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EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY MAGAZINE  
SUMMER 2014 #102

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THE PERFORMATIVE ASPECT  
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EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY MAGAZINE  
SUMMER 2014 #102

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# DISORIENTATION AS VIRTUE

WORDS VIBEKE BRYLD

Art is less expected to reach a wide audience. Art doesn't have slots in which it must fit. There are no rules regarding the size of the canvas, or the height of the installation. In this issue, we feature the documentary photo series, *Migrant Documents*, by artist Tina Enghoff. She works very deliberately with a form of documentation that challenges the way we perceive reality and identity. We see migrants in a way that doesn't fit our usual images of them, but instead forces us to see the restraints of identity in hidden life.

Director Pierre-Yves Vanderweerd also approaches reality without much information and without traditional forms of narrative guiding principles. In his last film, *Les tourmentes*, he lets his audience get lost, and thus opens us up to a different form of perception.

And in *Walking Under Water*, which premiered at HotDocs, the audience is forced to be present, really be present, because the film insists on moments of beauty, serenity, rather than conflict and other elements that "push the narrative forward".

You could argue that Nicolas Philibert works with a more traditional form of storytelling, but he is still very aware that the most important thing to capture is the indefinite, the invisible. The same could be said for the featured DVD in this issue, *The Bastard Sings the Sweetest Song*, a cinema vérité film, where love and lock-up, drink and poetry, music and noise are not in opposition, but something much harder to put into definitive terms. Therein lies the poetry.

In order to continue creating documentary works of art and venture into the unknown, both in form and content, we need bold financiers. In this issue's state of docs, we look towards Germany, where producer Joerg Langer gives us a sense of the landscape of public funding today.

Public funding is also what financed the official Olympic documentary directed by Sergei Miroshnichenko. But this fact combined with the film being commissioned by the OCOG didn't necessarily provide the director with creative freedom. It did provide him with the biggest budget for a non-fiction film in Russia, however.

But we mustn't lose the freedom to create the unpredictable, the stories that don't translate into script or theme.

**We have to insist on those magical, unique moments that can never be planned, the gifts of real life, the space where the real lifts itself up and becomes art.**

**We need the risk of losing our way and stumbling on something we never could have predicted. \_**

Photo credit, front page: The Idea of Travelling, photo by Tina Enghoff  
See photo series on page 20

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*Searching for Sugar Man*, 2012, directed by Malik Bendjelloul. Read our tribute to him on page 26

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**DOX Magazine** is published 4 times a year and is the leading European magazine on documentary filmmaking dedicated entirely to cover all aspects of the documentary genre.

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**When you have a camera in your hands, you have power upon others around you. We have to think about the possible abuses of this power.**

Nicolas Philibert, page 8

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#### **THE BASTARD SINGS THE SWEETEST SONG**

Directed by Christy Garland  
Canada, Denmark, Sweden, 2012,  
73 minutes

Produced by Murmur Film  
Co-produced by Pause Film  
and Final Cut For Real

Distribution: Cargo Film & Releasing



# EXPLORING THE SONIC POTENTIAL OF DOCUMENTARIES

## A GUIDE TO DOCUMENTARY SOUND

*In the final article for our series on sound for documentaries, designer Peter Albrechtsen shares some of his thoughts on sonic storytelling with examples from *The Queen of Versailles*, *White Black Boy* and *The Bastard Sings the Sweetest Song*. Sound is the invisible part of film but its affect can be amazing.*

WORDS PETER ALBRECHTSEN

**”There is only one difference between fiction films and documentaries: in fiction films the actors get paid.”**

I vividly remember hearing those words from the late, great Danish scriptwriter, Lars Kjeldgaard – they still resonate with me. I work as a sound designer for both fiction films and documentaries and I often get asked what the difference is between the two. For me, there’s not really any difference since it’s all about telling stories with sound.

Here I present some of my thoughts on sound design for documentaries where I’ll explain some of my methods and talk a bit about my work process on some of the movies I’ve done. This is by no means going to be *The Ten Commandments of Documentary Sound*, but some guidelines on how to use sound as a storytelling tool. It’s really important to remember that there are no rules – so don’t pay too much attention to what I have to say. But maybe these words can be inspiring, somehow.

### 1. START COLLABORATING EARLY

For me, great filmmaking is about collaboration. Of course, a film is very much a director’s vision, but the best films, in my opinion, come from strong collaborations, between director, cinematographer, editor, composer – and sound designer. By incorporating all the different aspects of film language, a movie becomes much more enveloping, compelling, sensuous, rich, poetic and alive. For me, being part of the process very early on is an invaluable inspiration and also makes it possible to integrate ideas for sound design very early on, sometimes already during the shoot.

Let me share an experience from working on *White Black Boy* (2012) by Danish director Camilla Magid. I was part of the process for three years, as Camilla contacted me about the project when she started shooting. The film takes place at a boarding school in Tanzania and the main character is the albino boy Shida. Like most children with albinism in

the country, Shida was taken away from his parents to be protected from the witchcraft related killings. The albinism means that Shida can’t handle the intense sun and his eyesight is getting worse. I think this is what inspired Camilla to talk to me, as she wanted to make the sound reflect Shida’s way of experiencing the world – when you lose eyesight, the hearing often get more alert. Very early on we decided to create a soundscape that reflected the way Shida experienced the world.

It was evident for me that Camilla was really listening while shooting the film. She was actually operating the boom for much of the shoot and put a lot of effort into getting the best production sound possible. But we also wanted to work with the sound in a more specialized, subjective way and for that we contacted the wonderful Danish sound artist, Jacob Kirkegaard, who agreed to go to Tanzania for the last period of shooting. I wanted him to record the ambience of the place, the nature, the kids, the life at the school. But apart from these natural recordings, the idea was also that Jacob should sonically dig deeper and use his specialized accelerometer, which translates vibrations in different materials to sound. During a classroom scene, Jacob noticed the bars on the windows and did an evocative recording of how the sound of the classroom travelled through the bars. The cinematographer noticed what Jacob was recording and shot a close up of the bars and thereby created imagery for the sound. Usually it’s the other way around, the sound is dictated by the image, but by recording these sounds on set, the sound and image were equal from the beginning. It turned into a very emotional scene and it would never had happened if the sound wasn’t such an integrated part of the shoot and the whole creative process.

## 2. SONIC RESEARCH

Visual research is pretty much a part of every film out there. Still pictures are taken of locations, of characters, of paintings, of colours and much more. I think sonic research is also extremely inspiring and something I do a lot – it always ends up having a big influence on the work I do. If, for example, I do a film that's shot in Moscow, I get hold of a lot of different sound recordings and music from Moscow, and this gives me the vibe of the place in a wonderful way. But I also try to share examples of sound and music with the director to find out which style we're aiming for and what kind of sonic quality we should aim for.

One of many examples of sonic research that really made an impact was when I did the American doc *The Queen of Versailles* (2012). The film depicts a billionaire couple as they build the most expensive single-family house in the US, and the crisis they face as the economy declines. The house is built in Florida and therefore I got hold of a lot of different ambient sound recordings from the area. What's special about The Sunshine State is that because of the hot, almost subtropical climate there are lots of insects in the air and a vast amount of frogs and other amphibians in the swamps. We didn't play these sounds loud in the mix – the sound design of *The Queen of Versailles* is quite subtle – but the background ambience still create this uneasy feeling of humid decay. When adding these sounds to the picture it made the Versailles house even more bizarre: a big luxury building built on a swamp – it was destined to go wrong!



The birds in *The Bastard Sings the Sweetest Song* reflect the horror hiding in the back of the main character's mind

## 3. NEVER SHOOT ANYTHING MUTE – AND BE QUIET

It happens all the time: The photographer and/or the director shoot pictures of extraordinary landscapes and key locations to be used as establishing shots or cut-ins. Please do not shoot these without sound and do not talk while doing this! If no other sound recordings have been done, the audio from these shots is a great way of picking up local ambience. Please, be quiet – the sound department will be very grateful!

## 4. BE HONEST, BE EMOTIONAL – AND DON'T GET TOO TECHNICAL

Sound in film is regarded, by some, as extremely technical. In the US, the sound crew is credited at the end, rarely in the main or opening credits. When sound for documentaries is all about cleaning up the dialogue track and nothing else, the sound editor is almost degraded to the role of garbage man.

A terrible waste of opportunity, I say. Fortunately, there are so many amazing examples of great sound design in documentaries and there are more and more coming – the films I've previously discussed in this column are just a few great examples.

Talking about sound is quite difficult. There are lots of words about visuals but not that many about sound. That might be the reason that sometimes talking about sound becomes a more technical exercise – sound engineers infamously talk a lot about software, gadgets, machinery. But the tech talk also happens when a director and sound designer talk about the sound in the film – very quickly, the talk might be all about the obvious sounds that are needed: a slam for the door or a passing car for the highway. The most important thing, though, is to discuss emotion and feeling – the main character's feelings, the director's feelings, and the sound designer's feelings. What's the dramaturgy of each sequence? What kind of emotional trajectory should the sound help establish?

Sound is the most invisible part of the film but its affect can be truly incredible. At screenings for *The Bastard Sings the Sweetest Song*, the director Christy Garland often gets asked about the approach of the sound design. People note that it seems to have more in common with the use of sound in a fiction film – a heightening of the location sound that brings the audience as close as possible to the characters' inner lives.

The film is set primarily in a cockfighting ring that is inside the main characters' home. There was non-stop cock-a-doodle-doing while Christy was shooting. Not only was it psychologically battering, the chaos of the caged birds, but she knew she'd be in trouble with the sound designer when the dialogue edit rolled around. But for me the location sound was a gift, and the birds were used to create an inner life of the film that I think reflects the horror hiding in the back of the main character's mind. Location sound can be gritty, distorted and rough around the edges but if you let the texture of the sounds guide you then you can create something that expands the environment. That's why it's important to talk about emotions. With modern software you can clean up a lot of distorted dialogue but no modern software will tell you how to feel about a scene, about a character, about a story, about a film. You have to listen to each other, listen to the film and listen to yourself.

## 5. EXPERIMENT

The soundtrack is a playground with amazing possibilities. Be serious, be emotional, be dedicated, be alert, and make sure that each sound you pick for a film tells the right story. But don't ever forget to have fun. \_

### WHITE BLACK BOY

Directed by Camilla Magid  
Denmark, 2012, 57 minutes

### THE QUEEN OF VERSAILLES

Directed by Lauren Greenfield  
USA, Netherlands, UK, Denmark, 2012, 100 minutes

### THE BASTARD SINGS THE SWEETEST SONG

Directed by Christy Garland  
Canada, Denmark, Sweden, 2012, 73 minutes

# THE MOMENT OF RECOGNITION

*Thessaloniki International Documentary Film Festival held a 9-film retrospective on the works of Nicolas Philibert. DOX spoke to him there about the musicality of editing, ethics, and the constant self-examinations of an artist.*

WORDS PAMELA COHN \* PHOTOS COURTESY OF NICOLAS PHILIBERT

Nicolas Philibert shakes his head with impatience. He is unwilling to be bestowed with the label “master” in any way. When we think of retrospectives and the concomitant master classes that accompany them, we might think of some august personage, a director that has been around for a few decades, has seen some things, and has much wisdom to impart, particularly to beginners. But what do you do with a filmmaker who is all of these things, but insists that he’s beginning again with each new project?

Philibert’s trajectory, as befits someone committed to a lifetime making films, might be considered slow and steady. But it’s a remarkable accomplishment nonetheless to have made 12 award-winning non-fiction feature films over the last three decades. His work always finds itself launched at top-tier international festivals, and quite often, also plays in the cinemas, particularly in his native France.

When I asked him what he finds a bit tedious for him in regards to talking about his work in general, and about the topic of documentary, in particular, he told me, “The same questions are asked, they come again and again. I just did an interview with a very charming young lady, but she asked me about *In the Land of the Deaf* (*Le Pays des sourds*) and how I came to make it, why I had wanted to make it, my motivation. It was a film made 20 years ago. I really don’t remember! And it’s not something I think about now.”

As for the ever-widening definitions of documentary, the 63-year-old filmmaker has said, “We should carry on with education. If it’s impossible to define the documentary in a few words, we should at least make it clear that it is always a personal vision and, in any case, it is less faithful to the described reality than to the intentions of the filmmaker. ... It’s amazing to see the gap between documentaries we can watch during festivals and the ones television is producing

and showing. It’s like two parallel worlds. On the one hand a large choice of approaches, styles, processes, scripts, and on the other hand, behind a so-called choice of subjects, the biggest formal uniformity. There are some exceptions of course, some late evening cases where it’s different, but they are reserved for sleepless people.”

In March, the Thessaloniki Documentary Festival – Images of the 21st Century celebrated its 16th edition with an impressive program of non-fiction world cinema, accompanied by tributes to two men beloved by the festival, as well as the international community: Nicolas Philibert, and recently-deceased Canadian documentary ombudsman and international producer, Peter Wintonick.

Philibert is a very present, vibrant, exceedingly polite and courteous man. He intrepidly sat for interview after interview about the retrospective of his work in Thessaloniki. When he speaks about his films, it is with great authority and confidence, even though he insists on an ever-present ignorance about things.

Cinematically and narratively, the bar he sets for himself is high. He remains steadfast to his oft spoken statement about cinematic imperatives: “It seems to me that a documentary is cinema when it is greater than its subject.” This seems rather obtuse at first, but as Philibert explains it: “I don’t come to a film from a point of departure where I know or understand anything, really. It’s a question of my ignorance. So, essentially, the master knows nothing.”

It turns out the master does know a thing or two about what one must do to produce work that is as engaging, mysterious and life-affirming to viewers as it is to its maker. I think this is what Philibert means when he says that the film becomes bigger than its subject. It’s about the relationship between Philibert and his subjects and, in turn, our relationship to



Nicolas Philibert, courtesy of Linda De Zitter

them when he presents his edited version of the time he spent in their company. Rather than following any kind of rubric of documentary filmmaking – or a retrofitted version for his own needs – a director like Philibert creates his own lexicon, his own grammar, as he puts it, by which to work. However, he and I also talked about scruples, and as old-fashioned and out of date a topic to talk about as some might believe this to be, continuing conversations about the responsibility of the one who is holding the camera when one films real people for a living is a conversation no lifelong documentarian can't afford to keep having.

The trickiness of being the subject of a retrospective where audiences are seeing the work you've done over the course of many years is that it's natural that people would try to make connections between the work you did decades ago to that of the work you've done recently. In these instances, do audiences teach you anything new about your older films? Do these new encounters to your earlier work bring anything useful to you that might inform your work now?

In a certain way, a film is never finished. It continues to exist in the experiences of the viewer and with the help of new viewers, in certain cases, the films continue to evolve. I say that because in the instances of meeting the public, in the Q&As, individuals make it their own film with their own perspectives. Sometimes, these interpretations bring about a really strong feeling and I appreciate that the work is still speaking so directly to people.

When one makes a film, one can pretend to control everything, that one can completely master the material. I can say that, for me, I make films with my unconscious since the finished film always says much more than I intended. And then someone can re-explain to me something they are seeing or feeling that I might not have consciously realized was there.

## **Q&A** What do you bring to your work now that you mightn't have when you were first starting out?

I don't know, really. All I can say is that my questions, my doubts never leave me. I have never made a film from a stance of certainty – about anything. I always have new questions and new matters I'm thinking about and I continue to feel that this is the only approach, the best approach that fuels my imagination. There is this perception of me as a “master” of documentary. I don't really like this label at all because to each according to their language, to their own grammar. I never feel like I have advice to impart to anyone, let alone another filmmaker. Each maker has his or her singular way of expression.

## **What about learning from other filmmakers? Do you go to the cinema a lot?**

I go to the cinema as much as possible, seeing fiction films mostly. I see a lot that impresses me. Have you seen *Fifi Hurle De Joie* by Mitra Farahani? The director tracks down gay Iranian artist Bahman Mohasses after he disappeared following the revolution. In a hotel room in Rome, the artist and the director create an unlikely collaboration just as Mohasses is putting the finishing touches on his final painting. I also recently re-viewed *Trilogie Bill Douglas*, which I like very much. I have varied tastes.

## **Last night in the Q&A after *Être et Avoir*, you mentioned how much you love to edit. Do you already have the edit in mind when you shoot?**

Yes, you can say it's the case because please don't imagine that the process of filming, for me, consists of just blindly collecting as much footage as possible and then sorting it all out in the editing. No. I'm always aware of construction. It's a build where an idea brings you to another one and that informs another, etcetera. I continuously think about edition. I do improvise a lot. >



*La Maison de la Radio, 2013*

When I make a film, I figure out what I need, a strong starting point. I need a strong departure point. For example in my latest film, *La Maison De La Radio*, there is this big building where so much takes place; or the small single classroom in the countryside in *Être et Avoir*; the reorganization of the grand museum in *La Ville Louvre*. These are strong starting points to explore something, a promise of something. I was sure that being at the radio station with my camera something would happen. It's a place that is a hive of activity, information, hundreds of journalists and producers, a huge range of programs, fiction, documentary, reports, news, all the guests that are there every single day, more than 130 guests every day. There could be a philosopher, a painter, all kinds of interesting people one can meet there. From that starting point, from all of those possibilities, I can improvise. I mean I don't really have some kind of shot list of the things I want to capture. What I can do, though, is open various doors, look inside, ask questions, ask if I can stay and watch and listen or come take some images.

