <p>State what you have done throughout your lifetime.</p>
	<p>CLERK</p> <p>...throughout your lifetime.</p>
 	<p>CLERK</p> <p>...what you have done throughout your lifetime.</p>
	<p>CLERK</p> <p>...throughout your lifetime.</p>

Of these thirteen shots, seen for the most part while we hear the female clerk instructing a series of clients as to how to fill out their pension applications, four of the shots show clients apparently waiting their turn at the window separating them from the clerk, while the other nine images are of countless case folders gathering dust on storeroom

shelves. The repeated juxtaposition of the order to “state what you have done throughout your lifetime” with the dreary images showing where those applications will end up, enables Kieslowski to make the point that the system portrayed in his film reduces peoples’ lives to painstaking exercises in futility.

Kieslowski’s choice to disjoin visual and auditory elements from one another as they were in their original relationship, might be seen in several different perspectives, one of which has not been previously described and which involves a positioning the viewer in two different spaces simultaneously – for example, both in the archive room (visually) and at the counter window (auditively), thereby enriching the viewer’s experience by making it multi-layered. It also gives the viewer an opportunity to make his or her own connections between what is said and what is seen, as a step toward constructing a meaning for the film as a whole. In this way, the film is unusually rich in subtext, due not only to the resonances of the individual spoken and visual elements in themselves but also to the disjunctive relationship between those elements. Further contributing to this richness of subtext is the absence of any guiding commentary addressed to the viewer and telling him or her how to understand what is going on.

Some interpretive parameters

Kieslowski himself once proposed what may be a rather narrowly literal understanding of *Urząd* when he stated in an otherwise ambitious tone:

...perhaps we were the first post-war generation [...] who tried to describe the world as it is. We show only micro-worlds. The titles suggest this: *The School, The Factory, The Hospital or The Office*. If these mini-observations were pieced together, they would describe life in Poland.⁶

⁶ Krzysztof Wierzbicki’s film, *I’m So-So* (1995), cited by Marek Haltof in *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski. Variations on Destiny and Chance* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), p. 5.

This seems to suggest that *Urząd* represents, not Polish society as a whole, but only one of its constituent “micro-worlds,” and that solely in their aggregate do the films mentioned describe Polish life at the time.

An interpretation I would consider too broad in another respect is Joseph G. Kickasola’s characterization of “the shelves jammed with documents and files” as “a remarkable synecdoche of bureaucratic chaos.”⁷ This is certainly true but those shelves and files may also be a synecdoche for something that is far more politically specific.

Other commentators have suggested interpretations that are both comprehensive and specific, viewing the office in which people are methodically worn down and maintained in a state of powerlessness and intimidation, as a representation of the Polish social system as a whole in 1966. For Ib Bondebjerg for example, the film expresses “the total alienation of people in this society” (op. cit., p. 77) and *Urząd* is in and of itself a devastating critique of an entire political system:

On the surface, this is just a report on and observation of Polish everyday life in the 60s, but in reality it is a death sentence for and burial of a society in which systems and procedures are superior to humans (p. 80).

Another factor that might be taken into account when considering the full scope of this little film is the generational difference between client and clerk. Most of the clients are naturally in their sixties or older and their aging and at times almost caricatural faces have a quality that apparently fascinated Kieslowski, who stated in another context:

I loved taking photographs. And all the time the subjects were old people, contorted people staring out into the distance, dreaming or thinking of how it could have been, yet reconciled to how things were.⁸

⁷ *The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski. The Liminal Image* (New York & London: Continuum, 2004), p. 95.

⁸ *Kieslowski on Kieslowski* (op. cit.), p. 45.

There are two female clerks in the office: one with lighter, curly hair, and wearing glasses and a short-sleeved blouse – she is seen only in profile or from behind; the other with straight dark hair, no glasses and wearing a long-sleeved sweater – seen in several frontal shots. At least judging from the images we have of them, both clerks are considerably younger than their clients.

What we have then is a power relationship in which older people, who have lived through two world wars, suffered hardships and deprivations of various kinds, and are presently in need, unsure of themselves and vulnerable, are ordered about by younger clerks who appear to be quite comfortable in their roles. The generational difference makes the condescending treatment of the clients appear even more heartless and lacking in respect than it otherwise might.



