



The Exhibited Documentary

The Current State of Documentary within Contemporary Art

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Abstract

Given the growing number of important works over the past two decades that have used the medium of film to produce pieces that can be labeled as documentaries, this study examines recent contemporary artists' use of this approach as well as its impact on contemporary art. This study lays out the different regimes of truth through which the documentary form has evolved throughout film history, as well as their effect on the use of the approach within contemporary art during the past 15 years. In order to examine the current state of the documentary form within contemporary art, an analysis will focus on two recent works: the "Cardboard Walls" video installation by Aernout Mik (2013) and the "Crude Economy" film program by Florian Wüst (2013). Mik's work is crucial to this study because of its use of reenactment and the documentary strategy, both of which have become increasingly popular among artists since the advent of the new documentary movement in the early 1990's. By associating this particular work to Jacques Rancière's concept of the emancipated spectator, it is possible to observe the relation to images that the documentary offers to its viewer and its possibilities to be an alternative to other media sources by combining individual and collective memory. The second case study introduces the film program as a new art form by a questioning of the contemporary role of the curator, as well as the influence of the documentary form in such works created by film montage. The two case studies establish the main esthetic and social characteristics of the current documentary approach by questioning its relation with history and demonstrating its potentiality to be a reflexive artistic form that can rethink and assist in the development of the position of the film medium in contemporary art.

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The Exhibited Documentary - the Current State of Documentary within Contemporary Art

Introduction

My interest in the place of the documentary form within contemporary art first took hold in 2013, during my internship at Impakt¹ in Utrecht. Over a period of six months, I helped to work on and expand the different film programs of the organization's festival, and I had the opportunity to tackle the abundance of film and video works adopting a documentary approach. During my internship, I had access to archival and new material that enabled me to observe the popularity of the documentary form in the arts sphere over the past two decades. Today, this approach is playing an important role, especially in contemporary art, and there is an unmistakable need to describe and discuss the current progress of the documentary form.

Nevertheless, given the currency of this subject, it may appear difficult, or even impossible, to seize the entire scope of this field in its full diversity and complexity. The goal of this study is not, however, to enumerate the different uses made of the documentary genre in contemporary art at present. Instead, this research focuses on a few different practices that offer new aesthetic and social possibilities to the documentary form within contemporary art. This study seeks to examine the use of the documentary form in recent artworks, which entails a reflexive approach that differs from the formal structures of the documentary in the art system.

Artists, critics and scholars have invariably questioned the nature of the documentary and some have judged it to be incompatible with art by arguing that the documentary is a "transparent reflection of the world, in which subjectivity, creativity and expression [are] necessarily suppressed" (Stallabrass, 2013, 13). Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests that "the fathers of documentary initially insisted that documentary is not News, but Art (a 'new and vital art form', as Grierson once proclaimed): that its essence is not information (as with 'the hundreds of tweedledum "industrials" or worker-education films'); not reportage, not newsreels; but something close to 'a creative

¹ Impakt is a cultural organization that has existed since 1988 and focuses on critical and creative views on contemporary media and culture. It works closely with artists and curators through its annual festival and also through artist residencies and monthly events. It is one of the few organizations in the Netherlands that promote new artists using the film medium or new media.

treatment of actuality' (Grierson's renowned definition)" (Stallabrass, 2013, 72). In other words, and for the purpose of this study, we can consider documentary as aesthetically reflecting on the status of a document instead of only being a document. On this basis, the present study will first examine the development of the regime of truth in the film medium, as well as art history, by looking at concepts discussed by scholars such as Bill Nichols's documentary modes and André Bazin's Myth of total cinema. Furthermore, by establishing a relation between the documentary form and that of artistic avant-garde works, this study will determine how the documentary form has developed inside contemporary art. More specifically, this research will pay particular attention to the tendency of the documentary turn that has operated in contemporary art for the past two decades and has been fundamental to the current state of the documentary. In order to do so, this study will be basing its research on the writings of Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind as well as those of Clement Greenberg, all of whom have researched and published on the subject extensively.

The research will then focus on two case studies that are representative of certain documentary approaches and strategies currently used within contemporary artworks that incorporate the medium of film. Even though the choice of these approaches forces us not to consider certain other strategies, such as the film essay, it makes it possible for us to focus on two important developments of the documentary form through the film medium within contemporary art.

The first case study is a video installation entitled "Cardboard Walls" (2013) by Aernout Mik. This piece depicts the aftermath of the Japanese Fukushima nuclear disaster that occurred in 2011. The different dichotomies at stake in this work show the various challenges that the status of documentary form is currently facing. Indeed, through the documentary strategy of reenactment, which consists of the recreation of past events, "Cardboard Walls" interrogates the difference between the specificity of the event depicted and the universal character implied by its status as a work of art. As numerous scholars, including Nichols and Sven Lütticken, have done in their discussions of the strategy of reenactment, this research seeks to gain a better understanding of the concept itself and of the ever-increasing use of the documentary approach in contemporary art. Furthermore, Mik's video installation allows a reconsideration of the position of the viewer by combining the dichotomy of the notions of work of art and mass media. To understand what is at stake here, the study examines the position of the viewer with the concept of emancipated spectator, as developed by the philosopher Jacques Rancière.

The second case study is the film program “Crude Economy,” which Florian Wüst curated for the Impakt Festival 2013. A film program is a collage of several films around the same theme (it could be the same director, the same period, the same subject, etc.) originating in different forms, be it fictional or non-fictional, made for cinematic screening or as an advertisement. This research will examine the evolution of the status of the curator, considered as an artist and consequently given the possibility to offer, via his or her curation of a film program, a platform to develop the potential of the documentary form. “Crude Economy” provides an overview of the challenge that such practice also entails, still little known by the general public. Through this example, the research will analyze the relationship that the documentary form has with history and how this relation creates what Rancière calls a space of dissension, in which the esthetic and political aspects of the documentary form question the organization of social order.

Through those two case studies, the research brings together concepts from different fields, including film history, film theory, art history and philosophy, in order to grasp the impact of the documentary genre in contemporary art.

The Exhibited Documentary - the Current State of Documentary within Contemporary Art

Chapter I: The documentary genre within contemporary art and its origins

Introduction

“Documentary” is a complex term that has been defined in many different ways, but it is generally acknowledged that the pioneering documentary filmmaker John Grierson was the first to employ the term.² According to him, the documentary form is “a creative treatment of actuality” (1966, 147) meaning that documentary is an original approach of one’s reality. This vague notion nevertheless permeates the main debates concerning the documentary genre. An exploration of the various definitions of this term will help to grasp the role and influence of the genre within contemporary art. To this end, I will first examine the status of truth, which has accompanied the genre throughout the many evolutions of the film medium and its relationship to contemporary art. Subsequently, I will examine the place that documentary films have occupied within contemporary art by analyzing its relationship with the avant-garde. Finally, I will consider the recent evolution of the form by looking at what has been termed the “recent documentary turn.”³

The term “documentary” comes from the Latin word *documentum*, which means document or proof. Using the dictionary definition, it is generally agreed that a documentary is “based on real events, places or circumstances and usually intended primarily to record or inform.”⁴ The documentary genre has developed along with the

² In his written work, John Grierson applied the word “documentary” to a film for the first time in his criticism of Robert Flaherty’s “Moana” (1926) in the newspaper *The New York Sun* (Feb., 8th 1926) in order to acknowledge its “documentary value.”

³ Several publications have been dealing with the “documentary turn.” Among them *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (2008) edited by Okwui Enzwezor, who was the artistic director of the exhibition ‘Documenta 11’ in 2002 and who is a of the documentary turn tendency. Others example are *Documentary Now: Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film, and the Visual Arts*, edited by Frits Gierstberg (2006) and *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Document and Contemporary Art #1*, edited by Hito Steyerl (one of the prominent artist of this tendency) and Maria Lind (2008).

⁴ Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, fifth edition, New York, Oxford University Press (2002)

media of film and photography, generating a form that has as its main purpose to document reality through technically reproduced images. Theorists, critics and artists have discussed the ambitious nature of the documentary since the first time it was acknowledged at the end of the 1920s such as Walter Benjamin, Bill Nichols, Ursula Biemann, Harun Farocki, Susan Sontag, Carl Plantinga and many others.⁵ Nevertheless, the question remains today: What is, and what is not a documentary?

1. Documentary: a Regime of Truth Between Fiction and Reality

If we have a look at film history, a dichotomy is often applied within film history between the Lumière brothers and Georges Méliès,⁶ (James Monaco, 2000, 285) with each exemplifying one of the two different traditions of representation, namely the desire to document events of day-to-day life and the will to present fictional stories, respectively. This conventional dichotomy has often led to an opposition between documentary and fiction. However, the distinction between those two traditions is more complex. Carl Plantinga, contributor of “Documentary” edited by Julian Stallabrass (2013) and professor of media studies at Calvin College, defines the documentary by suggesting that “although the distinction between non-fiction film and documentary cannot bear much theoretical weight, it might be useful to think of the documentary as a subset of non-fiction films, characterized by more aesthetic, social, rhetorical and/or political ambitions than, say, a corporate or instructional film” (2003, 52). That is to say that rather than being the opposite of fiction, documentary films could be considered part of non-fiction films. Nevertheless, unlike other non-fiction films, documentary is the form whose borders with fiction are the most porous. Indeed, fiction and documentary films can have similarities in their aesthetics and narratives. For example, the Taviani brothers’ 2012 feature film “Caesar Must Die” (Cesare deve morire) brings together fiction and documentary assets by filming actual prisoners enacting William Shakespeare’s play “Julius Caesar” in their own environment, the Rebibbia prison in Italy. This film illustrates the difficulty of drawing a clear limit between fictional and documentary form. The documentary format possesses, through its nature of technical

⁵ Those authors and artists have all reflected upon the characteristics of documentary, its essence, at different periods of art and film history.

⁶ This dichotomy has been earlier described by the filmmaker René Clair in his book “Cinéma Yesterday and Today” (New York: Dover, 1972) and the film critic Siegfried Kracauer in “Theory of Film” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

reproduction, a certain deal of *mise-en-scène*. The aesthetic and narrative choices that the artist or the director makes encourage a re-assessment of the truthfulness of a work that uses a documentary approach. In the same way, some hybrid forms of documentary merge with fiction, such as the docu-fiction.

Because the debate on the nature of the documentary has shifted over time, scholars have continually had to question the truthfulness of the image and its relation to reality. These inquiries have been linked to the history of documentary in film and photography. In the 1930s, several approaches to the reality of the image were developed. At the time, which is also the period corresponding with Grierson's first use of the term "documentary," the film theorist Siegfried Kracauer presented an approach of reality within the film medium. He suggested, "Aside from the fact that the documentaries do not explore the world to the full, they differ strongly in their behavior toward physical reality. To be sure, part of them manifest sincere concern for nature in raw, carrying messages which palpably emanate from the camera work, their imaginary" (1997, 201). Kracauer's idea of the representation of reality differs from the ones of Benjamin and Brecht (discussed below) by suggesting that the film medium, and more specifically documentary films, denies the possibility to mechanically represent the world as it is because of the intervention of the imaginary through the use of the camera. Kracauer considers there to be two types of documentary: one with a cinematic approach and one indifferent to it. While the first category poses the problem of the intervention of the imaginary through aesthetics, the second one is presented as "reportage pure and simple" that weakens the emotional involvement of the viewers.

During the same period, theorist Walter Benjamin developed in his influential essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) the idea of the loss of the aura in art. According to him, the disappearance of the aura, which represents the uniqueness and authenticity of a work of art, was the result of the strong desire of contemporary masses to get closer to their lived world. He noted, "The adjustment of reality to the masses and the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception" (1936, III, 2). In other words, at the time, the interest of contemporary masses in mechanically reproduced works such as photography and film lay in a desire to experience and re-think the concept of reality. However, for Benjamin,

following the ideas of Bertolt Brecht,⁷ this fascination for a naturalistic and realist mode of representing reality should be put in perspective in order to shatter the illusion of reality. One could associate this idea with Soviet avant-garde films that utilized montage to stimulate viewers. For example, Dziga Vertov's "Man with a Movie Camera" (*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*) (1929) presents images of the making of the film: the editor preparing the cuts and the camera filming. One may see this *mise-en-abyme* as a tool to represent reality, as the lived world, while revealing the filmic apparatus to counter the illusion of the representation.

However, one might argue that montage, as developed by the Soviet avant-garde filmmakers such as Lev Kuleshov and Vsevolod Pudovkin, also helps to create a cinematic illusion. This idea was further explored by André Bazin in the 1950s when he called the use of montage as a means to achieve realism the "myth of total cinema." (1967, 23-27) According to Bazin, not only editing but also technical developments such as sound and color contribute to a more realistic representation of the physiological viewing process: "The guiding myth, then, inspiring the invention of cinema, is the accomplishment of that which dominated in a more or less fashion all techniques of the mechanical representation of reality in the nineteenth century, from photography to the phonograph, namely an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time" (2005, 21). A good example of the implementation of his thoughts can be observed in the documentary films made by the Direct Cinema movement in the 1960s. By using a hand-held camera strategy, made possible by the technological progress of this period, the filmmakers of Direct Cinema strived to capture reality as truthfully as possible: "the filmmaker was always a participant-witness and an active fabricator of meaning, a producer of cinematic discourse rather than a neutral or all-knowing reporter of the way things truly are" (Nichols, 1983, 248). Bazin goes even farther in his reflection by suggesting that "every film is a social documentary" in the sense that it documents the aspirations of the collective unconsciousness.