I would stop making films if I had to follow any kind of precise schedule or something like this. I need to allow chance to come in and wait for those unexpected things, encounters, circumstances. I also have a set of questions I'm thinking about. One of those questions could be: What am I doing here? Why am I in this place with a camera at all? I am secretly questioning my very presence there, the legitimacy of my presence.

When I made a film in a psychiatric clinic called *Every Little Thing*, I wasn't sure I should have been there. I was asking myself what was I doing there with my camera? Is it legitimate to make a spectacle from mental illness? We live in a world where there is a constant avalanche of images. We have to question that. Filmmakers should question the nature of images, their power. When you have a camera in your hands, you have power upon others around you. We have to think about the possible abuses of this power.

**Let's go back to the rhythm and impulses of editing, the choices of a long gaze versus something more abrupt where you allow us to see something but then take it away rather quickly.**

It's a bit like psychoanalysis. As the psychoanalyst, I get to be the one who decides where the cut is, for how long the shot remains, the one who says, 'It's time to stop for today. See you next week.' That moment when I say this is finished and now we move on is very important. These impulses are intuitive a vast majority of the time. This is how I work. I'm not a theorist when I'm making a film. So in line with my intuition, editing, for me, is like music... Can I tell you a short story?

My first film is called *His Master's Voice*. It's a film in which 12 chairmen of major industrial companies face the camera and recite their vision of the world, their world of capitalism. I co-directed the film with Gérard Mordillat. It was our first film. We were 25-26 years old. At the end of the shooting, we had something like 25 hours of talking heads. We started with the transcription, writing down the whole movie. We took pairs of scissors and we started to cut and construct, build the skeleton of the film from their words. When this was done, we went into the edit room and we precisely followed this "script" with the images and words we had assembled.

It didn't work at all, not at all. The logic of the paper against that of the images didn't hold up. The construction was not good. We had forgotten something important. The scene isn't only words but the way in which things are told. The gestures, the intonation, the parenthetical aside in the speech – the ellipsis: all of this is important, the music of the words, and of language. That was the last editing plan I ever created. I started editing musically.

In *La Maison De La Radio* it's all constructed like a piece of music – a symphony with lots of voices. Short scenes. And then, a longer one. Someone speaking loudly, another voice speaking very softly. There are crescendos. Much of the time, in my films I'm not

that interested in what people are saying as much as I am in the eyes, the faces, the act of people listening. The content is secondary. When I was editing, I left a good amount of scenes out that were very informational with hard news playing in the background about things like the Arab Spring, Fukushima. I filmed in that period. The news being broadcast was very important. But I wasn't making a film about Fukushima or Cairo. This was in the film here and there, but not very prominently. I use all the visual queues around me because I've created the space for that. And in the worlds I create, time can become sort of malleable, or relegated to a mere detail.

**Part of the reason why your films remain so memorable for me is that there is room for me to step in, a space to see myself – not in comparison to the subjects in the film, but as one of them, if alternate worlds were possible.**

Here and there, I notice that people call my style observational and I find it absolutely bizarre. I don't agree. I am involved; I'm not merely looking. I'm discreet, of course. I'm not in the image. All of my films are based on relationships and the film talks about that relationship – albeit discreetly.

When you are somewhere with a camera, your presence changes behaviour. What is *La Moindre Des Choses* about? Is it about mental illness? Not really. Is it about theatre? Not really. It was a place where people with mental illness live and they built a play together. What is the real subject of the film? It is about the relationship between them and me, them and us. It's an encounter with people where there is already some prejudice built in about who they are and how they are.

You said that you remember my films because you see something on the screen, something you can recognize and share in, yes? I think that is linked to the question of cinema. Very often I wonder myself, from what moment can you say that a documentary is cinema, or cinematic? Or not. Is it linked to the format? Of course not. You can watch a documentary on your laptop or on television and you can have your breath taken away and realize you are watching cinema. You can watch a documentary on the biggest screen and not have that.

**There's a significant difference between watching footage – no matter how captivating or magnificent it might be – and watching a film that takes your breath away.**

Yes, it's footage only. It's bad television, something you have seen many times before. The mise-en-scène is completely flat, the acting is bad, and it's boring. So when does something become cinema? You can be watching a film shot on the other side of the planet with people whose language you don't understand. And then you see your story; you have this moment of recognition that this is your story, too.

**How do you create those encounters?**

My job is to program the chance of it happening. I must create the conditions that will allow the chance of something happening to come. Cinema can be considered an art certainly, but for me, a series of shots however beautiful they might be don't necessarily make something cinematic.

For me, the artistry is linked to the unexpected, to the invisible element. I can tell when a director is consumed by, or too conscious about, making Art – this is obvious much of the time. They are bigger than the work, in this case, not the other way around. True artists are searching. We don't know for what. Oftentimes, we don't even know why. When I come to the end of most of my films, I still don't know what I was looking for. \_



*In The Land of The Deaf, 1992*

**IN THE LAND OF THE DEAF**

Directed by Nicolas Philibert  
Italy, France, UK, Switzerland, 1992. 99 minutes.

**FIFI HOWLS FROM HAPPINESS**

Directed by Mitra Farahani  
France, Iran, USA, 2013. 96 minutes.

**TO BE AND TO HAVE**

Directed by  
Nicolas Philibert,  
France, 2002. 104 minutes.

**LA MAISON DE LA RADIO**

Directed by Nicolas Philibert,  
France, Japan, 2013. 99 minutes.

**LA VILLE LOUVRE**

Directed by Nicolas Philibert  
France, 1988.  
84 minutes.

**EVERY LITTLE THING**

Directed by Nicolas Philibert  
France, 1997.  
105 minutes.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE**

Directed by Nicolas Philibert and Gérard Mordillat  
France, 1978. 100 minutes

**MY CHILDHOOD**

Directed by Bill Douglas  
UK, 1972. 47 minutes

**MY AIN FOLK**

Directed by Bill Douglas  
UK, 1973. 54 minutes.

**MY WAY HOME**

Directed by Bill Douglas  
UK, 1978. 72 minutes.

# PARADISE LOST

*German producer Joerg Langer takes a look at the current state of public financing and distribution of German documentary.*

WORDS JOERG LANGER

**W**hen I talk to foreign documentary filmmakers and producers at international festivals and markets I am always a bit surprised at the role the German documentary industry plays in the international documentary landscape. Germany is one of the world's major regions for financing and producing documentaries. In the year 2014 the major German film funds supported films with approximately 350 million Euros. As part of that, around 18 million Euros were spent on documentaries.

When you look at the broadcasters, the picture is even more impressive. The German Public Broadcasters operate on a total annual budget of around 8 billion Euros. The annual turn-over volume of the private broadcasters is also about 8 billion. Together the broadcasters invest around 520 million Euros in non-fiction productions every year.

Shouldn't that be a paradise for every documentary filmmaker? How did this enormous industry develop and how does the system work on a daily basis?

## THE BROADCASTERS

The German Public broadcasting system began in 1945 when British journalist Hugh Greene founded the first German broadcaster, Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk based on the model of the BBC. Since then, a total of nine regional public broadcasters have been founded and in 1950 collectivized under the ARD-Network. The network was operated by the regional broadcasters. In 1993 a second network, the ZDF, was launched with a more federal focus. Up to the 1980s the public broadcasters were the only broadcasters in Germany. But starting in the 80s, private broadcasters were also licensed.

Over the last 34 years a constant battle has been going on: a battle for audience. Private broadcasters are completely dependent on viewing figures, so they do their utmost to maximise the number of viewers. Observing the audience battle is quite interesting. A few years ago one could observe a comeback of the documentary genre into the private channels. Of course it wasn't a rise of the creative documentary. Instead of providing quality documentary content all the relevant private channels (RTL, Sat.1, Kabel Eins, RTL II and VOX), with the exception of Pro Sieben, filled the daytime and partly the second prime time slots with docusoaps, docu-entertainment, and scripted reality formats. This choice was mainly due to financial problems since those formats tend to bring a maximum outreach for minimum cost.

In that battle, public broadcasters do not have to worry about budgets. They are guaranteed. However they are also

aware of the challenge of keeping viewers and maximising viewing figures. But how do you do that when the content supply (new channels, HOE, VOD, etc.) to the audience is constantly growing? You can only keep the viewers if you a) invest more in popular programming such as football, or b) if you keep niche programs (for example documentaries) out of pre-primetime, primetime and second primetime because you have to think about your viewing flow. But is that the purpose of a public broadcaster?

The order of the public broadcasters is regulated by the Interstate Broadcasting Treaty between the German Countries, and is regularly updated. It says that the Public Broadcasters are obliged to serve education, information, consultation and entertainment. They have to offer contributions to the culture. The treaty says nothing about outreach, viewer ratings or viewing flow. Despite that, this has been what the public broadcasting managers have spent a great deal of their efforts on over the last years.

**85 percent of the director/producers can't make a living from filmmaking but have to earn money with other jobs**

But outreach and ratings are quantitative measuring instruments, created for the private sector as a standard model to calculate advertisement costs. These instruments are not able to measure the quality of a TV programme. Over the years, producers, associations, and media politicians have tried to change that. It seems like a difficult undertaking, but currently the situation seems to be changing within the broadcasters. ARD and ZDF have taken action to become more transparent, and some new reportage and documentary slots are explicitly not connected to audience ratings any more.

This doesn't necessarily mean that the public broadcasting service in Germany is in crisis. Not at all. The ARD network just recently published the figures from 2012. Their seven regional channels and the central channel "Das Erste" aired 9.092 hours of reportages and documentaries – 1.137 hours per channel, or three hours per channel per day.

## HOW DO PRODUCERS DO IN THAT SYSTEM TODAY?

All producers have to work hard to keep their companies running. In Germany we have two main types of documentary producers, the director/producer and the producer/producer. Traditionally director/producers have always been numerous and strong. But with the enormous increase of creative people working in the industry with programs pitched to the public broadcasters combined with the commercialisation of public TV, those producers have a hard time at the moment. If they previously produced two or three films per year and made a good living on that, today they are happy if they can finance one film annually. A study of AGDOK (German Documentary Association) found that 85 percent of director/

producers can't make a living from filmmaking but have to earn money with other jobs.

Around the year 2000 a new generation of producers entered the market. They work from small and medium-sized production companies with between five and thirty employees. These companies can guarantee a permanent turnover of ideas, projects and money. They are producing less one-off documentaries and more series, more blue chip productions than low budget fare. These companies are valued by broadcasters and funders since they do very well on the international market, co-produce internationally, win Emmys, etc. But the challenge for these companies is also to develop more areas of activity (transmedia, interactive), and abandon complete dependence on a certain broadcaster or slot. The smaller companies seem to disappear, the bigger companies (if they are managed well) survive because the companies with higher annual turnover can better balance cash flow and produce more efficiently.

### **In 2013 German Film Funds supported the film industry with an amount of 350 million Euros, with around 18 million going to documentary production**

There is a small amount of director/producers who have found their niche in the industry and are still doing well. Often their films are award winning and successful so that they are able to finance their work with the help of national film funding. That is not to say that producers do not get funded, but the work of the director/producers in cinema is more prevalent than in television.

#### **THE FILM FUNDS**

At first glance the figures for German film funds seem very impressive to most of our European neighbours. In 2013, German Film Funds supported the film industry with an amount of 350 million Euros. About 18 million went to documentary production. So far, so good.

The structure of film funding is based on the federal system. We have nine funds on the federal level: Filmstiftung Northrhine-Westfalia, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, Middle-German Media Fund, Film and TV-Fund Bavaria, Media and Film Fund Baden-Wuerttemberg, Film Fund Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein, Nordmedia, Hessian Film Fund, and Hesse Invest. The source of funding is from the budgets of the Federal States. Therefore it is not surprising that the amount of support given by these funds must be spent in the region of a particular Film Fund.

#### **On the national level there are three relevant film funds:**

- National Film Board: Filmfoerderanstalt (FFA)
- Ministry of Culture: Die Bundesbeauftragte für die Angelegenheiten der Kultur und Medien (BKM)
- Incentive to Strengthen the Film Industry in Germany: Deutscher Filmförderfonds (DFFF)

FFA mainly supports films with commercial potential. BKM supports films with great cultural value. DFFF is just an economic instrument, giving back 20% of the investments in German territory.

In general, foreign producers are able to apply for funding in Germany. However, history shows that if the applicant is an experienced German producer that knows the funding system and has a good track record, the chances of receiving funding are much better.

Film funding allows many films to be made, but those films are also competing in the cinemas when released. Since the year 2000, the number of German documentaries released annually in German theatres quadrupled. At the same time, the audience for documentaries in cinema has remained the same as before. But what should a producer do if the TV doesn't want his/her film or hasn't got enough money to fully finance it? He should apply for funding and thereby commit himself to release the film in cinemas first.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Of course Germany is not a documentary paradise. Too many filmmakers and producers are trying to take a bite of the same cake. This puts the market situation out of balance with more weight on the demands of the broadcasters, VOD-platforms, distributors, etc. They can choose freely from the massive supply of documentary projects and dictate conditions and prices. In these circumstances, some producers make it, while others will always be working at the edge of survival.

A study made by the Alliance of German Producers found that more than half of the film and TV producers in Germany have a return on investment rate below 5 percent with 18 percent showing losses.

The current financing of films is too focused on the traditional chain of distribution, so when the producer is cut off from that supply chain he is forced to take money out of the overhead costs of a film. This is a huge problem because producers are only really able to survive financially if they maximize the number of films or turnover of films, which sooner or later leads to a decrease in quality. \_

#### **COMMENTS, GERMAN PRODUCERS**

##### **What do you think the role of public TV is?**

**Stefan Kloos:** The primary role of public TV is to provide high quality programs that critically investigate, that question, that make us aware, that inspire – and that entertain. Public TV for me means to go where not everybody dares to go because commercial relevance is a “can” and not a “must.”

**Christian Popp:** Public television should be courageous and surprising. It should promote innovation and different views and voices. It should shake and entertain the viewer. It should not be bound – as it is more and more – to the dictates of ratings and formats. Public television should be a starting point for an exploration of the unknown.

This is not about a carte blanche to film makers, but about taking risks. In a more concrete sense, public TV should act far from market considerations. It should properly finance innovative documentaries and multi-platform projects with meaning and artistic vision. That way, it will certainly find a broad audience.

*The Great Night*

# THE CAPACITY FOR SURPRISE

*Director of the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival,  
Marek Hovorka, shares his favourite docs from the last year*

Every year, my colleagues and I struggle through thousands of films – a jungle, in which we mark out highs, blind alleys, abysses and dangerous territories – and a film’s capacity to surprise, in both formal and thematic terms, is what we are looking for. A unique map of an expanding universe is created over and over again, dotted with films so diverse that they mark a fascinating journey into an unknown land, where hunters can only rely on their instincts, intuition and open mind. And each year offers a profound experience, unmatched by any venture into the world of contemporary fiction film. Turning in front of our eyes, we see worlds of generation testimonies from the margins of European cities, keepers of protected tortoises living on Australian shores, travelogues from deserts by filmmaking nomads, historical perspectives of our own history as well as philosophical contemplations on the world here and now. The more uncertain the path, the better the aim. And yet, also TV and industrial art products engaged in a one-sided fight with the living film due to a priori specifications and expectations carry information about the territory in which we move and try to find our footing. In their sum, they form a comprehensive whole that never ceases to be fascinating.

*Cinematography is always documentary in one way or another*

Alain Resnais

## **1** WINTER / MIRACLE

Directed by Gustavo Beck, Željka Suková  
Croatia , Denmark , Brazil, 2012, 60 minutes

A stunningly cinematic documentary that intuitively combines and carries forward the traditions of the Czech New Wave, the American independent scene as well as the tranquil spirit of contemporary Latin America. The film – or a double-feature, as indicated by its title – is made by two entirely different filmmakers: the Brazilian director, Gustavo Beck, renowned for his concentrated and almost immovable and static portrait of Chantal Akerman, and the Croatian director, Željka Suková, who has infused film with the long-lost surreal magic, as already seen in her documentary *Marija’s Own*. Be it not for the notable project CPH:LAB, these directors would have never met to join forces. However, the result is a fresh film experience guiding viewers through amoeba-like meanders of a film/city/mind without compromising its ability to surprise and seize the moment literally in Felliniesque manner. It is good to see miracles still happening in European film.

## 2 THE GREAT NIGHT

Directed by Petr Hátle  
Czech Republic, 2013, 72 minutes

"I gave my kids every chance to do all the things that I didn't have the opportunity to do. And I'm really sorry that they don't appreciate it. All I did, I did for them," says a fifty year old prostitute in her disorganised flat, with an empty bottle of vodka in her hand. The film debut *Great Night* by the Czech director, Petr Hátle, is set on the backdrop of late night or early morning hours just before the dawn when the impenetrable night is on the wane, when time stops for a moment and the interim space gives us the chance to take a glimpse of our inner selves just as clearly as we can see the bottom of a nearly finished bottle. Dostoyevsky's protagonists, harmlessly reconciled with the rules of the surrounding world, drift through the night that is no darker than a day. But because the majority of people sleep, it is easier to see the dreams of those who are sleepless at night. Neon and traffic lights as well as streetlamps and random headlights in a visually refined film, which does not lose any of its authenticity and vividness, blend with the cold lights of factory halls and supermarkets or the motley discotheque lights on the city's periphery. Empty streets, shelves, bars and empty flats are the natural environment of all the protagonists of Hátle's film. And however they might seem ensnared by the surrounding emptiness, they try to communicate through a dialogue that does not stem from resignation, but from their own dignity.