Running time

Considering how much is told in this film about life in Poland in 1966 and the richness of the viewer's experience at every moment of *Urząd*, a running time of under six minutes is extraordinary.

Kieslowski may have learned the importance of economy in documentary storytelling from his film school mentor, Kazimierz Karabasz. For Kieslowski, Karabasz showed the way in making documentaries running ten minutes or less, and which told their stories with remarkable precision and density, in stark contrast to documentaries made during the same period (1959-1968) by established filmmakers outside

of Poland and which Kieslowski found endlessly drawn out and boring.⁹

This is indeed food for thought for those who assume *a priori* that in order to deal with a complex subject with any depth, nuance or authority, a documentary *has* to have at least the length of a feature film.

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⁹ "Pour moi la personne la plus importante à l'École était Kazimierz Karabasz. Aujourd'hui je sais que nulle part dans le monde entier on ne faisait d'aussi remarquables films documentaires, montés avec une aussi grande précision qu'en Pologne dans les années 1959-68. De bonnes prises de vues, un montage intelligent, de la densité. Les grands du documentaire à l'étranger racontaient des histoires exagérément étendues dans le temps, ennuyeuses. Ici dans des pilules de quelques minutes – une dizaine au plus – j'ai vu quelque chose de merveilleusement construit. Karabasz était comme une indication divine, un doigt qui indique la direction." (Krzysztof Kieslowski [dans:] "Filmówka") http://www.culture.pl/fr/culture/artykuly/dz_urzadz_kieslowski

Krzysztof Kieslowski (1941-1996)

Filmography

SHORT FILMS

- 1966: The Tram (Tramwaj), The Office (Urząd)
1967: Concert of Requests (Koncert życzeń)
1968: The Photograph (Zdjęcie)
1969: From the City of Lodz (Z miasta Łodzi),
1970: I Was a Soldier (Byłem żołnierzem), Factory (*Fabryka*)
1971: Before the Rally (*Przed Rajdem*)
1972: Refrain (*Refren*)
Between Wrocław and Zielona Góra (*Miedzy Wrocławiem a Zieloną Górą*),
The Principles of Safety and Hygiene in a Copper Mine (*Podstawy BHP w kopalni miedzi*)
Workers '71: nothing about us without us (*Robotnicy '71: Nic o nas bez nas*)
1973: Bricklayer (*Murarz*)
Pedestrian Subway (*Przejście podziemne*)
1974: X-Ray (*Przeswietlenie*),
First Love (*Pierwsza miłość*)
1975: Curriculum Vitae (*Zyciorys*)
1976: Hospital (*Szpital*)
Slate (*Klapy*)
1977: From a Night Porter's Point of View (*Z punktu widzenia nocnego portiera*),
I Don't Know (*Nie wiem*)
1978: Seven Women of Different Ages (*Siedem kobiet w różnym wieku*)
1980: Station (*Dworzec*)
Talking Heads (*Gadające głowy*)
1988: Seven Days a Week (*Siedem dni w tygodniu*)

FEATURE FILMS

- 1975: Personnel (*Personel*)
The Scar (*Blizna*)
1976: The Calm (*Spokój*),
1979: Camera Buff (*Amator*)
1981: Blind Chance (*Przypadek*)
Short Working Day (*Krótki dzień pracy*)
1984: No End (*Bez końca*)
1988: Decalogue (10 films, each 52 min. in length, including two cinema versions:
A Short Film about Killing
A Short Film about Love
1991: *La Double Vie de Véronique*
1993/94: *Trois couleurs:*
Bleu, Blanc, Rouge

Jon Bang Carlsen

Richard Raskin

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Best known for his radical approach to the staging of documentaries, Jon Bang Carlsen has played a prominent role on the Danish film scene since about 1980, and remains one of Denmark's most innovative documentarists, with a number of feature films behind him as well.

His documentaries often focus on the daily lives and rituals of people whom viewers would consider either ordinary or marginal. Though firmly rooted in his native Denmark, Carlsen is drawn to other cultures and landscapes, with the result that a number of his films were shot outside of Denmark – in the U.S. (*Hotel of the Stars* 1981), Germany (*Ich bin auch ein Berliner* 1990), Ireland (*It's Now or Never* 1996) and South Africa (*Addicted to Solitude* 1999 and *Portrait of God* 2001). Each of his films forcefully evokes a sense of place as an integral part of its storytelling and Carlsen often uses long takes, dwelling on faces and settings as part of a highly controlled visual style.