In the 1970s, the regime of truth of the image shifts again, a shift that one may ascribe to the development of mass media television. Susan Sontag describes this phenomenon by suggesting that "needing to have reality confirmed and experience

⁷ The German playwright Bertold Brecht framed in the 1930 the concept of the distancing effect in performing art. He developed this concept assuming that "It is the inaccurate way in which happenings between humans being are represented that restricts our pleasure in theatre. The reason: we and our forebears have a different relationship to what is being shown" John Willett, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 183.

enhanced by photographs is an aesthetics consumerism to which everyone is now addicted" (1979, 80). According to her, the images have become the commonly understood reality: "Instead of just recording reality, photographs have become the norm for the way things appear to us, thereby changing the very idea of reality, and of realism" (1979, 87). That is to say that the masses rely on mechanically recorded images in a different way than they used to. Indeed, with the arrival of television in households, access to images has become common and changed the connection with the viewer who now has daily access to the outside world by means of those mass-mediated images. She develops her reasoning by stating that "the primitive notion of the efficacy of images presumes that images possess the quality of real things, but our inclination is to attribute to real things the quality of an image" (1979, 158). In other words, the authenticity of things is determined by the masses that rely on images to define it. To raise the issue that could engender this evolution, Linda Williams has quoted Anton Kaes: "[T]he sheer mass of historical images transmitted by today's media weakens the link between public memory and personal experience." (1993, 310) Indeed, according to Kaes, the danger of the mass images is to not relate the past either to experience or history (personal or public) but to media driven images, and, in that sense, to make a selective recollection of the past.

This concern regarding the shift in the regime of the truth of images resulted in the 1990s in a renewal in the documentary form via what has been called by Williams the New Documentary.⁸ By embracing the reflexivity contained within this genre through this questioning of the truthfulness of the mechanically produced image, the documentary has evolved into a form that expands the possibilities of depiction. According to Williams, those possibilities lie in the potential self-reflexive character of the documentary film: "In the discussions surrounding the truth claims of many contemporary documentaries, attention has centered upon the self-reflexive challenge to once hallowed techniques of *vérité*. It has become an axiom of the New Documentary that films cannot reveal the truth of events, but only the ideologies and consciousness that construct competing truths—the fictional master narratives by which we make sense of events" (1993, 315). That is to say that audiences have become aware of the complex relation that images have with truth, and they challenge their claims.

This shift has not only been only happened within cinema but also changed the perception of the documentary form by artists and photographers, as well as critics. Moreover, it has expanded the different forms and strategies of the documentary genre.

⁸ Williams, Linda. "Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History and the New Documentary." *Film Quarterly*, 46, no. 3 (Spring 1993), pp. 9-21.

Nichols has described the self reflexive character of documentary as a specific documentary mode: “the self-reflexive documentary addresses the limitations of assuming that subjectivity and both of the social and textual of the positioning of the self (as filmmaker or viewer) are ultimately not problematic” (1983, 262).⁹ This strategy can be found mainly within experimental documentary such as the work of Chris Marker in “Sans Soleil” (1984), in which a female narrator, who is also a fictional character, travels back in time through her memory by reading a letter a cameraman has sent her. In that sense, one can say that self-reflexive documentaries have permitted a certain emancipation of the documentary genre regarding the boundaries between reality and fiction.

The transformation of the regime of truth in images has also influenced the use of the film medium within art. Its evolution that can be traced through the theories of Walter Benjamin, André Bazin and later Linda Williams, indicates the uninterrupted re-assessment of its establishment that have led to the unfolding of the documentary approach within contemporary art.¹⁰

2. Documentary and Contemporary Art

Documentary and Avant-Gardes

The nature of the documentary and its relation to truthfulness have made people reluctant to consider it within the scope of art. However, art has been the privileged medium for the expansion of the documentary genre. The art historian Olivier Lugon has noted “‘Documentary’ is often taken as the antonym to ‘artistic’, yet it stems primarily from the artistic field – beyond art, yet very much a part of it” (Steyerl and Lind, 2008, 35). According to him, the documentary genre has been given a self-reflexive and a political purpose within art: “to reform art and society simultaneously, to purify photographic and cinematic aesthetics, while at the same time helping to improve the world” (Steyerl and Lind, 2008, 35). Since an attempt to capture the entire evolution of the documentary genre within art would be a tedious initiative, it might be better to focus on the strategies that the documentary genre has used to meet those ambitions.

⁹ According to Nichols, six forms of documentary exist: the poetic, expository, observational, reflexive and performative modes.

¹⁰ One may define the documentary approach as an approach using of documentary images within a form that is not exclusively related to the documentary genre.

The progress of the documentary genre within art has been most noticeable during the avant-garde periods, which embodied a character of profound change both in art and society. Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind have noted in that respect that documentaries' "inclusion into the art field historically marks a moment of social and political crisis, as was the case with the early years of Soviet communism with its debates about productivism and factography, the Great Depression of the 1930s in the US and reformist documentary photography, anti-colonial movements and the birth of the film essay, the counter-hegemonial movements of the 1960s and '70s, and nouvelle vague documentary as well as conceptualist documentation" (2008, 12). Those periods of crisis during which avant-garde films have flourished have been moments in art history during which the status of documentary has been reconsidered. Because of the proximity of avant-garde and documentary, one can grasp how the documentary genre has evolved within contemporary art by observing the influence of the avant-garde movements.

According to Nichols, the avant-garde of the 1920s contributed to the establishment of documentary aesthetics: "It is this milieu, with its own formal conventions and social purpose, its own amalgam of advocates and practitioners, institutions and discourses, and its own array of assumptions and expectations on the part of audience and artists that provides both representational techniques and a social context conducive to a documentary movement" (2001, 591). In other words, by challenging the image and its regime of truth, avant-garde artists have helped to introduce the documentary genre within art. For instance, the artists of the Soviet avant-garde, such as Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein, explored, with a political purpose, the use of editing associated with documentary images. While speaking of Vertov's film "Man with a Movie Camera" (*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*) (1929), Peter Wollen stated that "it can be seen as a precursor of both cinema-vérité and of structural film, though also, evidently, a sign of its ambiguity, of its uncertainty caught between an ideology of a photographic realism and one of formal innovation and experiment" (1976, 81). Wollen presented Vertov's film as the precursor of cinema-vérité and structural film and established a link between art and documentary and at the same time exposed one the main critic that will face documentary within art, which is to say its ambiguity towards fiction.

The avant-garde of the 1960s is characterized by the emancipation of the film medium from conventions that the hegemonic mass culture established after the Second World War. Clement Greenberg, in his essay *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* (1939), presents mass consumption as one of the reasons for the advent of a new avant-garde in which ambitious art needs to be dissociated from mass culture in order to engage reflection.

The arrival of television in the household at that point in time came to symbolize the overconsumption of images, serving as entertainment but not engaging with the audience on an intellectual level. This change of the images' status has evoked criticism among artists. Some, like Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell, started to use this new audiovisual medium to produce installations and performances. A new art form appeared and came to be known as video art. This is the context in which the documentary genre began to establish itself in contemporary art. Its connection to reality gave it a socio-political dimension that artists use in order to develop ideas through their works, and it gave them an alternative to the mass media and to what they considered – at least, at the time – institutional art. Thus, the documentary underwent a new evolution within art. Deirdre Boyle, who has written several essays about American documentary video art in this period, explains its complex relationship between video artists and political activism by suggesting that “there were a few distinctions between video artists and activists, and nearly everyone made documentary tapes” (1990, 51). This period gave a fresh impetus to the use of documentary within art. Nevertheless, the medium needed to assert itself aesthetically before reemerging in the 1990s in a new development that has been dubbed “the documentary turn”.

The Documentary Turn: the Contemporary Condition of Documentary within Art

In the late 1980s, video artists embraced the ongoing technical advances and started to use digital images. This development enabled them to increase the aesthetic possibilities of self-reflexive films. Because of the growing popularity of video installations, artists started to use digital projectors to create new spatial environments in which videos could be adapted to all shapes and sizes. This advancement in technology provided art with new means of expression and led to an aesthetic renewal.¹¹

This tendency has notably been illustrated by the exhibition Documenta X, which Catherine David curated and took place in Kassel, Germany, in 1997. The influential exhibition attracted several scholars and theorists, who in the framework of the *100 days, 100 guests* program spoke about the status of art at that time. Their discussions were compiled into *Politics/Poetics*, which David edited and is, in the contemporary art

¹¹ The technologic advancement is not the only factor that has permitted an evolution of the form of the medium. The different factors that might have led to the documentary turn include the legacy of conceptual art, the rejection of post-modernism, globalization, and others.

field, widely considered to be an influential collection of thoughts on the topic. With this exhibition, David sought to raise questions about the implication of art, and more specifically art works using the documentary approach, within the social and political critique. Indeed, many artists that use video presented works in the exhibition, including Chris Marker and Harun Farocki which evinced an unmistakable consciousness of the political world in which those artists lived by adopting a documentary approach. David's approach to Documenta X permitted a re-acknowledgment of the position of the documentary in contemporary art but also contributed to opening debate on the role of the socio-politic critique within this new documentary approach adopted by video artists. This new development has also raised questions on the nature of documentary and its status within art, and consequently has raised interest among art galleries and museums, which have become the distribution platforms of the documentary turn. To understand this development within contemporary art, we need to observe the status that artists gave to the documentary approach at this time.

In his article "Moving Images of Globalization", T.J. talks about "the uncertain interval between aesthetics and political commitment" (2003, 8) in which contemporary video artists using a documentary approach are operating. In this argument, he asserts that the status of the documentary continues to be precarious, despite its consistently growing popularity. Because of the documentary genre's ambiguous relationship with contemporary art that I have previously discussed in this chapter, but also because of the social and political climate in which the world is evolving, which has important consequences for the role and status of art exhibition spaces and institutions, the place of the documentary within film and new media is still being debated. In the introduction to their book *Green Room* (2008), Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind refer to the theorist Vít Havránek, who connects the contemporary interest in the documentary in the art world to the response to the need of "total organization of the reality after 1989" in Eastern Europe. Beyond Eastern Europe, the entire world has been affected by the fall of communism and the globalization of the capitalist economic system. Further, the enhancement of the Internet over the past few decades and the growing popularity of social media networks (e.g. YouTube or Facebook), as well as their fast speed, has made individuals feel increasingly like a citizen of the world, which makes us grapple with social but also political issues from other parts of the world.

The relationship between politics and aesthetics has helped to draw the documentary into the core of contemporary art and become one of its main preoccupations. One may suggest the growing popularity of documentary among filmmakers, artists and public can be, among other factors, linked to the political and

ethical preoccupations of modern day society that have been projected within contemporary art. In that sense, the documentary turn has been one of the undeniable influences of the evolution of the use of documentary within contemporary art.

Conclusion

Since its advent, the documentary form has continuously evolved by interrogating images' regime of truth, their engagement with society and their aesthetics. For this reason, the relevance of contemporary art works such as Aernout Mik's "Cardboard Walls" (2014) video installation and Florian Wüst's "Crude Economy" (2013) film program need to be examined as new steps in the evolution of the documentary form. In the following chapters, the different ways in which these two works operate will be examined, as will their respective impacts on contemporary art and the present-day status of the documentary approach.

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Chapter II: 'Cardboard Walls' by Aernout Mik, 2013, BAK, Utrecht, the Netherlands

Introduction

During the spring of 2014, the BAK (basis voor actuele kunst) art space in the Dutch city of Utrecht presented the most recent work of the renowned local artist Aernout Mik, entitled "Cardboard Walls". This video installation considers the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster that occurred in Japan in 2011. The two-channel video, picturing refugees' post-catastrophe life in warehouses, is projected onto two film theater-size screens, surrounded by a cardboard maze that reproduces the environment portrayed in the video. As Mik's previous works, "Cardboard Walls" deals with human's behaviors and schemes, but in this case, the installation focuses on a mediatized event. By using the documentary strategy of reenactment, the work explores the current status of the documentary images and approach within a contemporary art context. Indeed, even if the work of Mik does not fall within the documentary turn strategy that we have been discussed in the previous chapter, it has gravitated around since its beginning by being part of international exhibitions which have enhance discussion about the status of documentary within contemporary art such as Documenta 11 in 2002. One may not qualified Mik as an artist that strictly uses documentary in his work. He has been using for different pieces, documentary images or strategies. The Australian artist Gary Willis has noted in his thesis "Mik's works usually manifest as multi-screen docu-fictions, which engender socio-political resonance but become impossible to locate in the context of political crises, which inspire them, despite the fact the Mik often mixes real news footage into his faux documentaries" (2007, 170). In that sense his pieces reflect a tendency, which one may suggest flows from the 'documentary turn', of contemporary

artist adopting a documentary approach in some of his work.¹² In this regard, “Cardboard Walls” may be observed as an example of the use of a documentary approach in the work of video artists and therefore reflects on the current state and influence of documentary genre within the art context. Indeed, one may consider Mik’s installation as an illustration of how contemporary video artists questioned the conventions of the documentary form. In order to do so, I will expose the several dichotomies at work in “Cardboard Walls,” including universality specificity, art and mass media, and non-fiction and fiction. First, I will examine how Mik uses the documentary approach to deal with the specificity of a peculiar event combined with the universal character of a work of art. Then, I will examine how “Cardboard Walls” uses the dichotomy of art and mass media to engage with another dichotomy, namely fiction and non-fiction. By looking closely at these different dichotomies at play in this specific work, I will seek to determine the role of the documentary genre within contemporary art at present. Indeed, as society is evolving, art evolves with it and proposes new aesthetic channels and strategies to represent the world. “Cardboard Walls” is a concrete example of the issues that the evolution of the documentary genre has produced within contemporary art in the past two decades. What are the limits of the use of the documentary approach in contemporary art, and what are the questions that it raises? In other words, how can one use “Cardboard Walls” to define the status of documentary approach in contemporary art today?