## 3 THE SPIRIT OF '45

Directed by Ken Loach  
UK, 2012, 98 minutes

Last year's edition of the Cannes festival saw an exceptional occurrence. *Spirit of '45* by Ken Loach, a passionate defender of the weak, added, rather uniquely in the recent years, a political dimension to the festival. Exceptions, such as Goddard's *Socialisms* or Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* merely prove the rule that conservative festival programming strategy intentionally avoids politically provocative topics. The festival's organisers might not even have been aware of the fact that Loach's film – composed exclusively of testimonies of so-called "talking heads" and archival footage – is not only a tedious enumeration of data in the spirit of BBC's documentary films, but shows a personal and engaged attitude, recalling the plight and frustration of post-war Great Britain. *Spirit of '45* is not what it might seem; in the guise of classic documentary editing, it divided informed British audiences into two camps and sparked a nationwide discussion. Almost seventy years after the end of World War II, the British engaged in a lively debate over the interpretation of Britain's strenuous efforts in late 1940s, Churchill's election failures – truly unexpected for a leader of a winning country – and the exhaustion of the former world power due to omnipresent misery and absence of social ethos. By showing Britain's resignation on meaningful future strategies and its social conformism, Loach makes a parallel and a unique appeal to today's world.



**Marek Hovorka** Founder of Jihlava IDFF in 1997 and its Festival Director since then. Co-founder of Doc Alliance festival network, East Silver Documentary Film Market, DAFilms online distribution platform, and founder of various industry initiatives such as the Inspiration Forum, Emerging Producers, and Festival Identity.

## 4 THE 727 DAYS WITHOUT KARAMO

Directed by Anja Salomonowitz  
Austria, 2013, 80 minutes.

It is not by chance that each film by Anja Salomonowitz listed on her website is marked in a different colour. This very stylisation, which uses colours in addition to other means of alienating and highlighting topics, distances the viewers from the films, allowing them not only to relate to the works and the lives of their protagonists emotionally, but also to reflect and contemplate on them. Moreover, stylisation uplifts the viewer's mind from simplification and black-and-white perception of the world. In her feature debut, *You Will Never Understand This*, the director delves into the history of her Austrian family during the war. And the awkward and faltering silence of her kin, avoiding questions regarding their own responsibility, is accentuated by white interiors, ironically and uncompromisingly confirming their innocent image. Similarly, in her latest film, *The 727 Days Without Kamara*, the director uses colour contrast to evoke unnatural feelings in the audience. Omnipresent yellow, the dominant visual feature of the film about women who fell in love with strangers but have to stay separated because of Austria's uncompromising immigration policy, accentuates both their energy and the chaotic character of their unnatural situation. In all of her films, Anja Salomonowitz focuses primarily on women. She is interested in their lives and self-reflects through their experience. And regardless of whether her female protagonists succeed in expressing themselves on camera or whether they stay silent and misunderstood, the author's gesture remains engaged and highly personal. She explores the position and role of women, and is not driven by the omnipresent gender correctness, but by her own deep interest in the issue.

## 5 THE ART OF DISAPPEARING

Directed by Bartek Konopka and Piotr Rosolowski  
Poland, 2013, 51 minutes.

Polish documentary films showcased at film festivals all over the world come in an ideal form that makes them universally comprehensible. These works combine a part of the Polish cinematographic tradition with a distinct topic that is often relevant also in social or historical terms, and a conservative filmmaking approach. This is the core of their global success. But only time will tell how many of them will find their place in the history of cinematography. There are, however, authors who defy the predefined and established rules. And their films are among the most interesting and surprising works Polish film has to offer. Be it Marcel Lozinsky, Marcel Koszalka or Bartek Konopka, whose latest film, *The Art of Disappearing* – the visual form of which is so specific that the cinematographer, Piotr Rosolowski, is listed as the co-director of the film – revealed the shamanic nature of Konopka himself. He is one of the few who masterfully combines two seemingly incompatible features and use the layout of the mid-length documentary film to create a magical world of a spiritual Haitian shaman who applies voodoo to cure Polish citizens suffering under the yoke of Communism. The film traces the borderline between documentary and fiction, joke and philosophical essay, shamanism and serious social analysis. Keeping in mind that his previous documentary, *Rabbits à la Berlin*, was inspired by a similarly ingenious and fitting metaphor of life under Communism, I cannot wait to see what surreal concept will inform Konopka's next film. The tiny edge between real and surreal provokes our imagination and shows us much more than what can be scripted. \_

# MARRIAGE BY ABDUCTION BASED ON A TRUE STORY

*Screened at the 64th Berlin International Film Festival,  
the issue-driven drama Difret gave audiences the right mix of social commentary and art-house  
aesthetics to awe viewers and take the Panorama Audience Award.*

WORDS MELANIE SEVCENKO \* PHOTO ZERESENAY BERHANE MEHARI

It's a formula that is no stranger to blockbuster features: courageous characters tangled in tragic circumstances – with all odds tremendously stacked against them – find the tenacity to challenge the status quo and come out on top. With *Difret*, we get something similar: a story of conflict that is fierce enough for fiction, but is a true story. Adding to the intrigue, the film gives us a glimpse into the complexities of Ethiopia, a country rarely captured on the big screen, as it transitions towards equal rights.

Directed by Zeresenay Berhane Mehari, *Difret* follows 14-year-old Hirut, a bright village girl far beyond her years. It's the mid-1990s. Three hours outside of the capital of Addis Ababa, Hirut is abducted on her way home from school by a group of men on horseback. A victim of telefa, or marriage by abduction, Hirut is raped by her would-be husband and locked in a barn. While attempting escape, she grabs a rifle and shoots her captor dead.

In rural villages, the practice of abduction into marriage is common and one of Ethiopia's oldest traditions. For her crime, Hirut must face trial and potentially serve a life sentence. Enter Meaza Ashenafi, an empowered and brave young lawyer from the capital, who takes Hirut's case and argues that the young girl acted in self-defense.

With her practice Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, which gives legal aid to marginalised Ethiopian women, Meaza Ashenafi boldly embarks on a collision course between enforcing civil authority and abiding by customary law. She's up against aggressively rooted patriarchy with a risk of losing everything – her practice, her reputation, and Hirut's freedom. The film takes a view of a society on the brink of change, while looking at the personal repercussions of breaking centuries-old traditions.

"I've been very careful about using the word tradition versus modernity," said director Zeresenay Berhane Mehari. "This particular tradition of telefa has been there for centuries. It's a harmful tradition. The idea of people fighting for something that is wrong, does not necessarily suggest a new chapter or a modern society, but a chance to examine particular traditions and say, 'We don't want to keep this harmful tradition.' For me, the society transitioned because for the first time they

were given a chance to debate openly, not taking any of their traditions at face value."

Born and raised in Ethiopia, Mehari studied film in the United States before returning to his native country to work. Circumstances led him to Meaza Ashenafi, who back in 1995 was a household name and is still synonymous with Ethiopia's fight for women's rights. The filmmaker went through her cases and discovered the young Hirut. It had all the elements of a great feature: a story that plays with opposites – man versus woman, tradition versus constitution, village versus the city – and tries to strike a harmonious balance. Mehari was committed to exploring Ashenafi's fight on film.

"Abduction is one of the most entrenched, harmful, traditional practices in Ethiopia," said Meaza Ashenafi. "Since it's part of culture, it's a way of life, so it's very difficult to enforce the law at times. But thanks to this case, the situation has changed a little bit over the last 10 years. The practice is still there, but it has been mitigated."

Back in the 1990s, Ashenafi's case was documented on every radio and TV station in the country, reaching the international media too. "When the case happened, CNN and BBC covered it for two years," said Mehari. But the filmmaker wanted to bring his own take to one of the biggest cases in his country's recent history. In fact, the trial resulted in a change of the Ethiopian Constitution Commission, which guarantees the economic social and political rights of women.

"I'm not really a documentary filmmaker," said Mehari. "What I wanted to do was tell the story of the lawyer in a way that encapsulated what she wanted to do with tradition, while also making sure the constitutional rights of all people are protected and sometimes enforced. So that was my entry point."

Making a film in Ethiopia has its fair share of uphill battles. While the country has a long tradition of theatre, filmmaking is not a refined practice. The first films shot by Ethiopians were made in the 1960s; the second boom of filmmaking happened in the 90s.

With no film schools and no industry, Ethiopia produces about 80 to 100 films per year, mostly on digital video for



local consumption with hardly any stories crossing over into Western cinemas. But with fifty-two percent of the population under the age of twenty-five, film might be the new medium that is catching on.

Mehari spent three years researching and scripting *Difret*, a word that means “courage” in Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia, but also refers to rape. Then came the challenge of funding. The producers wanted to make the film without compromise, and sought only private funding. They even used crowd-funding platforms like Kickstarter to get the film off the ground. It also didn’t hurt to have Angelina Jolie come on board as executive producer five months into post-production. During filming however, with no industry to support it, the crew struggled to transport hundreds of pounds of gear into Ethiopia. They had to send rolls of film every couple of days to India to be processed.

### **The trial resulted in a change of the Ethiopian Constitution Commission**

*Difret* is only the fourth film to ever be shot on 35mm, and the cinematographer, Monika Lenczewska, is the first woman ever to shoot a film in Ethiopia. “We decided to make this film on 35mm because we wanted the country to be as much of a character in the film as the lawyer and the young girl are,” said Mehari.

Eight months into casting and still without a leading actress, Mehari discovered Tizita Hagere who plays Hirut through an after-school acting workshop. For the rest of the cast, Mehari employed mainly non-actors, with 80 percent of them never having acted before. Yet every film needs a star. Meron Getnet, who plays the leading role of Meaza Ashenafi, is one of Ethiopia’s most popular actresses.

Burrowing from reality, the director shot the film in a documentary vein, with a close camera right in the centre of the action. “It was a deliberate choice. I wanted people to feel the texture of the story,” explained Mehari.

“For the longest time, if you read an NGO or media report, it was always once removed. We’re always talking about a number: this percent of women in this region get abducted. I wanted the audience to be part of the film, to judge for themselves. Ninety-five percent of the time the camera is hand-held. It was, in a way, an act of having the film come to you.”

*Difret* premiered at Sundance, where it also won the Audience Award, and is garnering major media coverage in Ethiopia. The producers are also working with outreach organizations to take the film to rural areas without cinemas, since telefa tends to proliferate more in these regions.

“Telefa has been part of the culture for the last 2000 years, it’s so normal,” explains Meaza Ashenafi, who sees the film as a convergence of human rights and art. “But there’s a lot of interest and enthusiasm about this movie, not because it’s an entertaining product, but because the expectation is that it will spark a momentum, it will spark a dialogue on women’s rights.”

Mehari has similar hopes. “I think the news got out, the conversation is back on. People are still talking about abduction and we want that to continue,” he said. “We want that to actually go away from the media and go into people’s homes, schools, and religious institutions to have an open dialogue together, so maybe we can find a solution.” \_

### **DIFRET**

Directed by Zeresenay Berhane Mehari  
Ethiopia, USA, 2014. 99 minutes.



*Walking Under Water won the special jury prize at its world premiere at Hot Docs in Toronto in May. At first glimpse, the film looks like an anthropological study of a threatened native culture, but don't be fooled. It's a mythological tale of wonder and water.*

WORDS VIBEKE BRYLD \* PHOTO DAVID KASZLIKOWSKI AND VERTICAL VISION FILM STUDIO

**T**he film begins with a long sequence of several minutes: first under water, and next on a small boat with a man and a boy. They don't speak. The scenery is breathtaking. But we don't know where we are, we don't know where we're going, and we're forced to accept this and just be present. This is the premise of *Walking Under Water*.

There is a narrative structure, but the film manages to create a complete world on, and under, the water with a man who dives for fish, a boy who wants to learn, and tales of the gods of the sea. The boy and man rarely speak, but one starts to read their faces and gestures. With their serenity and that of the ocean itself, the sound of waves, wind, and silence, one becomes content with this world. It is full, complete.

For the same reason, when the sea nomads' world of magic and simplicity is interrupted by a trip to the city and the invasion of busy holiday resorts, it's incredibly distressing. This happens because your sensory system has been calmed, and you're not armed with your usual shield against sensory overload. So much is told through the senses. This is the kind of film that works once realized, but not on paper. So how did the team manage to get this film shot and made on the remote Mabul Island near Borneo?

DOX had a talk with the Polish team: director Eliza Kubarska, producer Monika Braid, and cinematographer, Pjotr Rosolowski.

# THE POWER OF PRESENCE

## **Q&A** How did you finance this kind of film?

Monika Braid: Well, first of all, I always work with co-productions and this film was only possible due to the collaboration with like-minded producers. BBC and Channel 4 said no. Then we went around to pitching forums for about two years. Everyone was intrigued, but it didn't fit any slots. For Polish TV it wasn't Polish enough. For BBC it wasn't narrative enough. But it was through the pitching forums that we met Stefan Kloos of Kloos & Co. Medien, and then we got ARTE on board. We had a very good co-production. The Polish Film Institute supported us and EBH Poland supported the project with equipment. We were ambitious, believed in the project and for the first two years, we invested our own money.

Pjotr Rosolowski: I also think we had a lot of luck. As opposed to most financiers, the Polish Film Institute prefers this kind of cinematic storytelling. So they supported us with 70.000 euros.

Eliza Kubarska: It also took two years to find out how to tell the story. I first went to Mabul Island in 2010, where I worked with a guide and translator, who died very suddenly. It was very traumatic and it was impossible for me to carry on with the characters we had worked with together. So when I went back in 2012 with Pjotr, I found Alexan and his nephew Sari.

The scenes of the film are very concise, and the sound is always impeccable. How much of the film was a construction?

Eliza Kubarska: I knew Alexan and Sari very well. They belong to the Badjao people, sea nomads, or sea gypsies. They live in the Philippines, Borneo and Malaysia. Many of them escaped from the Philippines. They move all the time, and they have no national identity.

Anyway, I knew their stories, and their belief system. I also knew where the magical places were. The most significant construction is the end of the film. The first thing I discovered when I went to the area was Bajawa and the resorts there. It was very close to modern civilization, and my original idea was to show this world overtaken by tourist resorts.

## **How did you manage such pure sound, the incredible underwater shots and perfect settings?**

Pjotr Rosolowski: The sound designer put a lot of micro-ports in the small boat, and I had a very good camera mic, and then we had a bigger boat next to theirs with equipment. And the sea is quiet, so it's a good space to record good sound. For the underwater shots we had an Austrian camerawoman, Lisa Strohmayer, who specializes in this. We had three full shooting days with our underwater cinematographer. Most of the time, we were filming above water. There were very few times when we did parallel shootings both below and above the water.

## **How did you integrate the legends of the underwater gods into the film?**

Eliza Kubarska: I knew the water nomads, also known as the Badjao People, had certain legends and beliefs. But it was hard

to get Alexan to tell the best stories of the legends. I asked him to tell me about his ancestry but he didn't understand what I meant. Then I told him the story of the little mermaid. And then he understood. He told me, "No, it wasn't like that. We came from the water men." And his nephew Sari heard this story for the first time.

## **How did you create a space that feels so unreal, so magical?**

Eliza Kubarska: First of all there is the light. Sometimes the sky is dark and the sea is white and that's magical in and of itself.

Pjotr Rosolowski: There was always the fear of whether there would be enough material for a feature. Is it too boring? I mean nothing is happening. So we were searching for another layer of the relationship between Alexan and Sari for the story. Before the shooting of the film I watched Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, his rendition of the relationship between people and nature. It inspired me to do it naturally, with long shots. The scene in the beginning, where nothing happens – Alexan gives his goggles to the boy, and it's really enough.

Eliza Kubarska: As for the sound, our sound designer and sound recordist were the same person. We do what we can with the images and the sound to help the audience to believe in the underwater kingdom and the spirits.

Pjotr Rosolowski: After the premiere here at Hot Docs, someone came up to us, also a sound designer, and asked if we had a sound recordist under water, which would be very expensive. We didn't. Our sound designer had to use his imagination and create the sound design along with the story.

Eliza Kubarska: I've seen a lot of beautiful places, but there was something very strong about this place and about these people.

## **The film ends with information on the Badjao people and their social and legal status. It's far from the world of wonder the film creates. Why did you end with this piece of information?**

Eliza Kubarska: I have a small mission. Most people will understand from the film that this is the end of the life and ancient culture of the sea nomads. I wanted to be sure that everyone understands that this is the end of this world.

Monika Braid: No one protects these people because they don't have any civil rights. They don't belong to any nation. Therefore, they don't have any citizenship or basic rights. Some of their areas have been burnt down to make room for resorts.