Carlsen's unconventional views on the staging of documentaries date from the very start of his career and were given their fullest expression in his film-essay *How to Invent Reality* (1996) in which he outlines his method and explains its underlying logic. Casting as his actors people who essentially play themselves on screen, but speak the lines he has written for them to say, Carlsen deliberately blurs the boundaries between documentary and fiction, uninhibitedly transforming the data other documentarists might prefer to record unchanged. But these transformations are not gratuitous: the lines of dialogue he writes are tailor-made to suit the people speaking them, so

that their words come across as natural and unrehearsed expressions of their own experience. And at the same time, this staging of reality is an act whereby the filmmaker becomes a part of – and illuminates – what he films. As Carlsen puts it, “My films are not the truth. They are how I sense the world. Nothing more.”

In some cases, the viewer is entirely unaware of the degree to which the action has been staged and the dialogue written by the director. This is true for example of *Before the Guests Arrive* (1986), in which a woman who runs a small seaside hotel explains how she and her one employee prepare the place for the approaching season. She speaks to the camera, and the viewer has every reason to believe that she is spontaneously expressing her own thoughts. On the other hand, with *It's Now or Never* (1996), the making of which is the basis for *How to Invent Reality*, the aging Irish bachelor who is searching for a bride seems to be unaware that he is being filmed, and for the observant viewer, rapidly changing camera positions show that the action has been carefully orchestrated and planned as a series of shots, just as if the film were a work of pure fiction.

In Jon Bang Carlsen's own words:

Whether you work with fiction or documentaries, you're telling stories because that is the only way we can approach the world: to fantasize about this mutual stage of ours as it reinvents itself in the sphere between the actual physical world and the way your soul reflects it back onto the world. For me documentaries are no more real than fiction films and fiction films no more invented than documentaries.

His most recent works depart somewhat from the staged documentaries in that his interviewees do in fact tell their own stories, for example with inmates in a South African prison describing how they imagine God (*Portrait of God* 2001). But the director is just as present here as in his earlier works, in that he tells of his own life in a voice-over, speaking in the first person:

When I was a boy I often lay for hours staring up into the summer sky for a hole into heaven or a lazy angel daydreaming on a cloud who'd forgotten old God's strict orders never to be seen by us people from down on this earth.

In middle age my search for God had taken me all the way to southern Africa, but his trail was as fleeting as the banks of mist that rolled in from the Atlantic to mist up my windowpane as I tried to create a portrait of a person, who might only be a rumour.

In one way or another in all of Jon Bang Carlsen's work, the subjective experience of the filmmaker is deliberately made an integral part of the film, and the director's own doubts and ongoing, tentative explorations are as much the subject of the documentary as are the people whose stories unfold before the camera.

Biography

Born September 28, 1950, in Vedbæk, Denmark, Jon Bang Carlsen graduated from the National Film School of Denmark in 1976.

Selected documentaries

1979 <i>A Rich Man</i>	1996 <i>How to Invent Reality</i>
1981 <i>Hotel of the Stars</i>	1999 <i>Addicted to Solitude</i>
1984 <i>The Phoenix Bird</i>	2001 <i>Portrait of God</i>
1986 <i>Before the Guests Arrive</i>	2002 <i>Zuma the Puma</i>
1990 <i>Ich bin auch ein Berliner</i>	2004 <i>Confessions of an Old Teddy</i>
1996 <i>It's Now or Never</i>	2006 <i>Blinded Angels</i>

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The Three Endings of Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937)

Richard Raskin

It is common knowledge that Columbia studio boss, Harry Cohn, was dissatisfied with the original ending of *Lost Horizon* and forced Frank Capra to reshoot the final scene in a way that the director and his screenwriter, Robert Riskin, both intensely disliked.¹

The original ending had been seen in the three-hour version of the film, tested at the disastrous Santa Barbara preview on November 22, 1936.² It apparently ended as had Robert Riskin's screenplay in which the final scene, bringing Conway (Ronald Colman) full circle, appears as follows:³

EXT. SOMEWHERE IN TIBET - NIGHT

352. CLOSE-UP

MOVING IN FRONT OF CONWAY - as he walks forward with a steady step - his head held high - his eyes sparkling - snow pelting his face.