1. Universality versus Specificity

What is a reenactment?

The “Cardboard Walls” installation deals with a singular event, namely the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The concept of an event has been philosophically debated,

¹² In the previous chapter I have discussed the documentary turn as one of the tendencies that have contributed to the acknowledgment of documentary within contemporary art. Several publications have observed and discussed this tendency including *Documentary Now: Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and Visual Arts*, ed. Frits Grierstberg (Amsterdam: NAI Publishers, 2006) and *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Document and Contemporary Art #1*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin and Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Sternberg Press and Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2008).

but for the purpose of our analysis, we might look toward a narrative approach. Gerald Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology* defines an event as "a change of state manifested in discourse by a process statement in the mode of do or happen. An event can be an action or act or a happening" (2003, 1972). In the case of Fukushima, the event has historical importance because it belongs to the category of disaster. Disasters can be accidental, natural or premeditated, and they not only affect a large amount of lives directly but also lead to consequences in the future. In "Cardboard Walls," Mik deals with the aftermath of a disaster that happened less than two years prior to his creation of the piece. The temporal proximity between the installation and the event that it represents, creates a dichotomy between the singularity of the event, as well as an approach more universal of the notion of disaster, and how art can represent this event. The use of reenactment here facilitates a reflection on the different questions that the dichotomy raises, and it places the work within a time-related opposition between the specific and universal conceptions of a historical event. Indeed, the viewers's memory of media images from this specific event are much more recent and in that sense easier to reminisce, making the understanding of the images of "Cardboard Walls" more accessible. On the other hand, the issue raised in the piece relates to broader questions, such as the question of trauma and memory that I will develop later in this chapter, which can be apply to any disaster.

Mik's installation consists of a two-channel video projected onto two screens in the middle of an exhibition room. This 50-minute video recreates the living conditions of the Fukushima refugees in their camp after the disaster. The performance is delivered in part by professional Japanese actors but mainly by Fukushima refugees who reenact their own experience of the nuclear accident and its aftermath. By doing so, "Cardboard Walls" produces a reenactment of a specific set of happenings. The practice of reenactment uses both fiction and reality and has been employed in both fiction and documentary films for various reasons. In essence, this strategy consists of the recreation of a specific event from the past.¹³ Within the film medium, a reenactment can assume different forms. For instance, it can be the recreation of a specific event by actors, but it may also include, only or partly, real participants in the original event. At present, reenactments are used mainly to depict an event that was not documented on film. The use of the reenactment strategy in "Cardboard Walls" does not adopt this function. Indeed, the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster has been widely documented, televised and broadcasted in other formats by mass media. By using both

¹³ "To act or perform again; to reproduce." In *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., "Re-enactment."

actors and people who experienced the actual event, "Cardboard Walls" establishes a reflexive approach to the event's past and continuing representation. A reenactment emphasizes this reflexive dimension by becoming a means to comprehend how the truth-value of a representation is generated by the film medium. Moreover, a reenactment poses a number of questions concerning the experience of temporality. This peculiar strategy grants an experimental and sensual dimension to the concept of cinematic recreation by merging past and present within the same representation. In this sense, Bill Nichols has noted that "[reenactments] resurrect a sense of a previous moment that is now seen through a fold that incorporates the embodied perspective of the filmmaker and the emotional investment of the viewer." (2008, 172) Indeed, in "Cardboard Walls," viewers perceive the Fukushima disaster in a different manner than is the case through the image provided by the mass media, because they witness the witnesses and see the past brought into the present.

Mik uses the device of reenactment in his different works in a very specific manner. His staging refers to current events without mentioning them explicitly. He states in a filmed interview "all of my pieces relate to a kind of political social event, but they're not directly images of it. There's a short moment, a sort of flash, that brings images that you recognize but can't really place."¹⁴ By way of example, his previous work, "Communitas" (2010), was filmed in Warsaw's Palace of Culture and Science, a building that has a strong connection to the communist past of Poland, because it was conceived as a gift from Stalin to the Polish people. For this particular piece, Mik filmed actors staging an attempt to create a utopian political organization. In "Communitas", like in many of Mik's works, the artist has created a certain ambiguity between historical moments and fiction. The degree of ambiguity is even greater in "Cardboard Walls" due to the recreation of a specific historical moment. Indeed, the video installation clearly portrays the re-organized life of the Fukushima refugees within a warehouse involving genuine evacuees. In this improvised camp, groups of people and families have built their private spaces from cardboard. The life is so well organized that we can distinguish pathways between the blocks of cardboard, which have been arranged to provide the feeling of a real habitation space that even includes doors. "Cardboard Walls" replicates how the Japanese camps were shown in mass media reports.¹⁵ In that sense, the installation challenges the device of reenactment as being the recreation of a specific event through the media images or through the memory of the refugees themselves.

¹⁴ Aernout Mik - Communitas." Video file. Stedelijk Museum. Posted May 23, 2013.
<https://vimeo.com/66799042>.

¹⁵ Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 5.

Reenactment: the difficulty to translate different testimonies of a traumatic event

In order to depict this specific event, Mik recreates different emblematic moments that occurred while Fukushima's refugees occupied their temporary camps in 2011. For instance, "Cardboard Walls" presents the visit of the TEPCO (The Tokyo Electricity Power Company) staff that arrived at the camps after the nuclear disaster in order to apologize to the victims.¹⁶ During the creation of the piece, Mik faced many difficulties by having the victims of the Fukushima catastrophe relive their experience of the traumatic event: "Originally, I wanted the roles of TEPCO to be played by the general group of participants, both former evacuees and others. But it turned out in the preparation of the work that these roles were so emotionally loaded and controversial that it was wiser to prepare this differently."¹⁷ This perspective makes clear how reenactment establishes a complex relation to traumatic events. A trauma is the result of a specific event that one has not been able to process in the form of an emotional response. Victims of traumatic events relive the same experience repeatedly without being able to detach themselves from it. For instance, soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) face difficulties dissociating the present from the past, and they often believe they are still in a hostile environment. Professor Cathy Caruth reports in her book *Trauma, Exploration in Memory* that Freud, in his early writing on trauma, noted that "the possibility of integrating the lost event into a series of associative memories, as part of the cure, was seen precisely as a way to permit the event to be forgotten" (1995, vii). In other words, making the victim remember the traumatic event would help him or her overcome it. Reenactment has been used to this end in psychotherapy.¹⁸

However, this psychoanalytic dimension is absent from "Cardboard Walls." The performative aspect of the reenactment in the art context provides a testimonial dimension instead of a cure. In this regard, Nichols notes that "no one is compelled to act out the original pain and trauma. Nor does the reenactment facilitate the work of mourning the past as much as the process of reclaiming it" (2008, 80). In other words, it is impossible to accurately recreate, by means of a filmic representation, the original

¹⁶ Figures 4.3 and 6

¹⁷ Aernout Mik, e-mail message to the author, October 15th, 2014.

¹⁸ In her article "*Einmal ist keimal*" *Observations on Reenactment*, Jennifer Allen makes this connection between psychoanalysis and re-enactment: "The reenactment can also be found in psychoanalysis and its offsprings (both legitimate and illegitimate), therapies that seek to cure the patient by reliving a traumatic past under qualified supervision" (2005, 183).

pain caused by a traumatic event, and a reenactment does not enable the participants to overcome their own trauma. Rather, reenactment participates in the testimony process. In “Cardboard Walls,” reenactment serves this function of testimony by involving participants who are directly associated with the traumatic event that is depicted. It is through the memories of the participants that Mik builds the performance within the video. Contrary to his previous works, in “Cardboard Walls” he could not avoid being confronted with concrete memories due to the focus on a specific event: “For this piece it did not feel proper to exclude the real memory and experience from the reconstruction of this traumatic event. In many other works, I ‘re-enact’ an imaginary memory, relating to collective memory, compiled from an accumulation of memories, desires, fears and projections. In this case, the memory was real and concrete.”¹⁹ In this statement, Mik acknowledges the singularity of “Cardboard Walls” within his own body of work. The piece has the particularity of dealing with one specific and concrete event, and thus, it is the first time he has included individual memory in one of his works. This choice permits a questioning of the relationship between individual and collective memory and their representation by the medium of film. This questioning is emphasized by the lack of sound that characterizes Mik’s work in general and is also present in “Cardboard Walls.”

Yet, this absence of sound also presents a problem. The voice is of undeniable importance to any testimony. Consider, for instance, the following statement by Shoshana Felman, who has written about the significance of the voice in the documentary *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann (1985): “To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others: to *take responsibility* -- in speech -- for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences”(1992, 204). That is to say, for victims of a traumatic event, testimony is not only a manner in which to verbalize their experience but also to testify — for themselves and for the other victims that are not able to do so. In that sense, they verbally take responsibility for the truthfulness of their story. Therefore, the lack of direct speech in “Cardboard Walls” could be considered detrimental to Felman’s question of responsibility, because without voices it does not seem like the testimony is coming directly from the victims, which prevents a concrete verbalization of their experience. Without this verbalization, the viewer does not have the possibility of being fully aware of the trauma that was caused. Instead, the viewer merely interprets the images. The viewer of “Cardboard Walls” is deprived of direct access to the testimony of

¹⁹ Aernout Mik, e-mail message to the author, October 15th, 2014.

the Fukushima refugee, which is only accessible through speech. Furthermore, the use of the reenactment strategy in “Cardboard Walls” calls upon the relation that this medium has with testimony. Felman has noted that “Because the testimony is unique and irreplaceable, the film is an exploration of the *differences* between heterogeneous points of view, between testimonial stances which can be assimilated into, not subsumed by, one another” (1992, 207). In other words, Felman states that *Shoah* allows the union of different testimonies of the same event without creating a version of the event that is singular in meaning. Applied to “Cardboard Walls,” this reasoning implies that the testimony of the participating refugees’ cannot be the same as those of the Japanese actors in the piece because of their different emotional implication. As the refugees are reliving something that happened to them, the actors based their memory on what they have been told by different sources, including the local and international media. Through his *mise-en-scene*, Mik’s explored those different testimonies and by doing so gives his own experienced of the event. Indeed, his character of observer remind the viewers of their own memories of the event, which for most of them have been created through the images of different mass media (television, internet, radio, press...) Yet, one may question how those different testimonies and memories can be dissociated without the medium of speech.

A universal memory: history

In “Cardboard Walls,” Mik chooses to include both collective and individual memory. Without sound, there is no discernible distinction between these different types of memory. Thus, the specificity of the event itself is challenged. In other words, the conflation of those different levels of memory, emphasized by the lack of sound that prevents them from being distinct, creates a universalization of the piece. By convoking individual and collective memory, “Cardboard Walls” blurs its temporal specificity. This particular characteristic of the work reinforces a common understanding of the timeless aspect of the work of art that the art historian Erwin Panofsky has described as the absolutism of art.²⁰ This aspect is at work in “Cardboard Walls,” whose video loop prevents the viewer from establishing a concrete chronology and defining the beginning

²⁰ “Therefore an artistic phenomenon, if it is to be fully understood in its uniqueness, makes a twofold claim: on the one hand to be understood in its determination, that is, to be put within the historical context of cause and effect; and on the other hand to be understood in its absolutism, that is, to be lifted out of the historical context of cause and effect and, beyond all historical relativity, to be understood as a time- and spaceless solution of time- and spaceless problems” (Panofsky, 2008, 67).

and the end of the video. Small, soundless events are strung together without any temporal indicators.

By contrast, this atemporal aspect of art is counterbalanced by the role that art plays within history. The scholar Peter Osborne, who has written about time in artistic practice, has noted “Contemporary works are being understood and valorized as artefacts of remembrance, while remembrance is reduced to, or identified with, memory or recollection, and linked to testimony” (2013, 190). In other words, contemporary art works are connected to their time periods. According to Osborne, this phenomenon presents the issue of looking at the historical present only from an artistic point of view. By doing so, present history can only be identified by its distance or separation from the past, through art. Nonetheless, is cultural memory alone in the construction of history today? Historians and philosophers have also questioned the relationship between memory and history in this current debate.²¹ Most of them acknowledge that memory and history have many similarities. However, they agree that the two concepts are different from each other. For instance, the scholar David Lowenthal defines the differences between history and memory by observing that “history differs from memory not only in how knowledge of the past is acquired and validated, but also in how it is transmitted, preserved and altered” (1985, 212). Yet, the current importance given to the debate between history and memory originates from the re-assessment of the authority of history in the 1980s through the impulse of post-modernism. Resurrecting the idea that the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard developed in his writings about the postmodern condition, Jan Verwoert notes: “all the grand paradigms we had at our disposal to tell history as a coherent narrative have been discredited and hence rendered useless” (Caronia, 2014, 29).²² In other words, the narratives used by conventional history have been criticized and disputed over time. As a result, the concepts of cultural and collective memory have been seen as an alternative to history. The historian Alon Confino, echoing Osborne’s critique of contemporary art works becoming objects of remembrance, writes that “the concept of ‘culture’ has become for historians a compass of a sort that governs questions of interpretation, explanation and method. And the notion of ‘memory’ has taken its place now as a

²¹ The philosopher George Santayana has argued that “History is nothing but assisted and recorded memory” (1954, 394). But he is not only the only one which have discussed the relationship between memory and history. This is also the case of the historians Frances A. Yates and Wulf Kansteiner, as well as the art historian Liza Saltzman, among many others.