Eliza: I think making people aware of these issues is part of making documentary. \_

## **WALKING UNDER WATER/ON THE SEA WITH BADJAO**

Directed by Eliza Kubarska

UK/Poland/Germany, 2014, 90 minutes



# MIGRANT DOCUMENTS

TINA ENGHOFF



The Idea of Travelling ©Tina Enghoff

A tree cannot block the water ©Tina Enghoff

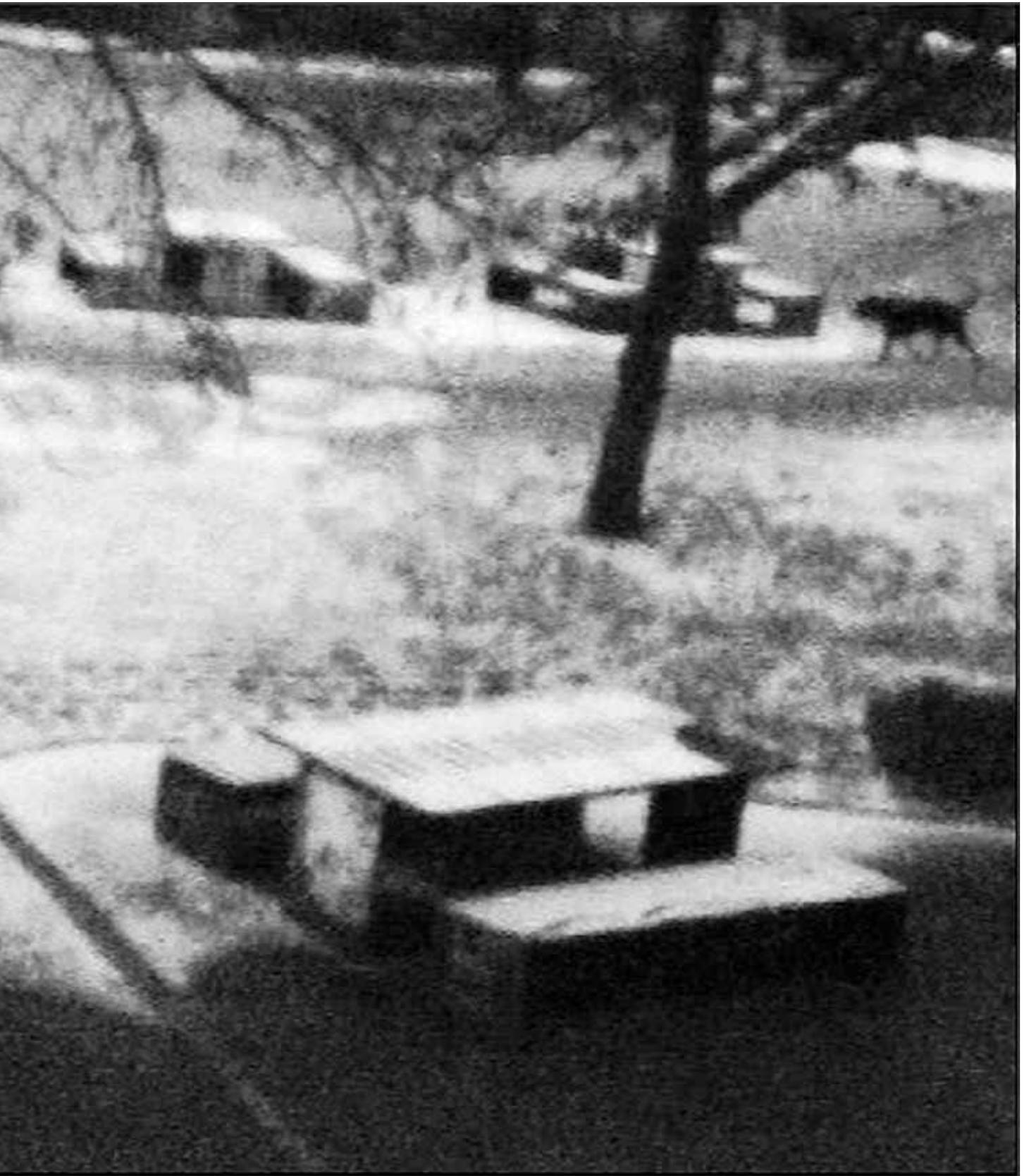


Tina Enghoff is a photographer and visual artist who works with political and social issues.

She has previously published *Out of a Time/ Från en tid* (Journal 1999 / Rhodos, 1999), *Possible Relatives / Eventuelle pårørende* (Journal, 2004 / Tiderne Skifter 2003), *Dogwalk* (Journal, 2008) as well as *Syv / Seven Years* (Forlaget Vandkunsten 2010/ Journal 2010).

Her primary media are photography and video.

Tina Enghoff's work has been exhibited widely in international museums and gallery spaces.



Positions ©Tina Enghoff



Disorder ©Tina Enghoff

# THE CAREFUL LOOK

*Art historian Louise Wolthers reflects on the performative aspects of documentary using this issue's photo series as a case study.*

WORDS LOUISE WOLTHERS

Of the many media-specific issues that are debated time and again within the field of photography, the documentary concept is the most challenging and interesting. Not in terms of defining it as a genre, but rather in regard to the performative aspects of what documenting actually does. This is certainly still relevant in our current globalised surveillance society, where transparency and visibility are key elements in securing safety and mobility for privileged citizens at the expense of less attractive subjects or “unwanted humanity.” Even though efficient surveillance and social sorting increasingly rely upon digital and biometric data, the photographic medium continues to play an important role in documenting and registering, as it has done historically in the construction of modern bureaucracy. At the same time, the camera is also still a valuable tool in the critical “sous-veillance” or counter-documentation of authority and power constructions. Sometimes, however, photography has to be used in spite of itself, especially in projects including people who, for various reasons, are vulnerable to exposure and thus demands a sensible negotiation between visibility and invisibility.

**Rarely does anyone insist on viewing them with an empathic gaze – let alone show interest in what *they* might see or want to document.**

Tina Enghoff's *Migrant Documents* is such a project. In correspondence with her earlier works on and with marginalised, forgotten or ignored subjects, the Danish photographer here deals with undocumented migrants in Copenhagen. The multi-medial piece (photography, video and sound) consists of seven different parts, which together form a manifold documentation of a group of people that have to remain unidentified and invisible. Enghoff employs different means of documentation, which mimics and references the kinds of surveillance and registration that migrants might experience. Furthermore she uses imagery and representations related to tourism, since the tourist represents the opposite, privileged side of the mobility scale and of border crossing.

The migrants participating in this project came from countries outside of Europe looking for work. Some of them arrived unregistered on boats from North Africa, others travelled to Spain or Italy on a tourist visa and then applied for a provisional work permit. They usually got seasonal, manual jobs – either with a work permit, but most often without – and when the work ran out they travelled north, where there's a higher rate of employment. Here they have stayed longer than the three months of their tourist visa and thus they are now deemed “illegal,” forced to live in a state of anonymity. In this limbo they and their fates are less visible than those of rejected refugees and other asylum seekers. Rarely does anyone insist on viewing them with an empathic gaze, let alone show interest in what they might see or want to document.

Anonymity or invisibility becomes a double-edged sword for undocumented or paperless migrants. Not being seen is a necessity, yet it adds to their already stressed vulnerability. Without a personal identification number or any other entries in the data files of the authorities, they are not entitled to shelter or healthcare. If they are not registered, their needs remain ignored and basic human rights are often out of reach. Deliberate non-surveillance thus functions as a means of exclusion from protective documentation. In the series *Disorder*, Enghoff has photographed blood test tubes from the one place in Copenhagen where doctors, nurses and midwives take care of people without residency permits on a voluntary basis: The Health Clinic for Undocumented Migrants run by the Danish Red Cross in collaboration with the Danish Refugee Council and the Danish Medical Association. This is also the only place the migrants are registered, namely by the blood that is taken as part of their treatment. This could potentially be entered into the kind of biometric register used by the police and other authorities, similar to records of DNA, fingerprints and photographic portraits. Enghoff's photos can be seen as portraits that literally get under the skin. The camera is extremely close to the blood, with its air bubbles, differing shades of red and various stages of coagulation. The individual test tubes of blood are metonymic traces of bodies, bodies with their own, individual experiences of travelling and trying to survive in a foreign country.

Compared to biometric data the CCTV camera is a more obvious visual technology, forming a constitutive part of daily life in more and more public and semi-public spaces. Enghoff set up a surveillance camera in one of the small parks in Copenhagen, where homeless migrants have to resort to sleeping. The camera registered everything that happened over three nights and three mornings in January, and the footage was edited into her video entitled *Positions*. At first glance the grainy aesthetics and static gaze of the camera underlines the connotations of surveillance technology. We could be looking at a potential site of danger and crime. What we actually see are fragments of a sketched, wordless narrative about the people using or passing through the park. In one scene children play in the snow, while in another someone walks a dog. The camera observes a person laying down to sleep on a bench, and the registration of the vulnerable gesture of crawling into a sleeping bag on a winter night reminds us that surveillance has the potential for solicitude and care. If there is any crime to be recorded here, it is that people are forced to live in a park without a roof over their heads or access to safety. That needs to be observed and registered.

*Positions* can be seen in dialogue with a series of black and white photographs entitled *A Tree Cannot Block the Water*. At first glance, they also have a crime scene aesthetic, hinting at clues or evidence. The bundles in the trees are actually the personal possessions of people using the park, although to the indifferent gaze they could arouse the same kind of suspicion as a bag abandoned in an airport or on a train. In the eyes of the local city council and the police, the mere presence

of the homeless represents a different kind of threat so the park is regularly cleared of the belongings of homeless people. By focusing the camera on the bundles in the treetops, *A Tree Cannot Block the Water* almost taunts the authorities whose job it is to register, and possibly deport, the unknown migrants. The personal possessions, blankets and clothes represent – like the blood tests – possible biometric traces of the people they want to identify. But the migrants remain beyond the searchlight of the authorities, like the figures in *Positions* who emerge as ghostly shadows or like the birds in the video that take off and fly away.

Most of the people in this project have now gone. Fortress Europe fortifies its inner and outer borders, surveilling and sorting today's travellers and migrants. But some of the experiences and views of the migrants in Copenhagen during the winter of 2012 have been captured. In a post-documentary gesture, Enghoff invited a group of them to photograph the city, and the result is a living archive of images in the form of postcards. As the title *The Unknown is Not a Memory* seems to suggest, Enghoff insists on the inclusive power of documentation as registering another's presence. The views of the postcards look back at Danish society with much more interest than society sees the migrants, if they are even seen at all. There are no signs in the images that the photographer has been seen or acknowledged by anyone else. The postcards bear testimony to moving in the cracks between visibility and invisibility and to the economic, political and ethical boundaries of globalisation – but most of all to the photographer who was there. \_



Positions ©Tina Enghoff

Migrant Documents: [www.tinaenghoff.com/case.php?case\\_id=29](http://www.tinaenghoff.com/case.php?case_id=29)

Disorder: [www.tinaenghoff.com/case.php?case\\_id=29&sort=7](http://www.tinaenghoff.com/case.php?case_id=29&sort=7)

Positions: [www.tinaenghoff.com/positions.php](http://www.tinaenghoff.com/positions.php)

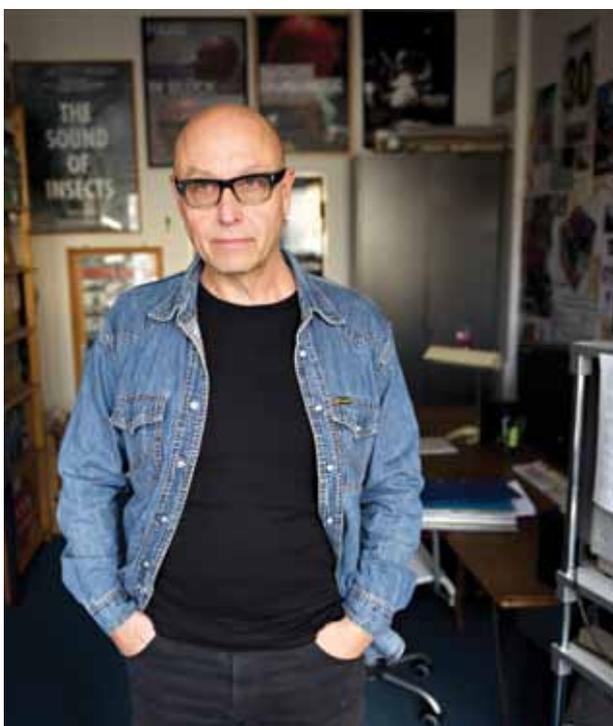
A Tree Cannot Block the Water: [www.tinaenghoff.com/case.php?case\\_id=29](http://www.tinaenghoff.com/case.php?case_id=29)

The Unknown is Not a Memory: [www.tinaenghoff.com/case.php?case\\_id=29&sort=14](http://www.tinaenghoff.com/case.php?case_id=29&sort=14)



**MALIK BENDJELLOUL**

The day of May 13th shook the international documentary community with news of the death of Malik Bendjelloul at 36. He took his own life after a struggle with depression. His remarkable talent is evident from his debut documentary *Searching for Sugar Man*, which earned him an Academy Award in 2013. “It was this lost masterpiece like a Cinderella story, a fairy tale,” Bendjelloul said of his protagonist Rodriguez’s life. The film displays great sensitivity and craftsmanship in its use of the audience’s imagination when this fairy tale gets a cinematic treatment. It is hard to fathom the empty space Bendjelloul leaves in his absence, and painful and painful to imagine what kind of extraordinary works could have been.



Michael Glawogger, courtesy of Gmb Akash

**MICHAEL GLAWOGER**

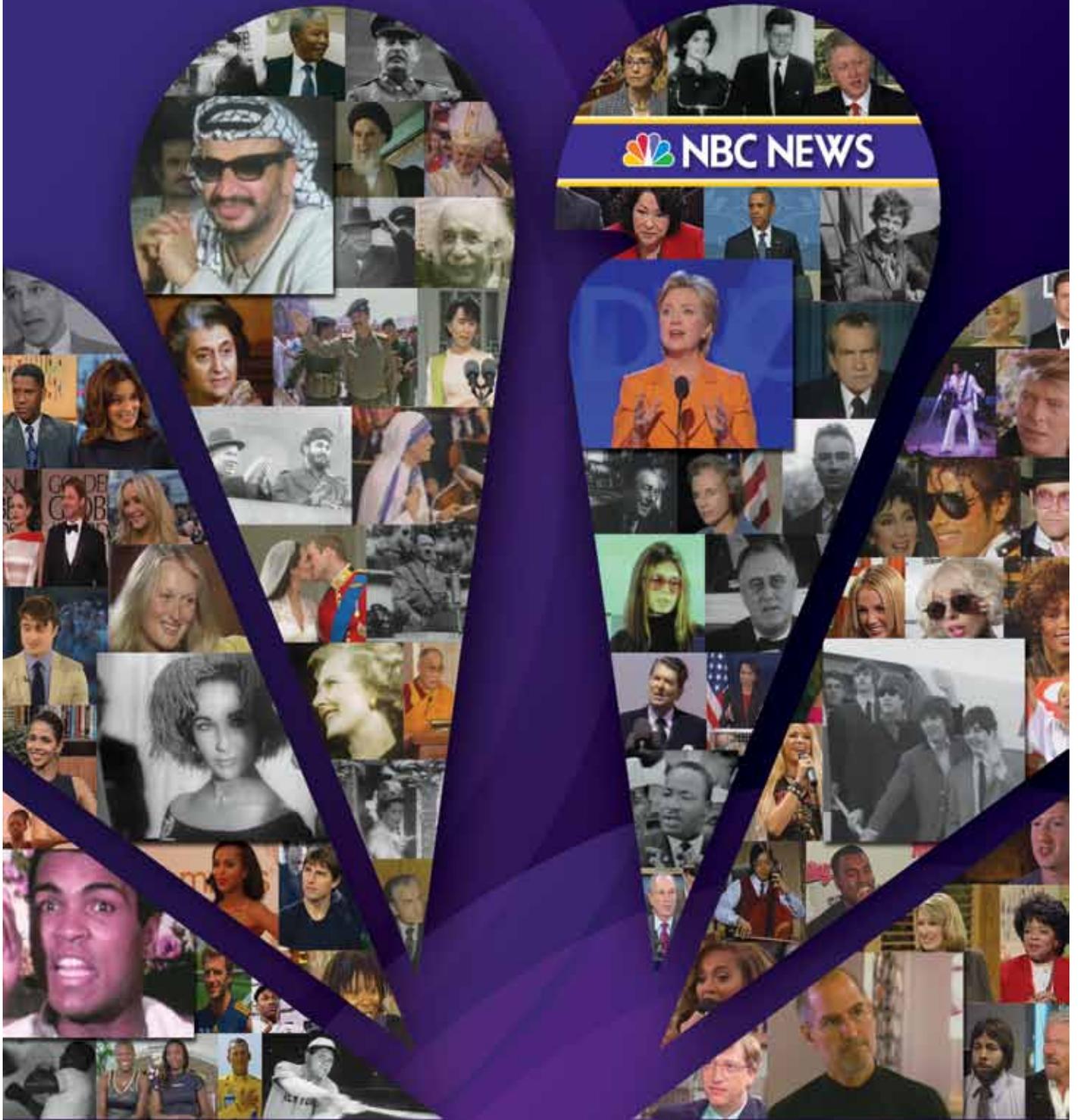
The sudden death of Michael Glawogger on 23rd of April is a huge loss to our community. We will be denied of his great works never finished or yet to be made. Glawogger directed famous works such as his trilogy *Megacities*, *Workingman’s Death*, and *Whore’s Glory*. Ally Derks , IDFA, comments: “We’re still in shock. One of the finest documentary filmmakers in the world passed away. We showed almost all his films and he frequently visited idfa. We will miss him and his outspoken vision on docs enormously.” He died from complications due to contracting malaria and typhoid in Liberia where he was making his film *Untitled: a film on nothing*. “I will travel the world for a year. I have no theme, no goal, nothing. I am sort of making it my goal to watch with curiosity to the maximum”. Who else would venture on a trip around the world for a year with this kind of openness to what may come? We are grateful for the works, he left behind and will miss the works that was to be.