353. LONG SHOT

Over his silhouetted back.

As he walks away from the CAMERA, and we STAY WITH HIM a long time as he approaches a hill.

¹ See for example Joseph McBride, *Frank Capra. The Catastrophe of Success* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 364. A more detailed discussion can be found in Robert Gitt's spoken commentary on the bonus material segment called "Alternate ending" on the DVD issued by Columbia Pictures in 1999.

² Capra himself described the preview in these terms: "The Santa Barbara audience sat quietly through the first ten minutes of the film. Then—it began to titter, where no titters were intended. The titters swelled into laughs, where no laughs were intended." Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 199. Elsewhere he said of the preview: "It was an absolute disaster, an unreleasable film." *Directing the Film. Film Directors on Their Art*, edited by Eric Sherman (Los Angeles: Acrobat Books, 1988), p. 265.

³ The entire screenplay is currently accessible at http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/Lost_Horizon.html

DISSOLVE TO:

ANOTHER LONG SHOT

He has now ascended to the middle of the steep hill - his gait unchanged. THE CAMERA PANS UP to the summit of the incline - and we see that beyond it the horizon is filled with a strange warm light. Conway's figure - in silhouette - disappears over the hill - bells ring - and as the music begins to swell.

FADE OUT:

THE END

According to one commentator: "That was deemed too indefinite a finale for a film with such doubtful box-office prospects."⁴

The ending Harry Cohn subsequently required of Capra, and which was shot on January 12, 1937, is fortunately included in the bonus material on the *Lost Horizon* DVD. Here the snow-pelted Conway is sighted in the distance by Sondra (Jane Wyatt), his love-interest in Shangri-La, as she stands at the railed mountain pass the viewer had recently seen in the same scale when Conway bade his wordless farewell to the Valley of the Blue Moon.⁵ This second ending consists of the following shots:

1. Medium shot of Sondra standing at the railed mountain pass, with the lamasery visible in the distance behind her. Suddenly she seems to notice something.
2. Long shot of Conway making his way over a snow-covered mountain.
3. Close shot of Sondra, who joyously waves, calling out "Bob."
4. Medium shot of Conway looking up and waving back.
5. Medium shot of Sondra, as two Tibetans join her from behind, and Sondra says to them: "It is he. It's Mr. Conway. Go, tell Chang." They hurry away.

⁴ McBride, op. cit., p. 364.

⁵ "Conway hesitates at the [mountain] opening, looks back one more time. His eyes show confusion and defeat." Scene 303 in Riskin's script.

6. Close-up of Conway.
7. Close-shot of Sondra, waving and calling out: "Bob, Bob," then rushing out of frame.

These seven shots are followed by a montage sequence which includes bells ringing in a steeple, the façade of the lamasery and the words "The End." This was the ending on the prints of the film seen in major U.S. cities during the first half of March 1937.

Capra and Riskin finally prevailed on Harry Cohn, obtaining his acceptance that a new ending be cut on the basis of existing footage. This third ending, followed by the same bell montage as in the previous one, consists of four shots and is the one audiences have seen since the middle of March 1937:

1. Long shot of Conway, making his way over a wind-swept glacier.
2. Medium shot of Conway, leaning on an ice axe and looking up at something (off-screen) that has caught his eye.
3. Conway's p.o.v.: the familiar stone archway with its wooden railing and the lamasery visible in the background.
4. Close shot of Conway who visibly reacts to what he sees, finally breaking into a smile.

The three endings might be summarized schematically as follows:

chronology		distinguishing features
1	Original ending, following Riskin's screenplay and shown at Santa Barbara Preview, November 22, 1936.	A strange warm light fills the horizon beyond a snow-covered hill as Conway disappears behind its summit.
2	Ending imposed by Harry Cohn and shown at the film's opening engagements during the first half of March 1937.	Sondra, watching from the railed mountain pass, sees Conway crossing a snow-covered hill, calls out his name and waves to him; he waves back. After dispatching two tribesmen to tell Chang that Conway has returned, she again calls out his name and rushes out of frame.
3	Final ending, wanted by Capra and Riskin and used since the middle of March, 1937.	Crossing a snow-covered hill, Conway looks up and sees the railed mountain pass with the lamasery visible beyond it.