²² Lyotard, Jean-François, *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir*, Les Éditions de Minuit (Paris: 1979).

leading term, recently perhaps *the* leading term, in cultural history” (1997, 1386). The evolution of the role of memory in cultural history is emphasized by the urgency that characterizes our current experience of time, which results from the accelerated processing of information and events in a globalized economy. In this context, contemporary works of art develop an alternative to conventional history. This is the case of “Cardboard Walls,” in which the characters reenact their past by means of improvisation, which as the performance progresses becomes “more speculative and propositional” owing to the combination of individual and collective memories. Nevertheless, the piece does not correspond to Osborne’s description of works of art as objects of remembrance, nor to conventional history, because according to Mik, the question of memory is central to “Cardboard Walls.” Mik says he sought “to combine personal and collective memory in the piece, therefore I worked with former evacuees in combination with other local people and even some people from outside of this region. [The purpose was] to let these two levels of memory interact with each other.”²³ Hence, Mik allows the participants’ memory to merge with the collective memory of the event, which had already been circulated, mainly through the media.

Other artists working in the same medium as Mik have also raised this question of memory. Omer Fast’s “Spielberg’s List”(2003) and Pierre Huyghe’s “The Third Memory”(1999), for instance, are both two-channel video installations that analyze analogies between memory and Hollywood film storytelling. Fast interrogates the memories of Holocaust survivors after they have reenacted their own roles in Steven Spielberg’s film, “Schindler’s List”(1993). Whereas Huyghe reenacted the hold-up of a bank that occurred in 1972, with its protagonists, after it had been fictionalized in “Dog Day Afternoon” (1975), one of the most acclaimed films of director Sidney Lumet. In both art pieces, it appears that the characters’ memories have been influenced by the power of media culture and confused by the story the films have recreated by using their own. In contrast with those two works, “Cardboard Walls” does not analyze the functioning of memory or its truth-value. Rather, it creates another type of memory: a fictional one that emerges from this interaction. “Through a combination of scripted actions and collective improvisation memories, fears, hopes and desires related to the traumatic event are being touched upon, and are invited to evolve to another level. [...] Besides the attempts of the participants to reconstruct the scenes of their memories (either parts of their personal or collective memory), they also start to create scenes with the TEPCO people which they could have imagined or wished to have taken place”,

²³ Aernout Mik, e-mail message to the artist, October 15th, 2014

states the description of the work provided by the gallery that represents and distributes Mik's work.²⁴ "Cardboard Walls" embraces another regime of truth that allows fiction to intervene in memory and blur the boundaries between individual and collective memory. Mik does not confront the participants with their own memories but through improvisation enables them to go beyond the memories and construct their own history. For example, in one of the scenes in "Cardboard Walls," a child plays with dolls that are wearing TEPCO uniforms.²⁵ While she is trying to make them mimic the team by changing the dolls' positions, one of the TEPCO members appears and helps her. Because of its metaphoric form, one may presume that the episode represented here is not the reenactment of an actual event. Indeed, it is very doubtful that one of the TEPCO team members helped a child refugee to play with dolls dressed like him. Moreover, as this event has not been documented and broadcasted, one cannot identify it as part of collective memory. It cannot be presented as part of an individual memory either, as the lack of direct testimony prevents it from being established as such. "Cardboard Walls" does not intend to elicit in the viewer an impression of historical accuracy. The alternative history that this work creates by engaging with memory permits a reconsideration of the role of collective memory and how the mass media represent it. The main issue that Mik's installation raises is how contemporary art might reflect on the complexity of memory in the age of mass media.

2. Art Versus Media

Mass media and their importance in our current society undeniably influence the construction of modern history. By using the representational strategy of reenactment that merges factual and fictional information, artists have tried to counter the hegemony of the images offered by media outlets. Jacques Rancière has noted that "the fiction of the aesthetic age defined models for connecting the presentation of facts and forms of intelligibility that blurred the border between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction. Moreover, historians and analysts of social reality adopted these models. Writing history and writing stories [fall] under the same regime of truth" (2009, 38-9). In other words, it is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in an aesthetic and a narrative sense, because they use the same form of narrativity. Even if fact and fiction

²⁴ Figure 2.

²⁵ Figure 4.4

have their own separate characteristics, each of them can utilize the other's strategies in some contexts. For instance, reenactment is commonly used in documentary films, but it can also be used in a criminal investigation in order to reconstruct the facts, or by the mass media to recreate an event that was not filmed or photographed. In "Cardboard Walls," the contrast between fact and fiction is difficult to discern, partly because of the lack of sound and the timeless feeling created as a result. However, two different types of narrative emerge within the video: One has a lyrical form that is commonly associated with works of art (i.e. a form closer to fiction), while the other is about the presentation of specific moments that relate to how events are broadcasted in the media (i.e. journalism as 'just the facts and nothing but the facts').

Floating images: the poetic reenactment

Mary Ann Doane has noted that televised mass media "has been conceptualized as the annihilation of memory, and consequently of history, in its continual stress upon the 'nowness' of its own discourse (Landy, 2001, 274). In other words, as mass media focuses predominantly on the actions happening in the present, neither memory nor history is taken into consideration. The narrativity of mass media is focused on the action, while "Cardboard Walls" seeks to distance itself from the event and explore the ways in which memory interacts with this event. The improvisation that Mik uses helps to create a contrast with the images that we have seen through the mass media. "Television's time is a time which is, in effect, wholly determined" (Doane, 2005, 262), which is why improvisation does not apply to mass media coverage. But how does "Cardboard Walls" differentiate itself from the representation of the same event by the mass media? And what is the specific nature of the aesthetic narrative in "Cardboard Walls"?

During most of the video, the narrative space (the warehouse) is recorded from above as the camera hovers over the scene. Mik used crane shots to follow the participants. He also moved the camera to obtain different shots, from high angles to close-ups, and thus created fluidity in the movement of the camera. The camera seemingly follows its own course without stopping or following a specific person. This movement of the camera is very slow and creates a lyrical effect by giving the image an almost dreamlike appearance by moving the camera very slowly, which sometimes resulted in the movement of the camera being almost imperceptible. By using this technic, the diegetic time, the time as the viewer perceives it, seems slower than the time in the real world, the actual time. This aspect can be confusing for the viewer, who

has the impression that some takes are longer than others, even if it is not the case. By using this technique, the viewer perceives the camera as inhabiting a space or being in a position that is external to the scene. The camera acts as an external observer. The space becomes an important entity in which the participants are performing their everyday life without being disturbed by an outside force. In addition, the loop that the two-channel video performs emphasizes the ambiguous character of the video's temporality and the oneiric character of the piece by making it timeless and beyond sensory reality. In a sense, this approach induces a loss of a perception of the specificity of the event as concrete and real, to renew it in a more universal perception, a timeless one. Doane has suggested that "The crisis compresses time and makes its limitations acutely felt. [...] The catastrophe would from this perspective be the most critical of crises for its timing is that of the instantaneous, the moment, the punctual" (Landy, 2001, 270). The catastrophe is thus a unique moment in time and is represented as such by the media. By choosing to extend time in "Cardboard Walls," Mik takes a stance contrary to that of the mass media.

Furthermore, the aesthetics of "Cardboard Walls" and the way in which it explores space and time serve to distance the viewer from the images of the event he or she has been exposed to by the mass media. The lack of sound emphasizes this effect by making the viewer focus only on the image and its aesthetics. Hence, the editing creates a rhythm within the images that helps to overcome the absence of sound and interpret what is given to see. Nevertheless, the ordinary actions in those scenes, such as reading, playing, sleeping, need to be counterbalanced by other images borrowed from the media coverage of the event in the collective memory of the viewer and help him or her identify the reenactment.

Emblematic moments: the media reenactment

The performance in "Cardboard Walls" is punctuated by different emblematic moments that happened while the Fukushima refugees occupied those temporary camps. These are actual moments that the mass media broadcasted and recorded. The scenes are filmed in a very specific manner: The camera is mainly fixed, at eye level, and serves as an observer. The scenes create a narrative climax, distinguishing themselves from the poetic approach of the other sequences by integrating action into the reenactment. During those moments, the shots follow each other more quickly to establish the sensation of an emergency. Even if those emblematic moments are connected to a specific moment and event, the work also fictionalizes them. For

instance, the participants recreate, through artistic representation, the tsunami that led to the Fukushima catastrophe. They create the impression of a wave movement by knocking over the cardboard houses one after the other. Because of its chronological incorrectness, some may find it disconcerting that Mik decided to include a visual metaphor for the tsunami. Indeed, this event is not part of the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster; on the contrary, it is the cause. The visual metaphor can be considered an anachronism, and the representation of such an emblematic event brings into question the representation that has already been made of this event. "Cardboard Walls," which does not use any actual archival images, has a documentary approach that converts facts into fiction.

The approach that Mik adopts to deal with a specific event drifts from the specificity of the event by relating more on memory than fact. To understand the detachment that "Cardboard Walls" images have from the specificity of the event, one may observe another video work made on the same matter, and using also using a documentary approach. The Otolith Group, an artist collective using mainly video, have also chosen to explore the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster one year after it had taken place. Their work is entitled "The Radiant" and was presented at Documenta 13 in 2012. The piece is an hour-long film essay edited from different types of media footage, such as corporate films, archives and filmed interviews. Consequently, its narrative and aesthetic approach is very different from that of Mik's piece. In contrast to "Cardboard Walls," the images in "The Radiant" call upon (and react to) a collective memory created by the media. What is in question here is a broader memory associated with a cultural aspect and not an individual one. One of the scenes in "The Radiant" relates to a scene in "Cardboard Walls," as it shows Fukushima refugees protesting and confronting the director of TEPCO by asking him to come to Fukushima. The confrontation is completely different than in the one in "Cardboard Walls." The leader of the refugees protesting makes himself heard through a megaphone and multiple interpellations to the director. The scene (from 00'46"01 to 00'47"45) is filmed with a handheld camera from the refugees' standpoint and, because those images have probably been broadcasted before, represents the point of view that will stay on as a collective memory. In "The Radiant", the Otolith Group chooses a strong point of view to confront viewers with images they already know. By contrast, Mik chose reenactment, a very different approach from that of collage, to explore the interaction of collective and individual memory. The other difference between "The Radiant" and "Cardboard Walls" is that Mik's video is part of an installation that draws the viewer into an exploration of collective memory. The approaches of the two works are drastically different, yet, both are using documentary

strategies. This implies the importance of documentary within contemporary art and its acknowledgment as a genre permitting art to deal with specific event as universal ones, such as the Fukushima disaster with extensive and universal consequences.

Mirrored reenactment: spatial mise-en-abyme

The artist uses a mirroring effect to stage the video in the exhibition space: Around these two screens on which the video work is projected, pieces of cardboard have been hung from the ceiling and form a maze. Inside the cardboard maze, chairs have been placed at random for the visitors. The cardboard has been placed in such a way that the screens are at eye level for those visitors who are seated. The installation reproduces the spatial structure of the video within its space and creates a *mise en abyme* of the strategy used in the video. By using the strategy of reenactment, Mik simultaneously creates another type of reenactment, related not to any performance but to the space itself. This strategy makes it possible not only to maintain the responsiveness of the spectators but also to reflect on the apparatus and its mode of representation.

Bertolt Brecht explored this distancing effect within the performing arts in the 1930s. According to him, spectators need to redefine their gaze toward what they are given to see and be removed from the position of observer. Spectators have to become active and involved but also be conscious of the apparatus to which they are exposed in order to comprehend what is playing out in front of their eyes.²⁶ It is possible to perceive the space of “Cardboard Walls” as the materialized reflexive gap between the image and the spectator. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Brechtian distancing technique, the viewer of “Cardboard Walls” is not asked to be active or involved in the installation. The viewer is provided with very little information and seems to be given some freedom to interpret, which is not necessarily granted by the distancing effect. Indeed, Jacques Rancière has described the modern spectator as emancipated — one that influences and is influenced by the new forms of enunciation — within art, while he has criticized Brechtian theory for being as authoritarian as the classic theater it is revolting against. In his essay “The Emancipated Spectator” (1977), Rancière suggests that “to be reflexive is to structure a product in such a way that the audience assumes that the producer, the process of the making and the product are a coherent whole. Not only is an audience

²⁶ “According to the Brechtian paradigm, theatrical mediation makes [spectators] conscious of the social situation that gives rise to it and desirous of acting in order to transform it” (Rancière, 2011, 8).

made aware of those relationships, but they are made to realize the necessity of it” (Rancière, 1977, 3). In other words, in order to give the viewer the opportunity to question a work of art, as well as its role and aim, it needs to be presented in such a way that everything in the apparatus has a precise purpose. In the case of “Cardboard Walls,” even though the viewer does not receive a great deal of information, the *mise en abyme* permits the viewer to be incorporated into the installation. Because the video is played in a loop, but also because the maze makes it possible to explore the space physically, the spectator is given the opportunity to understand and experience the installation in his or her own way.