**PETER LIECHTI**

Peter Liechti passed away on April 4th after a struggle with serious illness. He was a remarkable filmmaker with a language of his own. He experimented with storytelling and found creative, new ways to communicate almost impossible experiences to film. In his interview with DOX from October 2013, he confessed that his last film *Father’s Garden – The Love Of My Parents* was a step towards reconciliation with his parents and a way of finding peace within himself.

With his departure a unique voice in the world of experimental filmmaking has left us. \_

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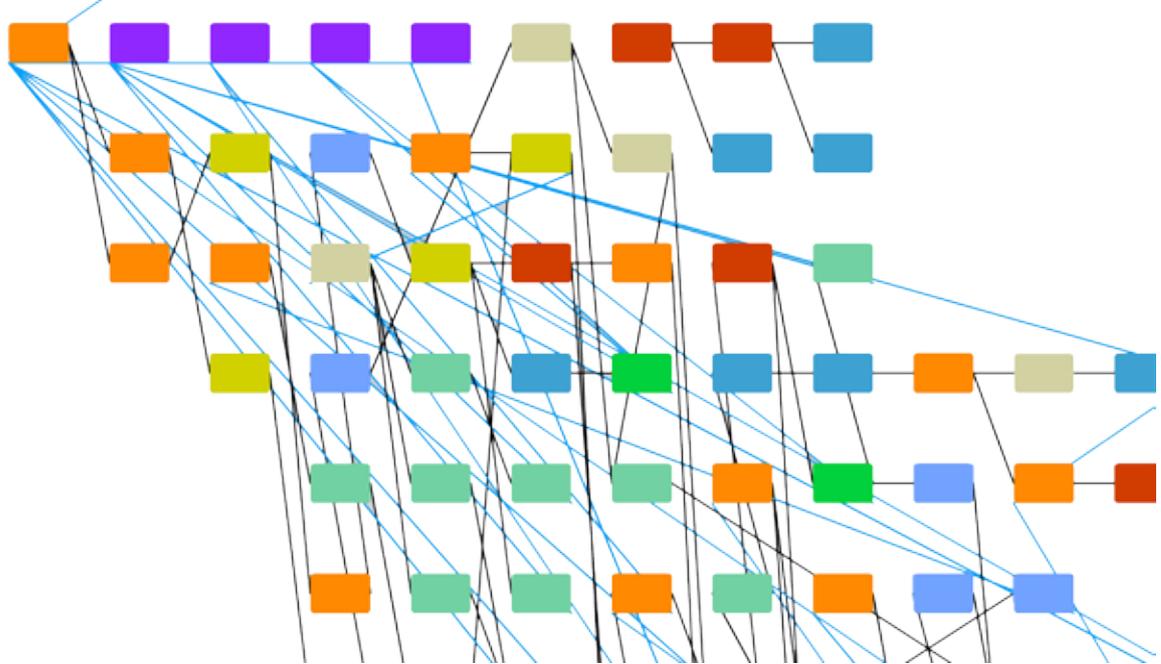
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# INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING TOOLS

## FRIENDS OR FOES?



*Interactive documentary filmmaker Suvi Andrea Helminen spoke to the creators of two interactive storytelling tools: how did they originate and will they inspire or reduce creativity in interactive storytelling?*

WORDS SUVI ANDREA HELMINEN

An increasing offer of interactive storytelling tools is making the production of interactive documentaries accessible to everyone. These tools can be compared to video editing programs: clips can be inserted into interactive timelines or rule-based structures, then text, music scores or additional interactive features can be added.

Korsakow is one of the tools that have been around the longest. It has been used for works such as *Planet Galata: A Bridge in Istanbul* (2010). Korsakow started as the creative vision of Florian Thalhofer and later evolved into a tool.

“I was studying at the University of the Arts in Berlin. In 2000, after a couple of years experimenting with interactive narration, I was making a film called *The Korsakow Syndrome*, a non-linear interactive film on alcohol. I had no experience in linear storytelling, and I tried to make an interactive story work. There were no tools around so I basically wrote software which used the logic of a computer to make a narration. In retrospect it was like mounting the horse backwards, as we say in German: “Ich habe das Pferd von hinten aufgezäumt. Had I known about the principles of linear storytelling beforehand, I probably wouldn’t have done it that way. Nevertheless, it worked. Thirteen years later it is still around.”

As with *Korsakow*, the origin of the tool ASAPS started with one person’s need for it. Creator Hartmut Koenitz was

working with video installations and became interested in creating interactive works. Later, as a PhD student at Georgia Tech, Koenitz formed a research group and began developing a tool. ASAPS is not specifically developed for video, but for interactive storytelling in a broader sense. It was recently used for the documentary game *Occupy Istanbul* (2014).

“I am just like everybody in interactive narrative: we all have our own tools,” Koenitz starts jokingly, because it has been like this for years. Until now most of the significant interactive documentaries have been programmed from scratch, fulfilling an author’s specific vision for a single project. Koenitz continues:

**It was like mounting the horse backwards**  
Florian Thalhofer

“I really wanted to make something that would be easy to use, and that I could teach. I believe in a small iterative approach, so the tool is constantly undergoing changes. There was one term where I taught ASAPS and pushed out fourteen new versions, because there were so many suggestions from my students.”

*Korsakow* was developed further in a university context as well.

“In 2000, one of my professors wanted to start a new class on interactive narration and we thought about what kind of tool we could use. That was the beginning of *Korsakow*. We stripped it down, and made it accessible for other people. With *Korsakow*, you build stories from different recipes unlike in traditional storytelling. You have minimal pieces of narration that we call ‘Smallest Narrative Units’. Then you create rules on how these units come together. The result is a narration that changes every time you look at it.”

Koenitz similarly built ASAPS to allow possibilities for creating changing and dynamic story structures.

“To me interactive narrative, fiction or non-fiction, should not be about making existing story structures interactive. I really want to avoid the Frytagian arc. I don’t want to have a notion of climax, because I believe we have the opportunity to go beyond that. In interactive media we can explore different types of structures. Interactive narrative is about what comes out of participation and procedurality.”

### **Interactive narrative is about what comes out of participation and procedurality.**

Hartmut Koenitz

Despite the possibility to create dynamic story structures, Thalhoffer believes that the film industry in general will confine itself to linear forms in the foreseeable future.

“I think there is just one reason for maintaining linear forms: because we are used to it. We made linear films in the past because of the technical reason that, originally, film was stored on a reel. You had this strip of film, and I think that is the reason why film is linear. Drawing from linear storytelling traditions just didn’t make sense when creating a structure for interactive works. Why on earth would you structure data that is on a computer hard drive in a linear way?”

Maybe it is not because we are used to the linear forms, but simply because they serve another purpose: passive entertainment – a reflective space in which the audience can absorb a story without having to interact with it. In our nature, do we have an innate bias towards processing the world around us in a linear way? According to Thalhoffer, we don’t.

“No! Look at brain scans. The brain does not work linearly. I think it is harmful to us when we try to organize our lives in a linear way. Our lives and our perceptions of the world are not linear.”

In changeable story structures the outcome of each individual viewer’s experience can be vastly different, and the outcome unpredictable. Directors don’t have the same amount of control over the message that is conveyed as they do in linear works. Koenitz says that directors have to be willing to accept a reduced and somewhat different role.

“It may be a challenge, especially for people who are already well versed in documentary filmmaking. The editing decision is no longer yours alone. You have a co-editor: the user. ... In interactive media, the author becomes a story-world builder in a sense and offers potential paths. And that is an altogether different approach. Some authors are more concerned with the integrity of their artistic visions and that cannot always be preserved in interactive changing media, but if you want to embrace this media you clearly cannot be the kind of director you are used to being.”

More and more directors are, however, experimenting with interactivity in various ways. Despite the growing interests, Thalhoffer does not experience an increased openness towards new ideas.

“The film industry doesn’t want radical change. These are very boring times. People need to digest all the culture that has come from the past. We are in a time of remixing and reshuffling stuff. It is not a time of revolutionary new ideas.”

Thalhoffer is worried about the current development in the interactive documentary field because many of the successful interactive works stick to a semi-linear narrative structure.

“Most producers look back on the successful models of the past to develop content for the new medium. And this also shapes how authors, as well as audiences, learn or don’t learn new ways of thinking about story. There are authors who are interested in tools that allow new ways of storytelling, but they are still striving for this very traditional story arc. The author is pre-thinking the thoughts that the viewer should have. Now you have the possibility to make great, amazing new stuff that has never been seen before. Instead it seems like computers are being used to reproduce stuff as it was in the past with a little added interactivity.”

Until now the interactive documentary landscape has been free of conventions, a space of experimentation. The emergence of more and more tools is a double-edged sword. They could push the field forward as it becomes increasingly accessible for everyone to produce interactive works, but potentially also limit it to certain forms of creative expression, dictated by what the tools afford. The question is how the tools will influence interactive production in the future. Maybe tools will take over because of the lower production cost. Or maybe they will merely be used for prototyping. Koenitz thinks it is an under-researched area. He draws parallels to trends in video games.

“I definitely think there is an influence of tools on production. Right now in the game world there are a ton of Unity games, because that’s the most popular tool right now. Similarly in the late 1990s everybody was using Macromedia Director to create multimedia works.”

Some interactive storytelling tools have a recognizable aesthetic, while others are more open to customisation. Many of the emerging tools vanish as fast as they appear. The questions are which of them will triumph and which affordances become the most desired. Only the future will tell...

Most of the tools have limited free versions, which can be downloaded and tested.

Korsakow can be downloaded here: [korsakow.org/](http://korsakow.org/)

To try ASAPS, write an email through this homepage:

[advancedstories.net](http://advancedstories.net) and receive a download link for a beta version.

Other tools include Klynt [klynt.net](http://klynt.net) which was developed by the team behind the interactive documentary “Journey to the End of Coal” (2008). There is also Zeega [zeega.com](http://zeega.com), which was used for several of the Localore projects (2012-13).

For map-based projects a good option is Mapbox, [mapbox.com](http://mapbox.com)

For interactive timelines there is Tiki-Toki, [www.tiki-toki.com](http://www.tiki-toki.com)

To gather photos and audio material for a crowd sourced documentary, a possible platform is Vojo [vojo.co](http://vojo.co), which was used for Sandy Storyline (2013).

Try them and may the strongest tools prevail!



# MIRROR, MIRROR

*Thomas Balmès won the Cinematography Award at Sundance Film Festival for his disturbingly beautiful Happiness. A film featuring characters with no sense of (self)representation, Balmès doesn't think in terms of beauty.*

WORDS HARRIETTE YAHR \* PHOTO TBC PRODUCTIONS AND SUNDANCE INSTITUTE

Thomas Balmès is an independent documentary director and producer whose films, often shot in remote locations, present new angles to noteworthy events, inviting us to question perspective and truth. Previous documentaries include *Bosnia Hotel* (about the Bosnian war from the point of view of Kenyan warriors), *Maharadjah Burger* (about mad-cow disease from the Indian viewpoint) and *Christ Comes to the Papuans* (about conversion to Christianity in Papua New Guinea). His last film, *Babies*, offered glimpses of childhood from around the world in countries such as Japan, Mongolia, Namibia, and the United States.

Balmès did most of the shooting on *Happiness*, sharing DP credit with Nina Bernfeld. He uses hypnotic images and deft, almost magical direction to capture a turning point in history. In 1999, King Jigme Wangchuck cautiously approved the use of televisions and the Internet in Bhutan, hoping it would benefit the “gross national happiness” of his country. Balmès documents the last days of life before the shift. In a remote village called Laya where there isn't even electricity (yet) and told through the eyes of an eight-year-old monk named Peyangki, the seduction of technology takes root. *Happiness* is ultimately a meditation on change and a mirror for our relationship with modernization.

**Q&A** **What stood out the most to me is the beauty of *Happiness*. It almost felt like a narrative, a fiction film, in the way it was shot. Can you talk a little about that?**

My previous film *Babies* liberated me from the idea that documentary should have a specific form. Working on a nonverbal film, I do trust more than before in the possibility of telling a story with very little dialogue, mainly through visuals, which is what I tried to do with this film. I think that documentaries suffer from cultural dogmatism of what should be done or not, unlike fiction. With this film I tried as much as I could to use the tools of fiction to tell a true story, with true characters and real situations. I do hate repeating myself and I find it quite exciting to search for new forms of cinematic writing.

My initial objective was to make a film about how television would entirely transform a society. That is how I ended up travelling to one of the most remote villages of Bhutan. My encounter with the Laya villagers and Peyangki was very visual, since I couldn't understand a single word of their language. I had a feeling that Peyangki expressed so much by his simple presence. By telling a story with very little dialogue, using silence instead, and very little action, with careful cinematography, I wanted a formal treatment that is exactly the opposite of what has now become the common language for television.

**Can you talk more about the cinematography, how your use of lenses affected the way the story came across?**

We only worked with prime lenses. We never used any zoom. We came very close to the characters at all times, so no need for zoom. Sometimes I would tell the people involved, "Wait one moment before you continue your conversation because I need to either change position or change the lens." This is something some directors would consider impossible to do, but I don't have any problem with that as long as I do not feel it's affecting the continuation of a conversation or the action. Depending on where you shoot, and what kind of culture the people have with the camera and with the concept of a film, it's totally different.

**I wanted a formal treatment that is exactly the opposite of what has now become the common language for television.**

**How would you say it worked in Bhutan with their culture?**

Apart from the film I have done in the States, I have only been shooting in cases where people don't have television; don't go to the movies; don't have a culture of images. So they have a very neutral relationship with the camera. Culturally, they are not into the representation, into the worrying or concern about how they are going to be represented.

**I also found your choice of music so interesting. It showed the playful side of your character.**

This is something totally new for me. Until my film *Babies*, I never used any music. I was much more stylistically radical. Music was something I would never even consider. I did this film (*Happiness*) mainly for my kids. I wanted to make a film to try to explain to them why we don't have television at home. Also I wanted this film to be seen by other kids. I also wanted the film to be very accessible. I would say music is a kind of compromise, to make the film more accessible and also stylistically in terms of language to get to something that is closer to fiction.

**Yes, you play with the genre, and with expectation. The film itself, if you turned off the sound and didn't know what it was about is just beautiful cinematographically. We don't get this so much in documentary.**

This is somewhat problematic. Some of the journalists I have spoken to are almost disturbed by the beauty of the images. Beyond beauty, I am trying to do a film that speaks visually and is meaningful. When I frame and compose, I am trying to make something watchable – shots and scenes and sequences, a few minutes without any dialogue that are purely visual. I am not thinking in terms of beauty. I am thinking about using the specificity of the medium of documentary with reality and images. So I am trying to get the least verbal as I can and to be able to develop the story mostly visually. And this is why I picked this character Peyangki because the very first time I met him he was super expressive, joyful and also sad. His character was quite complex.

**The way you tell the story through his eyes, we almost saw the battle was already lost, that the seduction of television and the Internet had arrived.**

You know I showed the film at IDFA and I brought my kids who are 7, 9 and 10. Not an easy audience. And they watched the film subtitled in English, and they don't speak English. They were mesmerized without understanding any of the dialogue. So what I am really trying to do is have characters that are expressive. I am trying to film in a way where dialogue is minimal, almost an option.

**I could not imagine a better way to end the film with the blank stares. I don't want to give away too much, but it really affected me. Was this your intention from the beginning to have this kind of ending?**

I knew very quickly I was not so interested in having conclusions about the consequences of television in the village. I needed to find a very specific way to stop the film – at the moment where people would almost expect it to start. Many people were keen on getting a scene showing the consequences of how people would react to the first images of TV, what would change in the village after that. I was not willing to do that because I think it would be very banal. I needed something visually strong.

From my own experience, I am fascinated by the eyes of my kids. We have no TV and sometimes we watch DVDs at home. They become like total zombies; you can't speak to them or try to do anything if there is a screen with something going on. It is like they all have exactly the same face. I have always been interested in trying to find a way of showing that situation. And I felt this could be a good ending.

**Would the great irony be if someone watches *Happiness* in Bhutan, say on the Internet?**

What is interesting is that the film has already started to create some conversation and debate about the content of television in Bhutan and elsewhere. I am always surprised about how few films deal with this issue of television and screens, in general. I don't think that there are that many things that have changed the world in the last 20 years like television has. \_

**HAPPINESS**

Directed by Thomas Balmès  
Finland, France, 2013, 75 minutes



# THE ART OF LOSING YOUR WAY

*At Visions du Réel this year, the disorientating and highly sensory film Les tourmentes won a well deserved special mention. DOX sat down for a talk on getting lost with the film's director Pierre-Yves Vanderweerd.*

WORDS VIBEKE BRYLD

*L*es tourmentes is a special kind of storm, a storm in which many get lost and never return. The film creates a poetic space in a French desert haunted both by storms, the past, and lost souls. It's very rare to see a film that allows itself to let the senses and poetry be the guiding principles instead of a traditional narrative structure. These are much more disorientating guides, but the film isn't just a film of the lost ones. It's a film that leads the viewer astray and let's us get lost, as well. We are also lost in the storm.