*
* *

The final scene, in its definitive version, has been interpreted in two very different ways in commentaries on the film.

One is straightforward and takes at face value the classic point-of-view figure used in the scene. This figure begins with a lead-in of Conway looking at something off-camera (Shot 2); proceeds to a shot showing what he sees – the railed mountain pass, with the lamasery visible in the distance (Shot 3); and concludes with a follow-up of Conway still in the act of looking, thereby confirming that it was through his eyes we have just been seeing (Shot 4). Commentators who understand the scene in this way take the ending to show that Conway succeeds in his quest for Shangri-La.⁶ The joyous bell montage and swelling music that then close the film would be consistent with this interpretation.

The other view is that the ending is ambiguous, as suggested for example in the spoken commentary on the Columbia DVD, in which Robert Gitt compares the definitive ending, fought for by Capra and Riskin, to the one that had been imposed by Harry Cohn:

... the ending that Capra wanted [...] is more ambiguous and much better I think because we *hope* that [Conway] got back to Shangri-La – maybe he did, maybe he didn't but we hope he did. I think it leaves it up in the air, which is very nice.

Understanding the final scene in this way would logically require that the point-of-view shot (of the mountain pass and lamasery) somehow be invalidated, as was argued by Leland Poague in the following terms:

⁶ For example, McBride wrote "The final ending [...] showed Conway looking toward Shangri-La" (ibid.). And according to Rudy Behlmer, "Conway is seen trudging through the snowy mountains until he suddenly sees the entrance to the lamasery." *America's Favorite Movies: Behind the Scenes* (New York: Unger, 1982), p. 34.

It is commonly assumed that Conway reaches Shangri-La in the film's last moments, or at least has reached a point where the entrance to the valley is in view— as indicated by an editing trope (Conway glancing off, followed by a shot of the railed archway seen earlier) commonly understood as representing a character's gaze and its object. However, when Conway experiences this vision, he is depicted as standing on a glacier [...] Even if we assume that Conway knows where he is, is near in fact to Shangri-La, however, there is no way of taking the point-of-view shot here (as it were) literally given its represented dimension [...] Any nearby glacier would be far below the archway entrance; Conway's "view" of the archway must be taken (at best) as a memory sparked by proximity. [...] the Shangri-La Conway "sees" in this last shot is, as if literally, his shadow, his projection, a memory that always walks on before him.⁷

According to Poague, it is the scale of the shot that shows that the mountain pass isn't really there. And that in turn means that Conway may or may not be anywhere near Shangri-La.

Poague's position might be challenged in a number of ways.

First, on the grounds that a more likely explanation for the scale of the shot is that the viewer had to be able to recognize the familiar landmark and could not do so (or believe that Conway could do so) if the mountain pass were a mere dot in the distance, and no glimpse were afforded of the lamasery framed by the stone archway.

Second, because scale alone – especially when the dimensions in play are ones that are familiar to the viewer – is a poor signal for indicating that something isn't truly there. Had it been Capra's intention to leave the ending open, he could have done so far more appropriately and effectively in other ways. And the scale of these shots is essentially the same as that in the Cohn-imposed ending described above. Surely no one would suggest that both Sondra and Conway are hallucinating as they wave to one another in medium shots; and if they aren't delusional, then why shouldn't the scale argument apply to that ending as well?

⁷ *Another Frank Capra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1994), pp. 151-152.

Third, if Conway hasn't found his way back to Shangri-La, then why should the lamasery bells peal joyously to triumphant music immediately after the final scene?

The conclusion of the James Hilton novel *Lost Horizon* (1933) is open, ending as it does with an unanswered question about Conway's desperate quest for Shangri-La: "Do you think he'll ever find it?"⁸ Despite occasional claims to the contrary, the ending of Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* answers that question clearly and unequivocally.

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⁸ James Hilton, *Lost Horizon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1933), p. 277. The nameless first-person narrator asks this question of Rutherford (corresponding to the Gainsford character of the film), who had been tracking Conway.

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