The spatial arrangements begin even before the visitors enter the exhibition space. Pieces of cardboard welcome them as they enter the building. They hang from the ceiling, floating approximately 1 meter above the ground and guiding them from the ticket office to the exhibition space, but they also make access a physical challenge for the visitors. Moreover, viewers’ experience of the work will be different, depending on the moment they start watching the video, either beginning with one of the climactic moments or one of the floating moments. But can one consider the viewer of “Cardboard Walls” a Rancièrian or a Brechtian viewer? The Brechtian distancing technique cannot apply to this work, because the installation emphasizes instead of directly exposing its theatrical aspect. By contrast, because the viewer is placed in a spatial *mise-en-abyme* that recreates the environment of the video work of the installation, he or she is assumed to relate with the character of the video. For this reason, the viewer of Mik’s installation cannot be considered Rancièrian, either.

Through the format of an installation and the way in which it is presented, the artist invites the spectators to be an active part of the story. With regard to installations, Rancière has noted that they “can also be transformed into a theatre of memory and make the artist a collector, archivist or window-dresser, placing before visitors’ eyes not so much a critical clash of heterogeneous elements as a set of testimonies about a shared history and world”(2003, 64). In “Cardboard Walls,” Mik does not only place images in front of the spectators’ eyes but also uses their perceptions. The little information given about the piece creates some confusion but obliges viewers to appeal to their own memories in order to construct a coherent narrativity and interpretation. Nevertheless, because it appears to be free from the hierarchy of genres, matters and disciplines, “Cardboard Walls” poses a problem of enunciation and deprives the piece of a critical or political point of view. Here lies the limit of Mik’s documentary approach in this particular work. Nichols has noted, regarding the relationship between the documentary form and its ethical character, that “documentaries provoke or encourage response,

shape attitudes and assumptions. When documentaries are at their best, a sense of urgency brushes aside our effort to contemplate form or analyze rhetoric” (Preface, X, 1991). Even if one reads Nichols’s statement as bold and worthy of criticism, it resonates with regard to “Cardboard Walls.” Without any intention to evaluate the quality of the work, one can view the lack of social involvement as one evolution of the documentary approach within contemporary art. As a result, one may suggest that documentary evolves in the direction of a reflexive form in which the viewer is led toward emancipation.

Conclusion

Although Rancière has described the new complex relationship between spectators and art as emancipated, it is important to note that contemporary art and artists are also constantly and progressively evolving and adapting to their spectators’ need of freedom. Under those circumstances, the status of reality and fiction within the documentary genre has changed and stopped being the main concern. Instead, the importance of the impact of images on the spectator and how we can use images in ways that are different from history and media has become a priority. Mik shows that one of the ways in which it is possible to rethink the documentary approach is to permit the spectators to have access to an intellectual and physical space of free interpretation. In “Cardboard Walls,” Mik gives the possibility of this freedom through the absence of language but also through the arrangement of the space and the apparatus in which the work is presented.

With “Cardboard Walls,” Mik creates a piece in which fiction and reality are not only interacting with each other but are blended together in an atypical documentary approach. Thanks to the documentary strategy of reenactment that he uses in a physical *mise en abyme* within the video and the installation, Mik questions the telling of history through art. Thus, “Cardboard Walls” can be seen as an attempt to bring about a form of enunciation constructed through memory and experience.

The Exhibited Documentary – the Current State of Documentary within Contemporary Art

Chapter III: ‘Crude Economy’ film program curated by Florian Wüst for Impakt Festival, Utrecht, the Netherlands, November 2013

Introduction

In 2013, the Impakt Festival, which focuses on experimental art and new media and takes place in Utrecht, the Netherlands, invited the German curator Florian Wüst to come up with a film program inspired by the chosen theme of the edition, “Capitalism Catch 22.” Every year, the Impakt Organization chooses a theme for the festival that is in service of its goal to present critical and creative views on contemporary media culture and innovative audiovisual arts in an interdisciplinary context. The theme for the 2013 edition was chosen to explore the dilemmas that today’s society faces as a result of the capitalist economic system, especially following the economic crisis that started around 2008: “A choice between a rock and a hard place, or to make an analogy with the main character in Joseph Heller’s book of the same name, a real Catch-22.”²⁷ From this collaboration between Florian Wüst and Impakt, “Crude Economy” was born: a film program divided into seven different film shows and screened for the duration of the festival at the “T Hoogt film theater and the Kikker theater. These shows consisted of films of different lengths, genres and from different time periods, and they focused on diverse aspects of the capitalist system and society, including economic freedom, financial trade and economic progress, as well as the risks and benefits of capitalism and its shifting effects on the human and natural environments. The significant amount of works in the program using a documentary approach, which was not the main focus, allows us to have an overview of the evolution of the genre within contemporary art and to predict its potential and its future. The collage that Wüst created by bringing together different works – from archival film to advertisements – within a film program makes it a peculiar experiment for the viewer. Similar to the one in Aernout Mik’s “Cardboard Walls,” the setting in which the films are presented questions the documentary practice within contemporary art and its relation to the viewer. “Crude Economy” also opens

²⁷ Dunnewind, Arjon, *Foreword of the Festival Director*, Impakt Festival 2013 Catalogue.

new avenues to explore this practice by breaking new ground within film programming. In order to examine the strategy adopted by Wüst's program, one needs to consider the role of the film program within the current status of documentary practice in contemporary art. To do so, I will first determine what makes it different from other film programs. I will then analyze how the use of a chronological curatorial approach that allows Wüst to reconsider the current status of the documentary practice within contemporary art.

1. Film Program as Work of Art

Definition and origins

A film program is understood within contemporary art as an event presenting a collage of films and videos brought together in order to engage a reflexive observation on the medium.²⁸ Despite the limited documentation and literature on this practice, it is necessary to understand the role that film programs have been playing within contemporary art in order to discern the innovative approach to film programs that Florian Wüst explores with "Crude Economy."

The notion of film program has been institutionally introduced through the Film Library, which was created by the Museum of Modern Art in 1935. By creating the library, the museum was the first institution to treat film as art. As a result, film programs started to be organized as retrospective of the museum's collection. MoMA's Film Library²⁹ has wielded considerable influence in contemporary art, specifically in the development of the use of film in different practices, such as installations or performances. Haidee Wasson describes its ambitions in these terms: "The Film Library became one of an emergent series of institutions forwarding the values of educated film

²⁸ In 1946, one of the first American film society, Art and Cinema, was created in San Francisco by Frank Stauffacher. From 1946 until 1954, Art and Cinema presented films programs of independent films and became a pioneer in the promotion of the avant-garde cinema in the United States. MoMA Film Library was an essential resource to develop Art and Cinema's film programs. In a letter to Arthur Rosenheimer Jr., the assistant curator of the Film Library from 1939 to 1949, Richard Foster, one of the collaborator of Stauffacher, defines the different purposes of film program as: "1. To show the relation between art forms - painting, sculpture, architecture, literature - and the cinema as a modern art form [...] 2. To show the possibilities of the cinema as an art form as distinguished from the Hollywood commercial films. [...] 3. To create an interest in the cinema as serious art [...] 4. To give a clear picture of the conflicting, often opposing forces operating in modern art generally [...]" (MacDonald, 2006, 17).

²⁹ The title of Film Library have been changed into Department of Film since then.

viewing, studious attention, face-to-face discussion, and, the most important, structured criteria by which film would be engaged” (1986, 2005). In other words, the library helped to lay a theoretical groundwork for video and film art by organizing film programs as events where scholars, critics and artists could meet and discuss their theories.

This reflexive ambition of film programs has also evolved outside art institutions. As the result of MoMA’s film library, film programs also started to emerge through the creation of film societies, mostly initiated within universities.³⁰ These film societies, often politically oriented, offered selections of films that were different from those of the museum, which was constrained by institutional limitations. Consequently, film programs have developed outside institutions. From the 1960s onward, film programs were shown as events as part of festivals and art exhibitions. Film programs have formed a network of scholars and curators, who have established a legacy between movements and artists. At that time, with the appearance of new film techniques, such as video and video installation, film programs became privileged events where innovative and pioneering films were shown. This was the case of XSCREEN, created in Cologne in 1968, which was one of the first events in Europe to propose the projection of international underground and experimental films. According to its co-founder, filmmaker and film curator Brigit Hein, this event and its popularity contributed to open access to those films in museums and exhibition spaces: “When we started to make films, there was no film in the art world. For this reason, we had to organize our events at cinemas, which was definitely the wrong place, given the expectation of the audience.”³¹

Even if museums and other art institutions have opened their collection to experimental cinema and new media art since the 1960s, film programs have not yet received recognition as a proper medium but merely as a means to present films. However, the evolution of the role of the curator has permitted film programs to affirm its artistic potential as a medium.

³⁰ In his book *Art in Cinema: Documents Toward a History of Film Society* (2006), Scott MacDonald brings together documents, such as letters and conversations, to illustrate the emergence of film societies in the United States in the 1940s.

³¹ Interview by Gabriele Jutz with Brigit Hein in *X-SCREEN, Film Installations and Action in the 1960s and 1970s*, eds. MUMOK, 2003 (118-29)

The curator artist

At MuMOK in Vienna during the spring of 2012, Eric de Bruyn en Sven Lutticken wrote in their notes to a film program entitled *Séance: Performing Film* that “Contemporary artists frequently organize screenings of films or compose film programs, either in art spaces or in cinema. The practice has become so established that it seems to have become one more tool in the contemporary artist’s toolkit, albeit not always used with great [discretion].” In other words, for many artists, film programs have been a mean to present their work. De Bruyn and Lutticken also questioned a few other approaches to film program that we can associate with “Crude Economy.” He described them as “reflections on the screening session as a medium, or as a model of artistic practice that tries to go beyond dominant and oft-criticized forms of movie consumptions” (2012). In other words, this type of film programming has become more than a tool: It has become a new art practice and can be acknowledged as curated film programs. This particular term indicates that the curator plays an important role in the production of such a practice. Over the past few decades, the status of the curator has undergone a shift within the art world, which many scholars have discussed and identified as the curatorial turn. Dorothee Richter argues that, since the late 1980s, artists and curators have been taking on each other’s functions.³² Indeed, artists have been assuming the role of selecting, organizing and editing their own work – but also the work of others – in order to exhibit it. For example, for the 2014 edition of Copenhagen International Documentary Festival, the artist Ai Weiwei curated a program that brought together 20 different critical documentaries reflecting upon the role and the responsibility of artists through their work. Even though the program was made on the occasion of a documentary film festival, Ai Weiwei chose to present feature films such as Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr Strangelove: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, first released 1964. This phenomenon of artist assuming the role of curator has affected the way in which the works have been exhibited, because the curator has an artistic and engaged vision. This is also the case of Florian Wüst, who is an artist producing video and film installations, as well as a film curator. His curated piece “Crude Economy” was created especially for the 2013 edition of the Impakt Festival and was only meant to be shown at this event. For this particular reason, it is impossible to separate the work

³² “Since the eighties, we can see another shift in the roles ascribed to artists and curators: it seems perhaps as if a shift in power in favour of the curator has taken place, especially since the role of the curator increasingly allows for more opportunity for creative activity.” (Richter, 1999, 16)

from its peculiar context. Indeed, like with other festivals, biennales and exhibitions, the Impakt Festival makes it possible to highlight, examine and discuss the evolution of art practices. The event aspect of this kind of show enables film programs to have a more critical approach by being presented as a curated practice. De Bruyn and Lutticken suggest that “the screening-as-event can be a performative exploration of alternatives modes of socio-historical mediation, operating directly on the present by reworking the past in an attempt to foster different relationships between the audience and the screen” (2012). By presenting films from the past, often primarily archive and avant-garde films, curated film programs give spectators the opportunity to rethink their position as viewers. The link between past and present via the presentation of images seems to be a characteristic that “Crude Economy” and Mik’s “Cardboard Walls” have in common. Indeed, both pieces rework the past through images, and even though they use drastically different techniques, they have a comparable goal. In effect, they both allow their viewers to be conscious of the thin boundaries between the concepts of past and present, and fiction and reality, and they give them the opportunity to focus and consider the reflexive character of the works. However, contrarily to our first case study “Cardboard Walls” by Aernout Mik that was projected on two screens in an exhibition space, “Crude Economy” is projected as a single event inside a film theater. By presenting his program inside a cinema, Wüst chooses a peculiar setting to project films that are usually shown in an exhibition space.

A paradoxically peculiar setting

Although most of the films of “Crude Economy” are intended to be shown in an exhibition space, one should not view Wüst’s choice to present them in a film theater as inappropriate, even though the film theater, by definition, is the place where films are expected to be watched. Wüst’s curatorial choice involves a reconsideration of the relation between the spectator and the screen. The reception of a filmic work of art certainly differs according to the setting in which it is shown. In contrast to Aernout Mik’s piece “Cardboard Walls,” which loops within an exhibition space, the public that consumes “Crude Economy” has the ability to choose neither the length of the program nor the point from where they watch the images. They have assigned seats in a film theater, and the order of the films shown within the program has been selected by Florian Wüst. The curator has also chosen to project the films in their original format. For instance, two of the films of the sixth show on the program, entitled “History of

Progress” and dealing with the evolution of work within industries, *Men and Machines* (Diana Pine, 1951) and *Foreigners, Part 1: Ships and Guns* (Peter and Zsóka Nestler, 1977), were projected in 16 mm, even though this format has disappeared from the film theaters. This projection required the rental of a 16 mm projector and the hiring of a projectionist able to play the films. Because film theaters are mainly equipped with digital equipment only, projectionists are not required to know how to project other formats. The spectators are not familiar with a projection of this format either, and as a result, the projection of those two films becomes a sensual experience. Indeed, the sound and the presence of the projector in the room, as well as the squared projected images, make their relation to the screen different than is the case during everyday film screenings. Similarly, *Die Börsenkönigin* (Edmund Edel, 1916) – a film that is part of the first show, “Coal for Life,” which reunites four different films that give their own view on the economic role and impact of coal in capitalist society – was projected in 35 mm while accompanied by live piano music. Such unusual curatorial choices of showing films in the way in which they used to be presented to the public in the past indicate the goal of Wüst to create a specific effect in the spectator. The relation between the public and the screen becomes historical, as they get the sensation of traveling through time via the images. Far from the reenactment strategy that Mik used in “Cardboard Walls,” we find in Wüst’s program the willingness to bring back the past in order to reinterpret it. To emphasize this effect, Wüst have chosen films that differ narratively and aesthetically from one another and presents them in chronological order within each show.