The readings from the guiding principles for shepherds of Lozère on how to call back or commemorate the people who got lost in the storms run throughout the film. They explain how these storms rip away the veil between the past and the present. The space is haunted in many ways and on

many levels. Through the storm a shepherd leads her herd, mental patients commemorate the dead mental patients in a graveyard, a man rings the bell that calls the lost souls back to the village. Nothing is explained. But the rituals, the cultural marks in the desert, the guide for shepherds and the long walk all lead us through a drama, where the opposing forces of sanity and insanity, nature and culture, past and present become muddled as our senses are drowned in the sounds and the wildness of the imagery.

Previously Vanderweerd has made films in the Sahara Desert, but this time he found a desert in his backyard. He is interested in the space where man and nature become interdependent, where their paths and destinies are intertwined.



**Q&A** How did the film begin – with the storm, the sheep or the melancholia?

I actually live in the screening location, and I own the flock of sheep. Most of my films have been shot in the Sahara. But Lozère is also a desert. It's the least populated area in France, and it has a strong relationship to nature.

The winter is central to the people of Lozère. It stretches from October to end of May, and is both a source of fear and attraction. Les tourmentes is a natural phenomenon. They are snow storms where people get blinded, get lost, and end up going around in circles. For centuries people have gotten lost in the storm. There are bell towers where the bell is rung to draw people back to the villages. The people, who get lost are called "the lost". The sheep also wear bells, and you send them out, so the lost people can come towards the flock. As a filmmaker, this strikes me as very poetic.

**In the film, there is a voiceover that seems to lead the shepherd in the film. Where did the text of guiding principles for shepherds come from?**

The practice of calling back the lost ones doesn't exist anymore. But there are still shepherds, who know the old practices. So I collected their knowledge and wrote them down in the old regional language Occitan, that isn't spoken anymore. The texts are recommendations for a shepherd on how to send out the flock, call back the lost and commemorate them by making a sacrifice. The practice doesn't exist anymore, but I wanted to find a way to be there. I didn't want to be a witness, but to live it in a sense. I wanted to evoke the feeling.

So over three years I built the flock, and had special bells made, bells that carry the sound far, with the idea of bringing people back from the storm in the present, but also the lost people in a more general sense.

**What is the meaning of "Les tourmentes"?**

It means storms, but also refers to the melancholia that hits the people of the area because of the long winters. Many of the people I met in the psychiatric ward were affected by melancholia. I didn't want them to explain anything, but just to feel their melancholia through their gestures and gaze.

Three thousand people, all mental patients, were buried in St Alban. And I would go with the patients from the psychiatric ward to the graveyard to visit them. The patients themselves said: 'We should go and send more love and comfort for them, and we should find their names.' So we found old journals with all 3000 names and their medical histories. And this is how the reading of their names became part of the film.

The voiceover is a current psychiatrist. But the patients also said that 'WE should say their names.' So they also say the names, sometimes in whispers, sometimes as if they are calling them back. The whole film was created from sheepherding, and the ritual of

calling back the lost ones, physically lost and mentally lost – and bringing them back.

**You use a form that's intrinsically intertwined with the theme of the film. The viewer gets lost with the lost ones. We are overwhelmed by the noise, the snow, and wind. The voiceover tells us that the storm rips the veil between past and present, but maybe also between reason and insanity?**

Yes, I'm very interested in the border between reason and lack of reason. None of my works is about analysing, but allowing certain forms to emerge, allowing both the public and the filmmaker to get lost at any time. For this reason, there is no linear approach. I hold poetic relations dear. I want each spectator to make his own journey to the point where it is uncomfortable. I want to allow for different journeys. Part of getting lost refers to time; the past resurfaces. It's about the emotions that inhabit the spectator. We live in a world where we expect linearity, but it's important to get lost, to let instinct take over, to let go. This is a more circular form of experience. And this tourmentes, this melancholia, this form of torment brings us in contact with our own torments.



**Your film contains many marks from the past, the graveyard, the megaliths etc. What does physical memory mean to you?**

I'm very interested in what elements stay when time passes. Place names, for instance, are that mark. They evoke both collective and individual memories. I wanted to make a spectral film that plays with the borderline between the physical and the mental, and I also wanted to slow down the passing of time. Preserve the past, so to speak, through evocation, through the calling back and through remembering.

**The soundscape plays a significant role in the film, and the sense of getting lost in the storm. How did you work with sound?**

The whole film is shot on 16 mm. without sound, so the sound is made separately. The sound works to create a sense of untemporality. We re-recorded sounds of nature and layered them: the rubbing of stones is layered with the sound of fire, so the sound itself becomes timeless, and impossible to determine specifically. The sounds come from a human interiority, from the energy of earth, and the sounds from the past come back to us now.

**Why did you choose this place, and why now?**

I feel after having explored the territories in Sahara, I have found a collective imaginary space there. With Lozère I found it at home – a similar collective imagination, dominated by nature. Man doesn't dominate nature. And this is a space where there is a presence that is invisible, and the imaginable is tangible. \_

**LES TOURMENTES**

Directed by Pierre-Yves Vandeweerdt  
Belgium, France, 2014, 90 minutes.

# I AM A HOUSE

*In Wim Wenders' latest project Cathedrals of Culture, he challenged 5 other directors to delve into the souls of buildings*

WORDS PAMELA COHN

In *My Architect, A Son's Journey*, Nathaniel Kahn's superb documentary from 2003, he pays homage to his father Louis Kahn's extraordinary career in architecture. When the filmmaker talks to master architect I.M. Pei, he comments on Louis Kahn's special bond with his "best" client, Dr. Jonas Salk, the medical pioneer who developed the polio vaccine, one of modern medicine's more important and ground breaking discoveries in life sciences.

The scientist and the architect collaborated on the vision of building the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, located in La Jolla, a city on California's Pacific coast. Today, the iconic structure, completed in the early 1960s, continues to house doctors, scientists and researchers in pursuit of creating prolonged, healthier lives for the human species. Pei says about Louis Kahn's creation: "Architecture has to have the element of time. ... That's the measure. That's why the Salk center will always be as perfect as it was when it was conceived. The teakwood may fade away – it probably has – but the spirituality of that project will remain. That building will stand the test of time, no question about it." Do buildings have timeless spirits? And if they do, how is that manifested in relation to the people that pass through them?

German filmmaker Wim Wenders commissioned five other top directors to collaborate with him on his latest project using 3D technology, a format he used to gorgeous affect in his film *Pina* about the great contemporary dance choreographer, Pina Bausch. His proposition for *Cathedrals of Culture* was to portray six structures to explore "the souls of buildings." What would these structures say to us in auto-portraiture? The 3-hour, 6-part omnibus project had a couple of rules of engagement for its makers – the imperative, of course, to use 3D film technology as a tool for each director's vision; the other, that each structure should "speak" in a distinct first-person voice.

The only director to break this last directive was Robert Redford, who chose to profile Louis Kahn's Salk Institute. He felt that the open environment of the Institute with its vast empty spaces, precise symmetrical wood and glass structures, and submerged crevasses that allow the natural light of Southern California's coastal zone to enter the buildings, would be best served in a mosaic-like approach.

We hear from the scientists and custodians that work there, mixed with montages of archival footage with Kahn and Salk themselves speaking about their dream for the building which was inspired by their mutual desire to have the Institute resemble a living organism, the melding of art and science into a structure that would appear to be an organic outgrowth of its natural surroundings. Vast swaths of sky and sea merge in wondrous shooting by Ed Lachman. The use of overlapping voiceover from the past and the present accompany a stunning visual exploration of the way the building inspires the scientists who work within it every day, an almost monastic-like retreat for its questing inhabitants.

The other buildings profiled in *Cathedrals of Culture* are the Berlin Philharmonic in Germany by Wenders; the National Library in St. Petersburg, Russia by Austrian director Michael Glawogger; the Centre Pompidou in Paris by Brazilian director Karim Aïnouz (who is an architect by training); the Opera House in Oslo by Norwegian director, Margreth Olin; and, Halden Prison, also in Norway, filmed by Danish director, Michael Madsen. It is the last two that, for me, were the most emotionally engaging pieces besides Redford's contribution. Here, the three dimensionality of the camera work is on best display, creating a resonance of space and time that illustrates our mostly subliminal engagement with structures that will exist long after we pass on.

The films of Wenders, Aïnouz and Glawogger are all cinematically exquisite, to be sure. I appreciated the humour and innate apologetics at its lack of a façade and exposed innards via the shy male voice of the Pompidou. Glawogger's portrayal of the way the almost all-female custodial staff of the St. Petersburg Library ignore the whispering voices in the endless carrels and corridors, filled with the echoes of passages from the works of Gogol, Brodsky and Dostoevsky is both haunting and elegiac. Ultimately, however, they present rather mundane institutional tours rather than engaging portraiture, barely moving beyond a superficial relationship with the animus, or governing spirit, of these cultural palaces.

The magnificent Operahuset is the home of the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, situated in the Bjørvika section of Oslo at the head of the Oslofjord. With its gigantic expanse of over a thousand rooms and its angled exterior surfaces covered in Italian marble and white granite, the structure looks like an iceberg emerging from the water parked right smack in the city's center. But this grand expanse's voice is modest and it is sitting there waiting for us. "I am a house. They put me here. In this neighbourhood of arrivals and departures, among the broken-hearted, and the open hearted. They widened their circle and let me in. They gave me a seat. ... I am a house. That's all. Until you step into me, until you step onto me, until your voice echoes in my corridors, until I feel the lightness of your feet. Until then, I am a house."

Intense, lithe and graceful figures move towards us and away, with playfulness, curiosity, beckoning us into their peculiar and magical world, Øystein Mamen's camera dancing along beside them. And then they are frozen in medias res like statues. Shifting between the rigors of grueling rehearsals, endless makeup and costume fittings, against that of the opulence of the performances, Olin herself embodies the voice of this grand House, an affectionate, loving voice talking directly to the denizens that live both in and outside her fortress, emphasizing – not unkindly – that while the



Operahuset in Oslo, seen by director Margreth Olin

fragile human bodies within her will disperse with time, she will stay standing to welcome a new influx, decade after decade, time after time.

There are several deft shifts in timbre throughout the poetic text – co-written with Bjorn Olaf Johannessen – that describes the structure’s sense of longing in facing what a human body can experience with “your weightless moments, your impossible moves, your aching muscles.” There is stoicism in the face of our ultimate abandonment of her, as well. “For that is what a house can do, to stay when you go. How I wish I could travel with you. ...27 bones in every hand, 43 muscles in a face, 100 thousand kilometres of blood vessels, 3 billion heartbeats before it stops and leaves me without you. And then – another you, because you created me to outlive you.”

In the case of Halden Prison, Michael Madsen says that he had to do a bit of convincing when he proposed his idea of filming a high security prison as his chosen “cathedral of culture.” Madsen was interpreting “cathedral” as an entity that can shape and mold its inhabitants, ultimately creating an isolated and imaginary community.

### **Do buildings have timeless spirits?**

Who would have thought that a maximum-security facility deep in the forests of Norway – albeit a “humane prison” – would provoke a fascinating architectural discussion? Madsen introduces his film with a query from philosopher Michel Foucault from *Discipline and Punish*: “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals – which all resemble prisons?” All of these places have proven to be rather unfriendly, even downright hostile, to the human spirit. But through Madsen’s lens and the narration from the prison’s

lead psychologist, Benedicte C. Westin, we get access to an inner sanctum that many of us would otherwise not be able to penetrate. Westin’s voice traverses a liminal scale, something between human and robotic with its precise spacing, oblique, indefinable accent and monosyllabic lexicon.

It is almost as if this voice is speaking to a child, giving him a personal tour of a possible future. “Inside of me there’s a whole community of its own. Everything, cells and kitchen and schools and workplace, forest gardens, you have everything, even a little shop where you can buy things. It’s like a little village.” But then without any change in tone, she also says, “Before you pass through [my gates] you can be whoever you want to be. But once you have passed through me you become a prisoner or a prison officer. I’m the one who defines who you are. I’m the difference between being a prisoner – and being you.” She goes on to say that she can see and hear everything that goes on and that she knows all about everybody that resides or comes to work within her walls. The tone is eerie but playful, straightforward, and then sly. It’s a wonderful bit of directing on Madsen’s part, both visually and aurally, the floating camera wafting through the environs like a curious ghost.

This is the audience’s privilege on these journeys – through sound and vision, voice, light and shadow, we also can be sojourners through the annals of time. As the Oslo Opera House reminds us: “...what I can offer in return is to remember just this one thing. To remember you.” \_

### **CATHEDRALS OF CULTURE**

Directed by Wim Wenders, Robert Redford, Michael Madsen, Michael Glawogger, Margreth Olin, Karim Ainouz, Germany, Denmark, 2014, 165 minutes

# HOW INTERACTIVITY IS EVOLVING THE DOCUMENTARY

*The emergence of multimedia interactivity in documentary filmmaking leads us to dig up that tiresome, nagging question, “what makes a documentary a documentary?” Most people I know gave up on this question a long time ago, and settled for the (unsatisfying) answer, “you know it when you see it.”*

WORDS JASON BRUSH

Questions of ontological principles aside, one of the best purposes for a dividing line between documentary and journalism, or between documentary and fiction, seems to be managing audience expectations. Most of my favourite documentaries, and documentarians – Errol Morris, Chris Marker, Werner Herzog, to name a few – have diligently worked to blur the line between genres. But, even for genre-bending work, the documentary label is useful. One knows to expect something of the “real” world with “real” people in a movie – just like it might be helpful to know whether you’re going to watch a horror film or a slapstick comedy.

Beyond categorization for marketing purposes, a definition of “documentary” can be useful in framing a filmmaker’s artistic practice. John Grierson’s original definition of the documentary as a “creative treatment of actuality” is as useful as any. When we talk about a “treatment of actuality” in traditional documentary film, we’re talking about capturing and editing images and sound of actual people, places, and things.

While most people would agree on this point, the “creative” bit of Grierson’s definition is the hang up. An example are the arguments inspired by the dramatizations in Errol Morris’s *The Thin Blue Line*; the creative process in Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing*; the openly political motivations of filmmakers such as Michael Moore. People spend a lot of time trying to critique a documentary film they don’t like or disagree with by trying to deny that film’s very existence as authentic documentary. By saying that a film isn’t a documentary, one can, somehow, negate its merits altogether. However, as soon as you accept documentary as an interpretive art form, a critique of a film’s merit on whether it is or is not a documentary quickly fades. Instead, one is left with a critique of whether the film and its arguments are sound or not – a much more interesting question.

Grierson’s definition holds up with new forms of interactive documentary at the most fundamental level: interactive documentary, at its core, aims to be a creative treatment of actuality. However, when we talk about what “creative” means, what “treatment” means, what “actuality” means, interactive documentary operates in some very different ways than traditional documentary. Because of these shifts, it’s sometimes hard to tell what’s a documentary and what isn’t, not because of the question of authenticity vs. creative manipulation, but instead, because the language of storytelling is so new.

There are a few, primary ways in which interactive media is evolving the documentary form: capturing media, interpreting media, and experiencing media.

## CAPTURING MEDIA

The heart of filmmaking is the moving image. Whether filmed or animated, movies are made by a camera (whether real or virtual) filming something of the world. There are many aspects of this in documentary, but because of the documentarian’s interest in “actuality,” they all involve the act of observing reality and capturing it in those moving images. Among the many means by which a documentarian might use to capture and depict reality are through the use of statistics and data. The familiar depiction of data in documentary usually involves people showing charts and or other visualizations, and discussing them (Davis Guggenheim’s *An Inconvenient Truth*, for example).

When one presents data on a computer, it’s a bit like looking at a film through the viewfinder of a camera. Instead of looking at content as something fixed, content that one consumes, one looks at content as something one can shape and manipulate, presenting media on a device, which is not just meant for the passive delivery of content, but for the active manipulation of information. This suggests a whole new mode of documentary, which is based on data visualization rather than images.

Jonathan Harris and Sep Kamvar’s *We Feel Fine* and Pitch Interactive’s *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* are good examples of this. These films depict reality by transforming raw information into a media experience, allowing the audience to investigate different facets of that media through an interface. Instead of a camera, they use data capture to create the raw materials for their experiences.

*We Feel Fine* searches blog entries for sentences that begin with the words “I feel,” and, “I am feeling,” and identifies the feeling the author has expressed (e.g., happy, sad, lonely, etc.). Those expressions of human emotions are then recorded in a database, which Harris and Kamvar use to generate various interpretive visualizations, in which colourful bubbles that represent individual feelings bounce about on screen like a sea of rainbow-coloured fireflies. The behaviour of each particle is determined by the emotion it represents. The viewer can then filter and sort the feelings to find patterns and insights.

*Out of Sight, Out of Mind* uses data about U.S. drone

strikes in Pakistan – the date, location, deaths (including civilians and children), and information about the target – to tell the story of this ongoing clandestine military operation. The visualization also aggregates articles in the news about drones in general, to provide context for the larger trend of their use in these situations.

As data collection intensifies with the continual generation of data online and the inter-connectivity of our experiences, the documentarian no longer has to deliberately choose to film a subject in order to capture its reality; instead, she or he can, conceivably, turn to raw data as the source material from which a documentary can be shaped. And, for some subjects, the generation of data doesn't end when a piece is created. It continues to grow and evolve for years after its creation. In other words, interactive documentaries that visualize data on an ongoing basis don't have a fixed or final state.

Are these documentaries? You could argue that by Grierson's definition they are. However, their claim as documentaries is dependent on meeting the creative component of Grierson's definition – without subjective, aesthetic interpretation, data cannot transcend its raw form.

Interactive documentaries that are built upon data visualization as a key piece of media face the challenge of being understood as documentary because of some of the inherent obstacles that data visualization has in terms of working as a storytelling device. If data visualization can behave as a sort of documentary, what is the storytelling onus put upon these pieces?

Not all documentary is narrative, but it's easy to see those works on a continuum with more story-based experiences by virtue of being time-based, cinema's singular attribute as an art form. Data visualization – particularly in terms of its

print-based graphic design heritage – often points toward or describes stories, but seldom immerses the audience in a story, mostly because one usually doesn't experience data visualizations over time. Minard's visualization of Napoleon's March to Russia is the canonical example of a story told through data visualization. However, when we look at his famous poster, we don't experience its information in time. We might take several minutes to look at it and read it, but its information isn't deliberately meted out over time for dramatic effect. It's just a single image.

The absence of time as a creative tool in most data visualizations – or, the absence of manipulation of the audience's experience of time – keeps most data visualizations from behaving as storytelling tools in the familiar sense. Once time is introduced as a mechanism, the familiar constructs of story can be employed: characters, conflict, etc. One of the many attributes that makes *Bear 71* remarkable is its blending of data and storytelling, using its data collection not as an output, but as a mechanism to inspire, structure and stitch together other media. It's the engine behind the story.

#### INTERPRETING MEDIA

One could argue that much of interactive documentary is really just a new editorial process. Instead of editing together raw footage in a linear fashion, the interactive documentarian adds a layer of navigation which allows the viewer to construct and interpret the story on his or her own. Alexandre Bracher's *Gaza/Sderdot* is the archetypal example of this approach. The footage could have been made into a straightforward linear narrative, but the navigation itself empowers a different type of experience and personal interpretation. >

*Just a Reflektor*, 2013



Jonathan Harris's *I Love Your Work* and Isabelle Fougère & Miquel Dewever-Plana's *Alma* are other similar examples. In interactive documentary, the viewer is the editor, and the design of the navigation is a critical component of the creative treatment of reality. In the strongest work, how the user can navigate says something distinct about the subject. In *Gaza/Sderot*, the navigation visualizes the wall separating its subjects, as well as the idea of simultaneous, yet divided, experiences that the piece seeks to illuminate.

These interfaces aren't invisible as they might be in the way one watches a traditional movie. When we sit in a theatre, or on our couch in the living room, the "interface" for watching that content is nearly transparent. Modes of exhibition vary in scale and quality, but at their essence, they're exactly the same – a glowing rectangle in which moving images are seen.

Introducing interactivity into documentary requires introducing a new mediating element into the experience. There are two primary types of interactivity: The first is interactivity in which the interaction is designed to say something specific about the subject, or the filmmaker's interpretation of that subject. The interactivity transforms how the audience interprets what they see and understands the piece's themes.

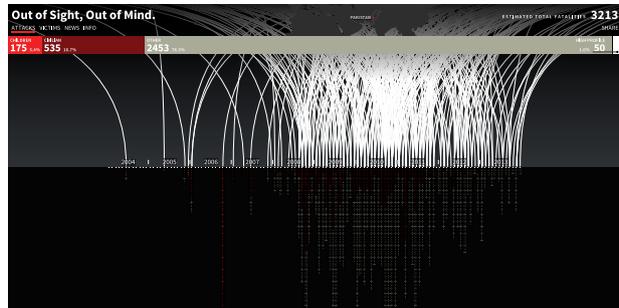
For instance, in Jonathan Harris's *I Love Your Work*, which is a documentary about a group of young women making feminist, lesbian pornography in New York, the interface makes you hunt and peck through a dense tapestry of imagery, making you simultaneously aware of your sensitivity to which bits are pornographic and which are mundane, and also aware of the way in which our lives are constructed by a series of mostly forgettable moments in which moments of eros are wedged.

The second type of interactivity has less of a formal, interpretive purpose, and is instead used to blend different types of media together that couldn't be combined without an interface. In this type of interactivity, the interaction is often used to give the user some choice about branches of a storyline to explore in depth, or to pace their experience. The "scrollytelling" experience, for instance, in *Snowfall*, which uses video, maps and other multimedia elements to enhance text-based journalism, is an example. The interface itself says nothing about the themes of the piece, that of grief, fear, thrill-seeking, wilderness, man-versus-nature. Instead it provides a framework that allows users to explore the different perspectives that comprise the story in a self-directed fashion.

#### PARTICIPATING IN MEDIA

An interactive element changes the media experience. However, our relationship with the screen as a kind of portal into a constructed but distant reality is not necessarily changed by the interactivity, in and of itself. Despite the control and choice that interactivity can provide, we're not necessarily implicated into the actuality that's being portrayed. In other words, it's not our actuality.

Interactivity presents an opportunity for the audience to play a participatory role in the making of a piece through its interaction. For instance, there are two music videos, which on the surface might not appear to be documentary at all, but evolve into documentary through virtue of a viewer's interactions. In Vincent Morriset's *Just a Reflektor*, made for the band Arcade Fire, the viewer uses his or her mobile



*Out of Sight, Out Of Mind, 2013*

phone as a means of controlling the image on their computer screen; one then can insert images of oneself into the piece. In Chris Milk's *The Johnny Cash Project*, participants create their own hand-drawn interpretations of different images within a music video of the late country music icon to create a "crowd sourced" video that stitches together people's paintings to visualize the collective experience.

An element in both of these pieces is the audience's reaction to the constructed media. The reality being documented and interpreted is in the act of watching the video and listening to the music creating the potential for a new subject for the documentarian: its own audience. Since the audience is no longer passive, the filmmaker is able to implicate us subjects, as well as our relationship with the technology being used making it somewhat akin to theatrical techniques of breaking the fourth wall. In the case of *Just a Reflektor*, the subject is also our relationship to the technology used to watch and experience media. The piece, quite literally, reflects and then fractures our relationship with the technology that we use to listen to music and watch videos.

#### WHY DOES INTERACTIVITY MATTER?

If we're going to think about how documentary is evolving through interaction and new technology, certainly it's just as important to ask, "Why?" There are a few ways to answer that. An interest in new technologies can be seen as part of the role the artist plays in investigating these new technologies to see what they're capable of. We could sum up by saying that filmmakers should be interested in interactivity simply for the sake of curiosity.

But, beyond curiosity, the medium of film benefits from interactivity as a way to extend the filmmaker's creative voice. Interactivity presents new formal opportunities to tell stories. It presents new aesthetic potential. It presents new ways to connect with audiences. It provides new opportunities to creatively interpret and reflect reality.

For interactivity to thrive and grow as an extension of a documentary filmmaking practice, the filmmaker must also consider the ways in which interaction itself can contribute to the creative treatment of actuality. In the same way that the stylistic and formal elements of traditional cinema – camera movement, framing, montage, sound mixing, music – presents creative opportunities based on the unique material capabilities of those stylistic and formal elements, so does interactivity. While the stylistic and formal elements of traditional cinema deliver a fairly uniform experience, with interactivity, the creative interpretation of reality also includes the choices of the audience itself, presenting a vast realm of new creative potential.



*I Love Your Work, 2013*

**THIN BLUE LINE**

Directed by Errol Morris, USA, 1988.  
103 minutes

**THE ACT OF KILLING**

Directed by Joshua Oppenheimer  
Co-directed by Anonymous, Christine Cynn.  
Denmark, Norway, UK, 2012. 115/159 minutes.

**AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH**

Directed by David Guggenheim  
USA, 2006. 100 minutes.

**WE FEEL FINE**

Directed by Jonathan Harris, Sep Kamvar,  
2005/2006  
[www.wefeelfine.org](http://www.wefeelfine.org)

**OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND**

Created by Wesley Grubbs, Nicholas Yahnke  
With Pitch Interactive, 2013  
<http://drones.pitchinteractive.com>

**BEAR 71**

Directed by Leanne Allison, Jeremy Mendes.  
Canada, 2012.  
<http://bear71.nfb.ca/#/bear71>

**GAZA/SDEROT**

Directed by Alexandre Brachet  
With Arte France, 2008  
<http://gaza-sderot.arte.tv/>

**I LOVE YOUR WORK**

Directed by Jonathan Harris, 2013  
<http://iloveyourwork.net/>

**ALMA A TALE OF VIOLENCE**

Directed by Miquel Dewever-Plana, Isabelle Fougère.  
France, 2012.  
<http://alma.arte.tv/en/>

**SNOW FALL**

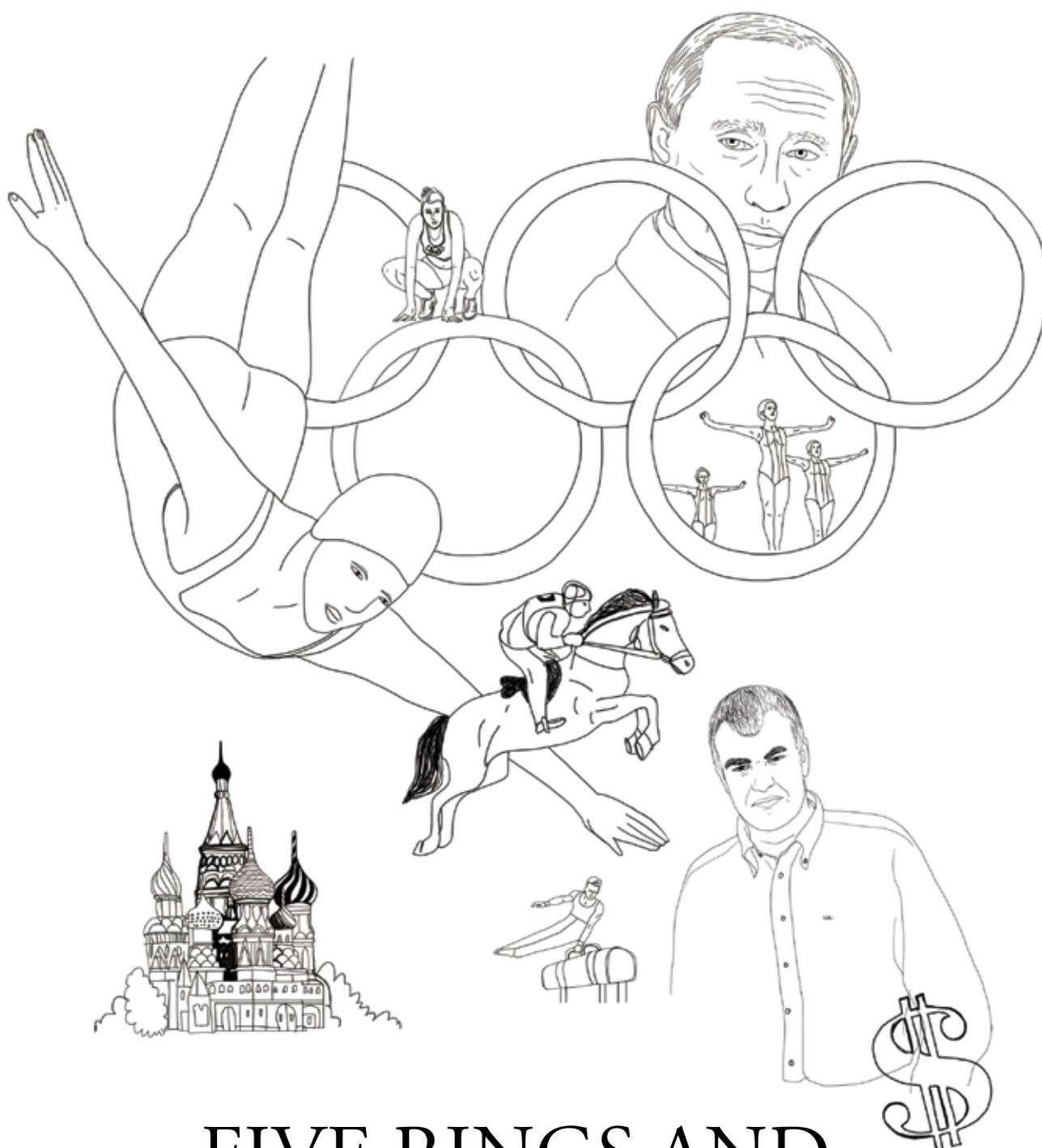
Directed by John Branch. With New York Times, 2012  
<http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/?forcedirect=yes#/?part=tunnel-creek>

**JUST A REFLEKTOR**

Directed by Vincent Morisset.  
With Aaron Koblin, 2013  
<https://www.justarefektor.com/>

**THE JOHNNY CASH PROJECT**

Directed by Chris Milk. With Aaron Koblin, 2010  
<http://www.thejohnnycashproject.com/>



# FIVE RINGS AND THREE MILLION DOLLARS

*Rings of the World, the official film about the 2014 Olympics, is directed by renowned Russian documentarian Sergei Miroshnichenko. The film on the extravagant event is the most expensive non-fiction film in Russian history.*

WORDS MARINA LATYSHEVA \* TRANSLATION SEVARA PAN \* ILLUSTRATION LARSEN ET RASMUSSEN

The Sochi Olympic Games have beaten all world records as the most extravagant in the history of the Olympic Games. The numbers look grand. The official figure is 214 billion rubles, of which 100 billion came from the government and the rest from private investors. Russia's Prime Minister Medvedev explained that this amount (approximately 6.4 billion dollars) was spent directly on the organization of the Games, whereas a total sum of around 50 billion dollars was spent on infrastructure. In an interview with CNN, Dmitry Medvedev declared that he considers the amount reasonable, given that it's a question of developing the whole region.

Prior to Sochi, the most expensive Olympic Games, at 43 billion dollars, was held in Beijing in 2008. In the case of China, the largest expenditure went towards solving infrastructure problems, which not only included construction of the new facilities, but also the transfer of old industrial companies outside the urban area. For comparison, let's take a look at the cost of the previous Olympic Games: One notorious example is the Olympics held in Montreal in 1976. The Games cost Canada 1.5 billion dollars, which took 30 years to pay off. During planning of the Summer Olympics in London in 2012, the UK authorities initially planned to spend 4.5 billion dollars, however final expenses came to 19 billion dollars, for which the organizers of the Games have repeatedly been criticized.

The fact that the Sochi Olympics may be associated with large-scale corruption has been the subject of debate amongst many experts. In 2013 the Russian opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov and Leonid Martynyuk published an independent report that stated that during the International Olympic Committee (IOC) sessions in Guatemala, Vladimir Putin said that the Olympics would cost the country 12 billion dollars. One should note, however, in reality the costs always exceed the projected amount by approximately two times during actual construction. The cost of the previous Winter Games in Vancouver increased from 2.88 billion to 6 billion dollars. The amount spent on the Games in Sochi, however, grew by more than four times. But these substantial figures were provided mainly to businessmen and companies close to President Putin. The Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation is obliged to control government spending. However, most data on Olympic expenditures was not disclosed publicly. The delegate of the Duma, Dmitry Gudkov, sent an inquiry to the Accounts Chamber of Russia, but, as the report states, the Chamber just gave him a formal answer.

Making documentaries about the Olympics is a long-lived tradition. Among the filmmakers that directed films on the Olympics, are such acclaimed directors as Leni Riefenstahl, Kon Ichikawa, Yuri Ozerov, Claude Lelouch, Milos Forman, and Arthur Penn. The Sochi Olympics was no exception.

Sergei Miroshnichenko, Laureate of the State Prize of the Russian Federation, and curator of the documentary program at the Moscow International Film Festival, was chosen to direct the film about the 2014 Olympics in Sochi. The film with the working title *Rings of the World* is considered to be the most costly in the history of Russian non-fiction cinema.

The tradition of making films on the Olympics dates to 1904. Today, the commissioning of an Olympic film and the selection of a director lies within the competence of the

International Olympic Committee (IOC). Miroshnichenko is known for creating compelling portraits of very different public personas, ranging from Vladimir Putin to Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In the late 1980s, Miroshnichenko took part in the BBC project, *7Up*. The series traces the lives of the protagonists over decades, paying them a visit every seven years. Miroshnichenko has already directed four episodes and believes that it is precisely this work that influenced the decision of the IOC. In 2012, the fourth part of the project entitled *Born in the USSR* was screened in nearly three dozen countries.

Despite the fact that the IOC has the deciding power over the choice of director, they are not financing *Rings of the World*. The project is funded by the Ministry of Culture, the Russian Federal Agency on Press and Mass Communications, the public TV channel, as well as by private international companies. The costs were to be partially covered by selling the broadcasting and media rights to other countries.