2. Re-making Film History

A chronological approach

With “Crude Economy,” Wüst adopts a peculiar curatorial strategy. Each show in the program presents several films in chronological order, and Wüst therefore promotes a reassessment of film history.³³ For example, consider the first show of the program, “Coal for Life,” which deals with the mining and the processing of the coal as an

³³ Florian Wüst’s curatorial projects often adopt a socio-historical approach such as “Screaming City: West Berlin 1980’s”(2008), “Wonders of Progress” (2011) and “Money Go Round” (2011)

economic motor in Europe at the beginning of the century, and the show illustrates this aspect of the capitalist economy from its glorious days until the fall of the industry.

The first film, *A Day in the Life of a Coal Miner*, was produced by the Kinetograph Production Company in 1910 and lasts nine minutes. It is an *actualité*, a type of film related to the documentary genre, which at the beginning of the 20th century took the form of newsreels to depict important social events. This non-fiction film correlates the hard labor of the coal miners with the social comfort of those who make a business out of it. This approach to the coal industry shows the historical character with which Florian Wüst imbues his program. By choosing an early film to introduce the theme, Wüst proposes a chronological and thus a historical approach that marks the evolution of society and the economic system that continues to this day, but also the evolution of the film medium. In the form of an *actualité*, a form of film that is considered to be one of the precursors of the newsreels, *A Day in the Life of a Coal Miner* portrays a part of society that no longer exists.³⁴ This film form disappeared from the theaters when television took its place, but it used to be projected before every film screening as part of the pre-program. In that sense, Wüst recreates a viewing context that the viewers of “Crude Economy” likely have not experienced before, in contrast to the very first viewers of the film.

The second film on the program is a silent narrative film from 1916, *Die Börsenkönigin* by Edmund Edel. In the form of a romantic drama, this fiction film proposes a vision of the coal industry through the eyes of the owner of a copper mine. The film explores different facets and risks of the mine industry as well as its social impact. In the story, Frau Helen Netzler, the owner of a copper mine, loses the man she loves (who is also her business partner) in an explosion after finding a new vein that would save her mine from bankruptcy. The role of the mine is central to the story, as it demonstrates the importance that coal had in society at the time. In terms of film history, the film is part of early narratives, a film form that appeared in the late 1910s. This film form, which is known to have been developed in American cinema by D. W. Griffith, popularized parallel editing and the use of different field sizes. The choice of Wüst to present a film that is representative of this time period demonstrates his strategy to establish a history of capitalism within film history.

The third film presented in the program is *Inflation* by Hans Richter (1928). This three-minute film essay deals with the global economic environment of the 1920s in an abstract manner by picturing the catastrophic spiral of inflation. In order to do so,

³⁴ “The *actualités* contributed to the emerging modern media landscape, adding moving pictures as a means to record or represent political and social affairs.” (Abel, 2005, 5)

Richter uses montage to superimpose images representing capitalist society on top of each other, such as commodities, hands counting money and the stock exchange. Richter creates an impression of the oppressive social atmosphere at the time that preceded the post-1929 economic crisis, known as the Great Depression. Although *Inflation* does not have a classic narrativity such as the previous film on the program, it creates palpable tension by means of editing and its music score. Within film history, Richter is part of an avant-garde film movement that is situated at a moment when artists from different art movements, such as surrealism and Dadaism, were starting to experiment with the film medium. Wüst once again integrates part of film history within his program by associating these different films in the chronological order of the development of the medium.

The last film of “Coal for Life” is more recent. Made in 2005, *Last Men Standing* by the artist Maja Djurkovic is a documentary about the miners of the Tower Colliery coal mine who bought a mine after the government had closed it for economic reasons in 1994. Their everyday lives portrayed in the film reflect on the difficulties that modern-day miners are facing. By choosing to bring modernity into the picture through the documentary genre, Wüst allows this film to reflect on the ones that precede it. It shows not only the social but also the economic consequences of the coal trade over time. Instead of presenting the different films of the program as individual or even opposing forces, “Crude Economy” creates an entity that revalues the mode of perception and attributes to the film program the function of a medium in its own right.

By presenting different videos in a chronological order, Wüst provides an overview of how the socio-economic context of capitalism has been documented throughout film history.

A space of dissension

With “Crude Economy,” Wüst uses his curatorial choices in order to reclaim history. Yet, the history he addresses is not based on an event but a period of time that is strongly connected with the history of film. Furthermore, as we have observed in the previous chapter, the medium of film has a strong connection to history in the sense that it is the product of a period.³⁵ Indeed, by showing the different films chronologically within “Crude Economy”, Wüst proposes an interpretation of the history of film based

³⁵ “Film can be regarded as being related to the history of the society in which it is produced. Film can function as history: as a source or a document not only of its own aesthetic history, but of history in general.” (Vondereau, 1999, 5)

on his own choices, and it is important to note that the majority of the contemporary works presented in Wüst's program are documentaries or use a documentary approach such as *I am 20* (Sastry, 1967), *The Shutdown* (Stafford, 2009), among others. Consequently, the curator confronts different periods of history with the history of film and in particular the history of the documentary genre in order to reflect upon the medium's evolution and to present a possible new approach to it. In that sense, "Crude Economy" is a deeply reflexive work. It looks at history at two different levels: the history of the documentary approach in the film medium and of our society in general. It also questions the connection between the two and the consequences of such a connection. In a sense, Wüst reexamines the past to apprehend our future and more specifically the future of the documentary genre within the film medium.

With "Crude Economy," Wüst challenges the documentary form by reflecting on the program's political aspect. Capitalism mediates social existence to yield a set of ideological representations (e.g. "the good life," "the successful life"). How can documentaries criticize, subvert or deconstruct such representations? This seems to be Wüst's project, and it is one that could be compared to Jacques Rancière's "distribution of the sensible theory."³⁶ Indeed, Rancière argues that "Art and politics each define a form of dissensus, a dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible" (2010, 140). In other words, esthetic practices and politics are both challenging the structure of established social order determined by different modes of perception. In the case of "Crude Economy," the artistic and social dimensions become a space of reassessment of the documentaries' possibilities. The film program includes different works adopting the documentary genre for their own purposes. This variety of documentary approaches in the film program permits a reassessment of the documentary approach as such. For instance, Wüst has chosen to include a pioneering documentary work such as *Nieuwe Gronden* directed in 1934 by the filmmaker Joris Ivens, as well the Indian video *I am 20* directed by S.N.S. Sastry in 1967, which was originally anthropological research for the government of India. The connection of such different works permits a reflection on the multiplicity of esthetic approaches within the documentary genre as well as its political use. Furthermore, by associating advertising, informal and documentary films, "Crude Economy" allows the viewer to observe these films' strategies and means of expression. In "Crude Economy," one observes the evolution of the capitalist system and its social impact within the film medium but also the evolution of the medium itself within capitalist society. According to Rancière, this

³⁶ Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, London: Continuum, 2004.

connection between politics and aesthetics, if it exists, should be designated by a space of dissension because “artwork can produce effects of dissensus precisely because they neither give lessons nor have any destination” (2010, 140). Therefore, by its reflexive character, art allows us to reassess the common social world by establishing different modes of perception.

A closer look at the seventh show of “Crude Economy” will illustrate how politics and aesthetics interact with each other in this work. The show is entitled “Creative Change,” and through four different films and videos it explores the different effects of accelerated globalization on human and natural environments. These four films present different points of view on the same subject. The first film presented in this show is an English cartoon made in 1950, *The Shoemaker and the Hatter* by John Halas and Joy Batchelor, which promoted the Marshall Plan. This propagandistic cartoon transposes, using a film technique mainly aimed at children, the points of view of the American and English governments regarding export and free trade. The film narrates the story of two neighbors, a hatter and a shoemaker, who are disagreeing over how to make their business prosper despite the recession that followed the Second World War. This 16-minute animation film is followed by a two-minute advertisement produced for the Shell oil company in 1963. The commercial, entitled *Shell Spirit* and directed by Geoffrey Jones, shows an automobile traveling from the city to the beach. The first two films of “Creative Change” might seem like they have completely different aesthetics, but in their content they represent a similar vision of globalization and commercialization. Indeed, despite the two very different film techniques, they both promote a lifestyle. However, they seem to address different kinds of viewers. While *The Shoemaker and the Hatter* seems to be speaking through its animation techniques but also its simplified narration to children and people who are not well educated, *Shell Spirit* addresses people who at the time had enough money to buy a television, go to the movies and have a car. In other words, this commercial is supposed to target the middle class. The third film on the program is more recent and was made in 2009. The documentary *Tatort Fraport (Crime Scene: Fraport)* by David Ruf portrays the everyday life in a camp of young eco-activists protesting the expansion of Frankfurt Airport. This 25-minute piece reintroduces the classical form of the documentary in the program and creates an esthetic tension between its conventional documentary format and that of the rest of the films on the program. This documentary brings into the film program another political point of view on the social issue presented by the program. As the program is chronologically constructed, *Tatort Fraport* brings with it the historical consequences of the capitalist aspect presented in the first two films of the program. This tension is emphasized by the

last film on the program, *The Residence (A Wager for the Afterlife)*, a video piece of 37 minutes made in 2012 by Katleen Vermeir and Ronny Heiremans. This piece blends fiction and reality by documenting the work of the Chinese artist and architect Ma Wen as well as adding two fictional characters: a wealthy investor and Lady Credit. This work deals with the state of the contemporary art world in which artists have become entrepreneurs. Through the combination of these films, "Crude Economy" poses not only a confrontation between the present and the past, and fiction and documentary, but it establishes a causal relationship between them. Thus, they become an esthetic entity exploring a very social issue by means of different strategies. "Crude Economy" thus reevaluates the esthetic status of the films on the programs by considering them as an entity.

Changing status

In "Crude Economy," there is a proliferation of documentary films or films using a documentary approach. By bringing together films associated to the documentary genre from different time periods and using different aesthetics and strategies, "Crude Economy" gives an overview of the history of the genre and of how it has been used over the course of film history. Furthermore, the curated film program can be considered as distinct from the documentary genre. Nevertheless, the historical approach that Wüst adopts permits a reevaluation of the status of those films. Wüst presents the films composing "Crude Economy" as entities that use a documentary approach and as a whole explore the current state of capitalism. As such, one might question how "Crude Economy" allows the fiction films that are distinct from the documentary genre to be part of a documentary piece. First of all, as we have already argued in the previous chapters, the boundaries between fiction and documentary are evolving and becoming more and more difficult to disentangle. The genre is expanding and redefining itself as one that permits the exploration of different possibilities within contemporary art and also within cinema. Associating these different films with each other, "Crude Economy" allows for a reevaluation of the status of certain films and video pieces in order to bring out their documentary characteristics. Of course, since the documentary has been regarded as a genre, its relation to fiction is called into question. Grierson himself has argued that "Although [John Ford's] *The Grapes of Wrath* was a studio picture, some of us would not object to its being called a documentary picture, because in the reenactment little of Steinbeck's original and direct observation was lost. The studios did not, as they often do, erect a barrier between the spectator and the actual. This time,

their filter was permissive rather than preventive of reality” (Stallabrass, 2013, 30). In “Crude Economy,” the question of the nature of the relationship between the film medium and fiction and reality is explored not only through the inclusion of feature films in the program but also through the hybrid character of some films that combine the strategies of more conventional fiction and documentary films. This is the case of Ascan Breuer’s piece, *Paradise Later* (2010), which is a documentary in which fiction is inserted by means of a voice-over: On the soundtrack, a narrator recites the text of Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness*. The producers of the film have described it as “a documentary adaptation of a novel.” In this 13-minute video, the camera follows the course of a polluted river in Indonesia, while the voice-over plays on the soundtrack. This narration influences our perception of the images and adds a poetic veneer to the conventional character of the voice-over within documentary.³⁷

Wüst goes even farther by choosing to include as part of the program an advertisement: *Shell Spirit*, which we have already alluded to. The images of this advertisement, which follows a car from the city to the seaside, confront us with the non-fictional character of documentary genre. Even if advertisements are classified as a non-fiction form, their staging prevents us from connecting them to the documentary genre. In that specific case, one can see a strong documentary influence, which is clearly informed by the filmmaker’s history as a documentary filmmaker. Yet, as the narrativity of the piece only results from its montage, it is the aesthetics of the images that brings into question its documentary character.³⁸ Moreover, by including it in “Crude Economy” and associating it with other films and videos that are more clearly related to the documentary form, Wüst expands and redefines the documentary status of *Shell Spirit* and equally expands and redefines the documentary in general. That is to say the documentary approach of the advertisement is emphasized by the montage of films that Wüst has created with “Crude Economy.” As a result, the film montage of the program

³⁷ Bill Nichols described the voice over within documentary as “The Voice of God, and a corresponding voice of authority—someone we see as well as hear who speaks on behalf of the film, such as Roger Mudd in *The Selling of the Pentagon* or Michael Rubbo in *Daisy: The Story of a Facelift*— [that] remains a prevalent feature of documentary film (as well as of television news programming).” (2001, 14).

³⁸ “With the documentary approach the film gets back to its fundamentals. ... By selection, elimination, and coordination of natural elements, a film form evolves that is original and not bound by theatrical or literary tradition. ... The documentary film is an original form. It has come to grips with facts – on its own original level. It covers the rational sides of our lives, from the scientific experiment to the poetic landscape-study, but never moves away from the factual.” *Hans Richter, ‘Film as an Original Art Form’ in R. Dyer McCann, ed., Film: A Montage of Theories* (New York : Dutton, 1966), 183.

itself proposes a new approach to the documentary by expanding the status of certain filmic forms to that of historical documents. By doing so, one might consider “Crude Economy” a curated film program with films that have a documentary approach.

Conclusion

The hybridization of film genres that “Crude Economy” underscores through its collage of films emphasizes the new possibilities that are open to those employing the documentary approach. By editing together these particular film works, Florian Wüst produces a piece that not only reflects on the history of capitalism through the medium of film but also explores the history of this medium through its close link with the development of capitalist society. As Jan Verwoert argues, “Documentary practice in art is neither framed as a specific genre nor associated with one particular medium alone. Instead, the discourse of the documentary approach in art encompasses a multiplicity of practices developed in different media” (2009, 208). Indeed, this evolution of the documentary form can also be observed through other practices, such as digital and Internet art. Because they are so recent, these practices’ impact on the future of the documentary is still difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, their expansion implies the need to find new practices and platforms as a mean of expression to reflect on and consider how the media deals with society’s current affairs.

By producing a curated artwork in a film theater, Wüst creates a platform for the documentary form to develop through its hybrid form. He explores the possibility of the film medium to develop and bring together contemporary art and cinema. It also gives the documentary genre the possibility to transfigure others film genres. “Crude Economy” produces a montage of film from different time periods, genres and aesthetics that makes it possible to anticipate future developments of the documentary form and even the use of the film medium within contemporary art. One might argue that in “Crude Economy” these perspectives are still at an experimental stage. Nevertheless, the unique hybrid character of the piece suggests the infinite possibilities of the documentary approach that are yet to be explored.

The Exhibited Documentary - the Current State of the Documentary Approach within Contemporary Art

Conclusion

In this thesis, we observed the evolution and ongoing transformation of the documentary genre by using the example of the film medium in contemporary art. By examining Aernout Mik's "Cardboard Walls" video installation and Florian Wüst's "Crude Economy" curated film program, we found that it is necessary to adopt new means and platforms in order for documentaries' social and aesthetic potential to be realized. Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind have suggested that for the past 15 years "the art field has become a laboratory of new documentary expressions" (2008, 14). They have also pertinently described the unsteady character of the genre: "While the meaning of 'documentary' has shifted historically, the art field's reaction has also turned out to be unstable, torn as it was between rejection and embrace. But documentary practices are also filled with internal contradictions. On the one hand, documentary practices express the desire to get rid of the author or creator. On the other, this desire can create [...] an even stronger aesthetic impact, because the resulting images seem stripped from any formal affection. This paradox cannot be reconciled; it defines the dynamic nature of documentary representation" (2008, 17). We have seen that by embracing these characteristics, which generally give the documentary approach a self-reflexive aspect, contemporary art has permitted the limits of cinematic expression to be transcended and provided a new impetus to explore the possibilities of the film medium. Furthermore, one might suggest that, through the observations made in this thesis, the cycle of the two avant-garde movements, as described by Peter Wollen, has been perpetuated with the two different approaches of the documentary genre that are illustrated by our two case studies: on the one hand, in museums, and on the other hand, in movie theaters. It remains to be seen whether Bill Nichols' argument that "the formal experiments of the artistic avant-gardes set the standards for the representation of reality by mass media" (Steyerl, 2008, 14) will prove to be accurate. Even if the documentary genre continues to be discussed within art, its legacy is yet to be measured by scholars given the current character of its evolution. What can be certain is that the emancipatory potential of the documentary form is just waiting to be unlocked.

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Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2

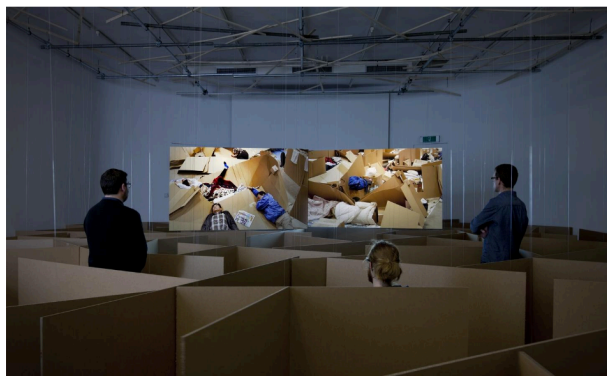


Figure 1.3

Cardboard Walls

02.03.–29.06.2014

a video installation by [Aernout Mik](#)
BAK, Utrecht (NL)



Aernout Mik, *Cardboard Walls*, 2013, installation view. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

1/2

In the course of 2014–2016, BAK's program unfolds through a new series of projects under the title of *Future Vocabularies*. The series explores, through various artistic, intellectual, and activist itineraries, the conceptual lexicon through which we might imagine a way of acting out concrete propositions and possibilities from within what is largely considered the crisis-ridden, ruinous folds of today. The opening vocabulary entry on *survival* is developed in the course of 2014 with a number of artists and theorists from BAK's key past and ongoing projects, thus drawing a line of continuity into these times of *interregnum* and into the unknown of what we used to call the "future." This multifaceted series was inaugurated with the work *Cardboard Walls* (2013) by artist [Aernout Mik](#), which weaves together the key lineages of thought that we have marked for ourselves as critically important for (rethinking) survival—namely, questions surrounding the durability of the planet, the livelihoods of refugees, and the need to reorient our thinking around (institutional) infrastructure.

The video and spatial installation *Cardboard Walls* confronts us with the immediate aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan. Unfolding before us are various situations—both real and imagined—brought on by the catastrophe as they are enacted by the evacuees from the region, now destined to a "life" in the makeshift, fragile cardboard compartments. At first, the collective improvisations replay the concrete recollections of the traumatic events, to the extent that even the provisory habitat itself—all that the people here have left—becomes destroyed in an outburst of despair. Yet, gradually, the improvised (unscripted) actions take a more speculative and propositional—even if at times illogical—course, prompted by a number of politically charged moments when Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) staff, who are responsible for the accident, enter the camp to issue a public apology. A new composition of solidarities, relations, and possibilities begins to surface from within the debris of the calamity, driven by the force to survive in the face of tragic circumstances of an inhuman scale—until a new cycle of accusations, anger, and hopelessness restarts the vicious circle, time and time again.

The spatial installation of the work incorporates the viewer into its own structure of cardboard walls so that it quickly becomes manifest that the disaster in question is not of marginal concern by virtue of having occurred far away, but rather that *we* are in *this* together. Although claimed to be an act of nature, this event of huge global consequence might better be understood as a result of our enduring hazardous, obscene, and abusive genealogy of relations to both the environment and to each other. The installation addresses how what we thought we controlled (nature), or created and thought to control (capitalist doctrines), has in fact taken charge of our lives in an authoritative swoop, announcing loudly that the era fully engineered by the actions of humans—the regime of the Anthropocene—has reached a level in which the possibility of survival itself is placed under alarming threat.

[Aernout Mik](#) (b. 1962) is an artist based in Amsterdam.

The work *Cardboard Walls* has been produced by Aichi Triennale, Aichi and [Aernout Mik](#), with additional support by the Mondriaan Foundation, Amsterdam and the Netherlands Film Fund, Amsterdam.

Figure 2.

Aernout Mik
To: Morgann Brun
questions

15 October 2014 at 11:14
Inbox - Gmail



Dear Morgann,

I got your email with requests from BAK in Utrecht.

Originally I wanted the roles of TEPCO also played by the general group of participants, both former evacuees and others. But it turned out in the preparation of the work that these roles were so emotionally loaded and controversial that it was wiser to prepare this differently. Also the role of the 'boss' had to be performed convincingly, so I decided shortly before the shoot to cast a few trained actors for some of these roles. The 'boss' is quite well known Japanese actor. Actually one of the other actors that played TEPCO staff has been before working for the company, but this was accidental. Some of the TEPCO staff and also the accompanying 'officials' were played by the general crowd, and who was only decided on the day of the shoot.

In general I work with only few actors, most of the people are untrained.

For this piece it felt not proper to exclude the real memory and experience from the reconstruction of this traumatic event. In much other works I 're-enact' an imaginary memory, relating to collective memory, compiled from an accumulation of memories, desires, fears and projections. In this case the memory was real and concrete.

It felt incorrect to let this be 'reconstructed' by completely other people only.

But at the same time I did not want it to be only a reconstruction from the personal memory. It was my aim to combine personal and collective memory in the piece, therefore I worked with former evacuees in combination with other local people and even some people from outside of this region.

It was the purpose to let these two levels of memory interact with each other.

best

Aernout

Figure 3



Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2



Figure 4.3



Figure 4.4



Figure 5



Figure 6

ECONOMY

CRUDE ECONOMY IS CURATED BY FLORIAN WÜST.

CRUDE ECONOMY REVOLVES AROUND THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE 20TH AND EARLY 21ST CENTURY. THE SELECTED FILMS—RANGING FROM EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA AND VIDEO ART TO DOCUMENTARY, INDUSTRIAL AND EDUCATIONAL FILMS—LOOK AT THE PROCESSES OF INDUSTRIALIZATION AND MODERNIZATION, WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE RECONSTRUCTION OF WESTERN EUROPE AFTER WORLD WAR II. THE MEDIA CAMPAIGNS THAT ACCOMPANIED THE AMERICAN MARSHALL PLAN NOT ONLY PRESENTED THE SUCCESS OF THE EXTENSIVE AID PROGRAMME, BUT PROMOTED THE INCREASE IN PRODUCTIVITY AND TRADE AS PREREQUISITES FOR GROWTH AND PROSPERITY FOR ALL.

THE PREMISES OF NEO-LIBERALISM THAT PREVAILED UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE STATE ARE A SECOND TOPIC. THE SHIFT OF POWER FROM LABOUR TO CAPITAL—AS DAVID HARVEY POINTS OUT—WAS CRUCIAL FOR THE CENTRALIZATION OF WEALTH THROUGH THE EVOLUTION OF TODAY'S GLOBAL FINANCIAL SYSTEM. CAPITAL IS NOT A 'THING' BUT A PROCESS IN WHICH MONEY PERPETUALLY SEARCHES FOR MORE MONEY. ALL CAPITAL CIRCULATION IS HIGHLY SPECULATIVE, AND ELUDES PURELY RATIONAL COMPREHENSION. EXCESSIVE RISK-TAKING AND LACK OF RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS A COMMON GOOD APPEARS INTRINSIC TO CYBER CAPITAL. IN THE FINANCIAL CRISIS OF 2008, ABOVE ALL ELSE THE PRIVATIZING OF PROFITS AND THE SOCIALIZING OF LOSSES SHOWED THE DOMINANCE OF THE BANKING SECTOR OVER GOVERNMENTS AND PEOPLE.

BESIDES DISCUSSING THE AMBIVALENCE OF OUR WAYS TO WORK, MAKE MONEY, TRADE ASSETS AND CONSUME, CRUDE ECONOMY REFLECTS ON PRACTICES OF RESISTANCE AGAINST THE UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH AND OPPORTUNITIES, AND THE EXPLOITATION OF HUMAN AND NATURAL RESOURCES WHICH THREATENS TO DISINTEGRATE SOCIETIES ALL OVER THE WORLD.



THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER | 19:00

PROGRAMME 1 COAL FOR LIFE

The mining and processing of coal was a major motor for economic progress in Europe. It not only propelled the modernization of life in the industrial age, but shaped the identity of whole communities and towns, landscapes and regions. The programme which features some classics of the silent film era relates the heyday and fall of the European mining industry, to the theme of crisis and speculation.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A COAL MINER

KINETO PRODUCTION COMPANY, GB 1910, 9:00 MIN

Sponsored by L.N.M. Railway, this early film provides a picture of coal mining at the beginning of the 20th century. It draws parallels between the hard physical nature of the coal miners' work—much of the above-ground labour is done by women—and the luxury of those who rely on their toil.



Florian Wüst is an artist and independent film curator based in Berlin. He has been a regular contributor to the Impakt Festival. Besides curating film programmes for international art venues, festivals and cinemas, Wüst frequently writes and lectures about topics related to film and society. Together with Stefanie Schulte Strathaus he is editor of Who says concrete doesn't burn, have you tried? West Berlin Film in the '80s (Berlin 2008).

Figure 7.1

FLORIAN WILST

FRIDAY 01 NOVEMBER | 17:00

PROGRAMME 2

FREE TO CHOOSE

That capitalists seek the disengagement of the state from free market operations might be a common misunderstanding. On the contrary, corporations need the state to set rules and conditions in their favour. Large public commissions are a safe business. The number of lobbyists bustling around the offices of parliamentarians and functionaries in Washington or Brussels shows this mix of public and private interest. The programme reflects on the notions of efficiency and optimization, and asks how much citizens and consumers nowadays are 'free to choose'—if they want so.

BÖRSENKÖNIGIN (THE QUEEN OF THE STOCK EXCHANGE)
EDMUND EDEL, DE 1916, 52:00 MIN
LIVE PIANO SCORE BY WIM VAN TUYL
 Silent film star Asta Nielsen plays the proprietor of a copper mine on the verge of ruin. After the plant manager has traced a new copper vein, she buys the worthless shares and therewith secures the finances of the mine and herself. In her private life, however, she is less lucky.

INFLATION
HANS RICHTER, DE 1928, 3:30 MIN
 Richter's films of the 1920s, although abstract and surrealist in style, express a strong sense of reality. Inflation deals with the disastrous spiral of inflation during the world economic crisis that made the savings of Everyman melt away.

LAST MEN STANDING
SASHA MAJAJ DJURKOVIC, GB 2005, 17:00 MIN
 In 1984 the Tower Colliery Coal Mine in Wales was bought by the miners themselves, after the government had closed it for economic reasons. The pit continued to work profitably until 2008. While the miners speak of their pride and dignity, the teenagers sniff glue, lacking any future in the region.

MARKETING
PIERRE LONG, FR/GB 1953, 17:00 MIN
 Marketing takes France as an example to show the necessity of product standardization and market research. In order to meet the European Recovery Program's goals, the film promotes self-service shops, ready-packed pork chops and practically shaped door handles.

LOBBYISTS
LIBIA CASTRO & ÓLAFUR ÓLAFSSON, NL 2006, 19:00 MIN
 In this video Castro and Ólafsson portray the activity of lobbyists in Brussels and Strasbourg. An article by the British reporter Tamasin Cave, performed as a song, is juxtaposed with on-site observations and interviews with lobbyist organizations and civilian 'watchdog' groups.

FREE TO CHOOSE, VOL. 1
THE POWER OF THE MARKET: THE PENCIL
MILTON FRIEDMAN, US 1980, 2:30 MIN
 In his PBS television series Free To Choose, American economist and 'father of neo-liberalism', Milton Friedman, explains the principles of free market economy to a broad audience. The story of the pencil stands out as especially easy to comprehend.

KOPFENDE HASSLOCH (MAPPING THE GERMAN)
JÜRGEN BRÜGGER & JÖRG HAASENSGIER, DE 2006, 37:00 MIN
 Imagine a cartographic map produced on a 1:1 scale, exactly the size of the territory it represents. Where could you unfold it? How could you see it all at once? Mapping the German leads into the middle of German normality: a place where consumer products and media strategies are tested and optimized.

Figure 7.2

ECONOMY

FRIDAY 01 NOVEMBER | 19:00

PROGRAMME 3 TRADING PLACES

The hustle and bustle of an old marketplace in the heart of the city conveys a strong sense of materiality. Money is traded for tangible commodities: food, fabrics, household goods. Even the floor of the traditional stock exchange, with brokers waving and shouting, functions as a physical reference to the virtual trading of assets. Today this is mostly done by computers, buying and selling counted in nanoseconds. Labour is a commodity too; it has a price. Often this price is too low to even cover the costs of living. Through a mix of international experimental films, Trading Places addresses the social realities of modern urban economy.

ARRIVAL

MANI KAUL, IN 1980, 19:00 MIN

Men, women, fruits, flowers, vegetables, goats and sheep come to the city—all ready for consumption. In a collage of images held together by an engaging soundtrack we are shown the brutality and dehumanization of city life.

ILHA DAS FLORES (ISLE OF FLOWERS)

JORGE FURTADO, BR 1989, 13:00 MIN

Furtado's acclaimed short film explores the economic relationship between humans, animals and food. It makes us laugh, but the laughter quickly dies, when following the path of a Brazilian tomato from the field to the Isle of Flowers, Porto Alegre's landfill.

UNA CIUDAD EN UNA CIUDAD (A CITY WITHIN A CITY)

CYLIXE, DE 2012, 18:00 MIN

When the construction of a high-rise financial centre in Caracas, Venezuela, was abandoned 20 years ago, nobody dreamed that the building once would become a heterotopic space—the world's tallest squat.

UNSUPPORTED TRANSIT

ZACHARY FORMWALT, NL 2011, 14:00 MIN

Set on the construction site of the new stock exchange in Shenzhen, China, the video tells a story that begins with Muybridge's early sequential photographs and moves on to Marx's description of capital that appears to move of its own accord.

PARADISE LATER

ASCAN BREUER, AT 2010, 13:00 MIN

The camera follows a polluted river while we hear the annual report of a disillusioned Western businessman. The text derives from Josef Conrad's 1899 novel Heart of Darkness, taken from late 19th century Belgian Congo to 21st century Indonesia.

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14

Figure 7.3

FLORIAN WÜST

SATURDAY 07 NOVEMBER | 19:00

PROGRAMME 4 MAGIC OF MARKETS

In economics the metaphor of the 'invisible hand' describes the self-regulating behaviour of the marketplace. The recent financial and economic crises have not been the least of factors which have shaken this idea of markets automatically channelling self-interest toward a collective benefit. But the gamble of turning leveraged risk into profit continues. Magic of Markets takes the image of disembodied human hands as a loose narrative thread to discuss the relationship between the stock market and the real world.

HANDS

RALPH STEINER & WILLARD VAN DYKE
US 1934, 4:00 MIN

This short film dramatizes the greater economic value of hands put to work by the Works Progress Administration, a New Deal agency that employed millions of people to carry out public works projects. A series of hands in close-up first represents inactivity, then turns to labour and the handling of money.

NIEUWE GRONDEN

JORIS IVENS
NL 1934, 25:00 MIN

Ivens' legendary film, with music by Hanns Eisler, documents the great effort of draining the Zuiderzee. The film's ending was expected to show the first harvest from newly created land. But in the face of the world economic crisis, the men who had built the dam became unemployed, and the surplus grain was dumped into the sea.

DAVID HARVEY: THE CRISES OF CAPITALISM

RSA ANIMATE
GB 2011, 11:00 MIN

The RSA Animate series was conceived as a way of illustrating and sharing the thought-provoking ideas from the RSA's public events programme. In The Crises of Capitalism, radical anthropologist David Harvey claims a new social order beyond capitalism.

FICTIONS AND FUTURES #1 HAPPINESS IN THE ABSTRACT

ARNE HECTOR & MINZE TUMMESCHKEIT
DE 2013, 35:00 MIN

In finance, futures are contracts between two parties to buy or sell an asset in the future for a price agreed upon today. The Chicago Board of Trade listed the first-ever standardized futures contract in 1864, based on grain trading. Fictions and Futures looks at the latest developments in the futures market and its role in increasing food prices.



15

Figure 7.4

ECONOMY

SUNDAY 03 NOVEMBER | 15:00

PROGRAMME 5

HISTORY OF PROGRESS

Great hopes for a better future fuelled the first decades after the end of World War II. Under capitalist premises, technical and scientific innovation helped to create unprecedented wealth and well-being, if not for all, at least for many in the West. The increasing automation of industrial production, however, caused the loss of jobs, human labour was largely replaced by machines or moved to other parts of the world where lower wages allowed higher profits. This selection of experimental and documentary films reflects on the many flip sides of economic progress.

MEN AND MACHINES

DIANA PINE

GB 1951, 17:00 MIN

This survey of Europe's Marshall Plan-aided economic recovery conveys harmony between men and machines. To lower costs, more automation and mass production are needed. But the film warns that traditional craftsmanship and the manufacture of quality goods must not be abandoned.

I AM ZO

S.N.S. SASTRY

IN 1967, 14:00 MIN

20 years after India's independence, Sastri travelled all over the country and interviewed its youth, those born in 1947. How do they see themselves and the young nation that they symbolise? The answers are a mix of idealism, irony, dismay, hope, and optimism.

UTLÄNNINGAR, DEL 1: BÅTAR OCH KANONER

(FOREIGNERS, PART 1: SHIPS AND GUNS)

PETER NESTLER

SE 1977, 44:00

Documentary filmmaker Peter Nestler is known for his sharp analysis of social and economic relations. *Foreigners, Part 1*, made together with Zsóka Nestler, links the history of shipbuilding and armament in Europe with the exploitation of labour and the circulation of knowledge between countries.

THE SHUTDOWN

ADAM STAFFORD

GB 2009, 10:00 MIN

Based on a collaboration with Scottish scriptwriter Alan Bissett, *The Shutdown* recalls the experience of growing up next to Grangemouth Refinery: A mesmerizing portrait of the impact of the gigantic petrochemical complex on daily life in its vicinity.

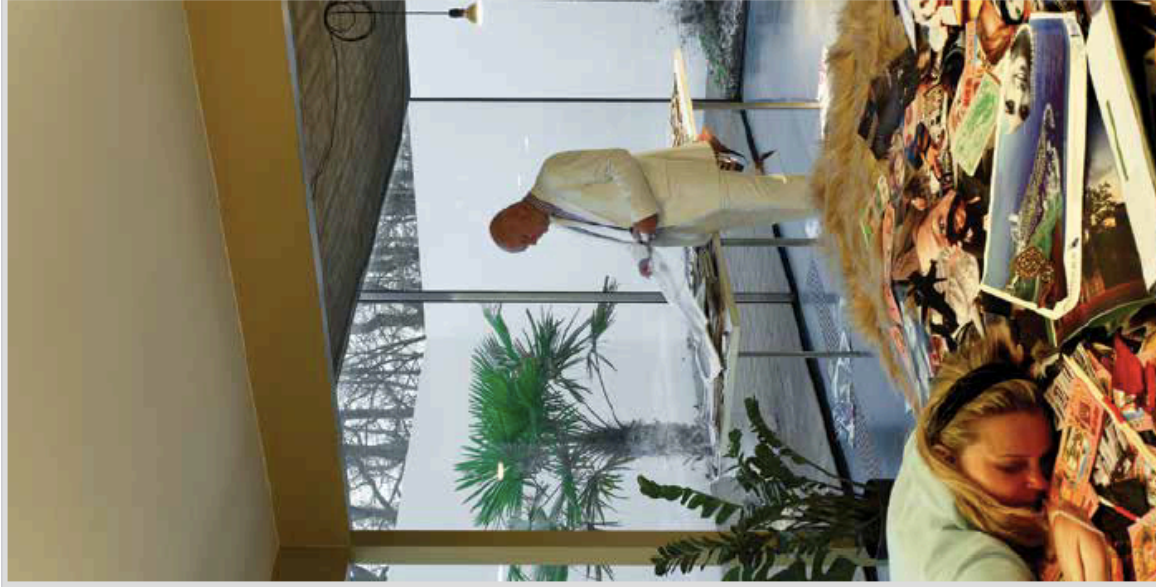


Figure 7.5

FLORIAN WÜST

SUNDAY 03 NOVEMBER | 17:00

PROGRAMME 6

RISKS AND BENEFITS

The two films in this programme deal with issues of finance and innovation, corporate leadership and morality. Although different in style, both films focus closely on their subjects in order to reveal capitalist competition as a great psychological theatre: well-dressed men, sweat above their eyebrows, in tough discussions around a table.

NICHT OHNE RISIKO (NOTHING VENTURED)
HARUN FAROCKI
 DE 2004, 52:00 MIN

Nothing Ventured documents the negotiations between a small, specialized enterprise in need for money and a venture capital investor. The latter wants to guarantee a high profit rate for the risk he's taking. The negotiations last two days, and conclude unexpectedly.

THE ANARCHIST BANKER
JAN PETER HAMMER
 DE 2010, 30:00 MIN

Adapted from a 1922 short story of the same title by Fernando Pessoa, The Anarchist Banker stages a TV talk show with a banker who advocates rational egoism in economy. Pessoa's original character is inspired by the life of Alves dos Reis, a shady financier who almost bankrupted the Portuguese state.

SUNDAY 03 NOVEMBER | 19:00

PROGRAMME 7

CREATIVE CHANGE

Neo-liberalism has entailed the large-scale privatization of public services and property. Today local water supplies, for instance, are being bought back from corporate owners at high costs. Community gardening is becoming a more and more popular way to claim urban spaces for non-commercial use. Are we seeing the advent of a new social understanding that resists economy as the sole measure of things? Or is this just another incentive for rising real estate values? Creative Change looks at accelerated globalization and commercialization, and its shifting effects on human and natural environments.

THE SHOEMAKER AND THE HATTER
JOHN HALAS & JOY BATCHELOR
 GB 1950, 16:00 MIN

Produced for promoting the Marshall Plan, this prizewinning cartoon shows two traders arguing about how best to recover their livelihoods after the war. The latter believes in producing few hats at a high price. The shoemaker wants to lower costs through mass production and make his profit through export and free trade.

SHELL SPIRIT
 GEOFFREY JONES
 GB 1963, 2:00 MIN

Built to a dizzying pace, this historical Shell advertisement charts an automobile's journey from the city to the seaside where fields give way to sandy beaches and a single gull swooping into the surf.

TATORT FRAPORT (CRIME SCENE: FRAPORT)
DAVID RUF
 DE 2009, 25:00 MIN

Crime Scene: Fraport shows everyday life in the Kelsterbach forest camp, built to protest against the expansion of the Frankfurt Airport. Young eco-activists talk about their motivation for a struggle doomed to fail. In January 2009, the camp is cleared by the police.

THE RESIDENCE (A WAGER FOR THE AFTERLIFE)
VERMEIR & HEIREMANS
 BE 2012, 37:00 MIN

The video thematizes the artist as entrepreneur in a global society. Besides the Chinese artist and architect Ma Wen, two fictional characters appear: a wealthy investor who commissions the architect to create a house for his afterlife, and Lady Credit, who envelops a multiplicity of roles, similar to the financial market's volatility.

Figure 7.6