The budget of *Rings of the World* amounts to 3 million dollars, which by Russian standards is unprecedented. It is the most expensive project in the history of Russian non-fiction and Russian documentary filmmakers have never dealt with such big production budgets. The average budget for a feature-length non-fiction film in Russia is around fifty- to one hundred-thousand dollars. Some projects are partially or fully funded by the state through the Ministry of Culture, while others are non-fiction productions for television funded by the TV channels themselves. This type of production, however, is almost entirely associated with the notion of "propaganda," hence discussing it in terms of art is bizarre, to say the least.

In the given situation, a budget of 3 million dollars for a film is rather hypocritical even if the Ministry of Culture did contribute only a modest part of the amount. However, to his colleagues Miroshnichenko's hands are clean. According to the director, he asked the Ministry of Culture about funds allocated for making a fiction film, not a documentary.

One can assume that a film about Putin's "baby" would be a priori propaganda. But all kinds of people have been working on *Rings of the World*. Ilya Demutsky, for instance, is the composer of the film. He used excerpts from the court speeches of Pussy Riot member Maria Alekhina and set them to music, a composition for which he received a prestigious award in the WHAT competition in Bologna, Italy. While working in Sochi, Miroshnichenko made a film for television, entitled *Philosophy of the Soft Path* (literal translation from the Russian), almost half of which consisted of an interview with President Putin. Maybe it was then that he paid his "propaganda dues," and then decided to play a subtler game in *Rings of the World*. The cost of the Games and the possible large-scale corruption associated with the preparation for the Olympics has been the subject of a heated debate within Russia and abroad. The Russian opposition even issued a special report on corruption in Sochi.

The film is not yet finished. Nevertheless, everyone is already wondering whether the film, commissioned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), will touch upon the subject of the unprecedented costs of the Olympic Games in Sochi.

Miroshnichenko decided not to deal with this unpleasant topic. In an interview with DOX, he explains his position: >

## Q&A How would you describe *Rings of the World*?

It is a reflection on what outstanding athletes devote their lives to, and how male and female balance changes towards a stronger female presence in sports. There are in fact extreme kinds of sports, to which women did not have access for a long time. For instance, the ski jump, which women were trying to get into for years, or hockey, which becomes more exciting every year.

At the heart of *Rings of the World* lies the philosophy of sports and memories of the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, which, by the way, were not published in our country. He preferred not to translate the common phrase “Mens sana in corpore sano” in the traditional way as “A sound mind in a healthy body” but as “A sharp mind in a dynamic body.” It creates an entirely different meaning, doesn't it? We wanted to explore the possibilities of the body, but at the same time the athlete's ability to keep his mind sound from becoming a Nietzschean hero, a Superman.

I have watched a few Olympic films. Most of them were mere reports. But as soon as there was a style, a stance, or a tone, the film became epic. One such film I consider to be epic is Claude Lelouch's novella *Visions of Eight*, about the 1972 Summer Games in Munich, Germany, and his film *13 Jours en France* about the Olympic Games in Grenoble in 1968.

### Tell us about your team and the work on the film. When should we expect the premiere?

Approximately 80% of the film is already shot. Prior to the Games, we had travelled around the world and filmed outstanding athletes in their preparations for the Olympics. We met Patrick Chan, Sidney Crosby, Pavel Datsyuk, and a few other accomplished sportsmen. We also filmed the Olympic torch relay. We left for Sochi only in mid-January.

### The IOC recommended not filming with the athletes whose moral qualities, as the Committee believed, did not comply with the ideology of the Olympics. Miroshnichenko

There were 58 people on my team. The cameramen were Russian. I wanted to invite Polish, Swedish, and British colleagues, as the camera operator traditions in those countries are exceptionally good; I have a great respect for them, especially the Polish. But at some point I realized that I must give a chance to my countrymen and gathered a group of Russian professionals. It was hard work: some managed, others had to leave. Some of them proved to be outstanding professionals.

Filming sports was extremely challenging. Modern aesthetics suggests mostly shooting with a wide lens and an autofocus on small cameras. There wasn't anyone able to shoot dynamic footage with telephoto optics (F800 and more) in Russia.

Moreover, I was faced with the complete degradation of Russian documentary cinema production. We had to send an inquiry to Canon to provide us with optics and sometimes it had to go all the way from Europe. For our film we used 18 cameras: Red Epic and Canon C500. Besides, there was no quality telephoto optics in Russia, and those needed to be ordered from outside, as well. We did not have any post-production capacities to edit in 4k since all relevant studios have been destroyed! When Yuri Ozerov was making his film about the Olympics in 1980 O, *Sport – You're the World*, he heavily relied upon the studios in Riga, Leningrad, and Moscow; the whole State machine was working for him. I worked as a private entrepreneur and was faced with exceedingly high costs. Many times we had to build everything ourselves from scratch, not



receiving any support from anyone. There is still more to be shot, but editing has already begun. We had filmed already more than 700 hours. Hopefully, everything will be ready by August. Of course, I would like to show the film at the festival, for example, in Venice or Berlin.

### Was the film commissioned by the IOC or by the Russian Organizing Committee “Sochi 2014”?

All official Olympic films are commissioned by the IOC and are the property of the IOC. But, of course, an Olympic film has a relation to the country that hosts the Games. The IOC approached the Russian Organizing Committee with the proposal to make a film. Then, I assume, they proposed and discussed the candidates. As a result, they confirmed my candidacy. I think that was due to the fact that my previous film *Born in the USSR* was shown in more than 30 countries.

The film *Rings of the World* cost about 3 million dollars and was funded entirely by the Russian side. Expenses are proportionally divided between the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Press, the public Russian TV channel, and by the Vnesheconombank and some other private organisations, I managed to raise both private and state funding for this film.

### Did the IOC set any terms and conditions?

Yes, some terms and conditions were imposed by the IOC. They have a strict ideology of tolerance and equal treatment of all athletes and all countries.

### Are you referring to the use of doping?

It includes doping issues, yes. I agree that the athletes, which take doping, should not be regarded as the heroes of the Olympic movement. The IOC is a serious organization. They take things very seriously. For example, when I offered to film on video, they immediately said that they need the cope on film. According to them, the digital technology has not yet been tested by time. For the IOC, 10-15 years is not long enough. They store these films for centuries.

### You are aware of the criticism of the Sochi Olympics as an extraordinarily expensive project. Do you deal with this issue in *Rings of the World*?

First of all, I know the data. And, unlike others, I know how much was actually spent by the State and how much was invested by private businesses. The government spent less. And I do not want to count private money.

### Do you agree with the figure announced by Prime Minister Medvedev? According to him, the sum of about 50 billion dollars was spent on the organization of the Olympics in Sochi, of which around 6.4 billion dollars (200 billion rubles) was spent directly on the preparations for the Games

Dmitry Medvedev gave one number, Vladimir Putin another. I know

one thing – there was less public money than private. For example, out of all private investors, Vladimir Potanin invested the most – 87 billion rubles. But it was his private money, and I do not have the habit of counting the money in someone else's pocket. He built what he wanted to utilize in the future. He figured it all out. And I do not think that Vladimir Potanin or Viktor Vekselberg are stupid enough to throw away the money just like that. I am sure that the capital they invested would work for them in the future.

**Critics say that the private investors were forced to invest in the Sochi Olympics under State pressure.**

Not Potanin. He actually said that the idea of investing in the Olympics was his; he fought for it. I think he built a resort so that his employees could later go there for vacation.

You see, I read the criticism, but I did not engage in the investigation of corruption. That was not the task of the official film. Would you want me to sit Mikhail Prokhorov in front of the camera and ask him about who stole what? Does one need such an Olympic film? Who is going to watch it? In a half century, the viewer will be interested in whether Chan, Crosby, or Shaun White was at the Olympics. Therefore, we made a film about them, and not about some Pupkin who stole something somewhere. Of course, there was everything, including trading of the land and corruption, as in any Olympics. Believe me, in the US as well as in any other country, it is all the same. The IOC did not commission a film about corruption in Sochi; the IOC was interested in sports. There were other directors who made films about corruption. And, unfortunately, a lot of it was not true.

**Do you mean *Putin's Games*? Have you seen the film?**

Yes. And only part of it was a subjected truth. In the end, the Games were held, facilities were sound, nothing collapsed. It will all live.

The thing is, such a film was also a commission. There was a request to make a film about the Olympics, and there was another request to show how bad it all is in the country. When the Olympic Games in Sochi are reproved by the people on the other side, by those who were not granted to hold the Games, it seems that those people are just upset. It is clear that the decision to hold the Olympics in Russia was legitimate. It is impossible to bribe the whole IOC. Bribing a competitor was highly unlikely. Russia's rival Korea had an official sponsor in Samsung which lobbying Korea. Russia would not have enough money to bribe Samsung! I think, it was decided to hold the Olympics in Russia in order to develop sports infrastructure in our country. We could embark upon disputing over the issue of corruption and the economic component of the Games. But you are mistaken if you think that the IOC is interested in that, or if you think that the officials of the Olympic Committee are upset about the costs of the Games in Sochi. The IOC is happy that so many resources have been used! It is propaganda for sports.

**The IOC did not commission a film about corruption in Sochi; the IOC was interested in sports.**

Miroshnichenko

Of course, it will be very challenging to outdo Russia in the preparation for the next Olympics. As they say, the Russians would do anything to prove their importance and recognition in the world. It is in our tradition.

**Is your film a piece of propaganda for sports or for Russia?**

I think, it is propaganda for the Olympics. The fact that in the modern Russian approach to sports there is a lot that is ambivalent,

intriguing, and worthy of serious discussion, perhaps, is critical. But I was occupied with something different. Propaganda for the Russian lifestyle was not my concern.

A colleague of mine told me that I film like Leni Riefenstahl. Of course, I have seen the film *Olympia* and I think that only a fool would call it a pro-Nazi movie. It was commissioned by the IOC, not by Hitler or Goebbels. There are scenes where Hitler was not portrayed in the best possible light, for example, when he makes a wry face at the moment of victory of a black athlete. Riefenstahl was a very courageous woman; her relationship with the Nazis and especially Joseph Goebbels was manifold. Those who have read her memoirs know that under the aegis of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, another film was being made at the same time about the 1936 Berlin Olympics. I regard the *Triumph des Willens* differently of course. Though I still think that it is a good chronicle of that time. I hope that after saying this I will not be regarded as a Nazi, as my father was fighting against them during the WWII.

**With all due respect to the talent of Leni Riefenstahl, I think that the aesthetics of her film are indeed consistent with Nazi aesthetics and the cult of the Superman.**

Maybe so. But sports, at its very foundation, propagates the cult of the Superman. Therefore, in my film the orientation point was the philosophy of Pierre de Coubertin, who actually feared the domination of the cult of the Superman in sports.

And that is exactly what we talked about with our protagonists. I never thought that athletes could be such philosophers. They are very interesting to converse with if you ask them rather contemplative questions. Hence, my film is not concerned with the question, "Who stole what?" but with the controversy between the cult of body and the cult of mind and body. The film is also devoted to the young athletes who become the leaders of their generation. American Shaun White brought a whole generation of young people into sports, hence keeping them from drugs. If we love Shaun White, in a sense we love America. Dozens of children came to hockey because of Crosby. We were shooting in Detroit, a rather quaint town, where one thing relinquishes its life as another is reborn. For many years stadiums in Detroit lived on Russian hockey. And when I see tens of thousands of young Americans wearing T-shirts with the name "Datsyuk," I realize that what Datsyuk has done for Russia and for its alliance with other countries, is a hundred times greater than what any politician has done.

**Does your film allude to the events in Ukraine in any way? They happened exactly during the time of the Games.**

Of course, there are Ukrainian athletes and Ukrainian flags in my film. However, during the Olympics no extreme confrontation took place. A full crisis fell upon the Paralympics. Some students of mine worked on the subject.

We did talk with our protagonists on the subject of sports as a replacement for war. You cannot even imagine how thought-provoking their views are! There is an entire block in the film allotted to the topic of war: war in the real world, internal war, the confrontation with one another in sports, the confrontation of nations, hatred – and how to overcome all of this. My film transcends a mere study of corruption.\_

**RINGS OF THE WORLD**

Directed by Sergei Miroshnichenko  
Russia, September 2014

# IS DOCUMENTARY THE PRIVILEGED GENRE OF ECO-CINEMA?

*Green cinema, environmental documentaries, ecological films, greenbusters...  
What does eco-cinema mean in the public space? Editorialist Sandrine Lage shares her research  
carried out at La Sorbonne University with French viewers and French media.*

WORDS SANDRINE LAGE

In the wake of Michael Moore's work, the emerging trend of documentaries has achieved an unprecedented degree of success among militant cinema-goers. His 2004 hit *Fahrenheit 9/11* was indeed considered to be the highest-grossing documentary of all time as he shook the world making fun of George W. Bush, then President of the United States. Others regard Al Gore, Vice President of the USA between 1993 and 2001 as the one who cleared the way for ecological documentary as a viable film form. With *An inconvenient Truth*, directed by Davis Guggenheim (2006, United States), we saw the emergence of a new kind of cinematic object. Documentary about the ecological crisis and civilisational malaise was raising awareness in the micro-market of eco-cinema and crystallizing the debate around a mediated figure rather than around an identified filmmaker. Produced and distributed with significant resources, this kind of documentary seemed to promise massive success.

In fact, the films devoted to ecological issues have invaded the cinema screens especially between 2006 and 2010. As French theatres registered the highest rate of attendance ever reached in 27 years in 2009 (with 200.85 million entries), it seemed an interesting context to ask ourselves to what extent the press and spectators agree that eco-cinema is being inscribed in the public space. 2009 was also a memorable year when it came to French productions.

Our research undertaken at La Sorbonne University (Paris IV) showed that both press and spectators saw eco-cinema as inscribed in the public space through shared information. This was emphasized by the kind of films audiences talk about when it comes to eco-cinema. As a first step to unravel shared information, we took a look at a selection of press articles on the issue. Keywords cinema, film, documentary, environmental, ecology, ecological, ecologist and green (in French) were among a group of headlines of the French Press. Our wide sample ranged from magazines like Marie Claire to newspapers like La Croix; both left wing (Les Inrockuptibles)

and right-wing (VSD) editorial lines are represented.

The sample included both generalist press (La Croix) and more specialized ones (Livres Hebdo), both national (VSD) and regional press (Le Progrès). Within these titles there is also diversity in periodicity: daily (Le Progrès, La Croix), weekly (Les Inrockuptibles, Livres Hebdo and VSD) and monthly (Marie Claire). Moreover the broadcasting/circulation varies from 10.000 copies per week (Livres Hebdo) to 207.849 papers per day (Le Progrès). It was among this group that the terminology adopted by the press to define ecological cinema emerged: greenbuster, green cinema, green wave, eco-doc or eco-film.

## THE GREEN NEW WAVE OF CINEMA

MEDIA	AUTHOR	DATE	HEADLINE
Côté Santé	Nathalie Giraud	01/10/2009	Ecology on the big screen
Marie Claire		01/10/2009	Green Cinema
VSD	Bernard Archour	07/10/2009	Eco-docs, does it work?
La Croix	Amaud Schwartz, Marie Verrier	07/10/2009	Ecology burst the screen
La Croix	Amaud Schwartz, Marie Verrier	07/10/2009	The cinema at planet's rescue
Inrockuptibles	Serge Kaganski	06/10/2009	Eco-Films: lively the ram sorting
Le Progrès		04/10/2009	The planet is dying in dolby stereo and the green cinema wants to save it
Le Progrès	David S. Tran, Michel Rivet	04/10/2009	These films saving the planet: are they an eco-business or a green wave?
Inrockuptibles	Serge Kaganski	30/09/2009	Greenbusters
Livres Hebdo	Catherine Andreucci	24/09/2009	The syndrome of the ecologists

The next step was to find out what films the press covered. A close reading of the diverse French publications allowed us to understand how the press inscribes ecological cinema in the public space. In the articles in question, several documentary titles came up as representative of ecological cinema (see figure below). Although it wasn't possible to determine their profile (like, say, "ecologists", "non-ecologists", "more or less informed about ecology") the viewers often identified themselves with one of those general categories.

**HOW IS THE 'ECOLOGICAL CINEMA' INSCRIBED ON THE PUBLIC SPHERE?**

FILM	RELEASE DATE	DIRECTOR	GENRE	COUNTRY	BOX OFFICE FRANCE
THE TITANIC SYNDROME	2009	Jean-Albert Lièvre, Nicolas Hulot	Documentary	France	261 133
HOME	2009	Yann Arthus-Bertrand	Documentary	France	167 471
AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH	2006	Davis Guggenheim	Documentary	USA	719 713
BARRIN'S NIGHTMARE	2005	Hubert Saucer	Documentary	France	363 390
THINK GLOBAL, ACT RURAL	2010	Coline Serreau	Documentary	France	337 676
HERE TO STAY	2009	Pierre Barougier, Olivier Bourgeois	Documentary	France	14 333
HALLUJANES: JIN HANJUN LUNARIL, BEAN LUNARIL	2008	Jean-Paul Jaut	Documentary	France	250 000
ODORNA, ODOMONS LES NEUX	2004	Patrice Lacombe	Documentary	France	44 707
KOYANASKATE	1982	Godfrey Reggio	Documentary	USA	
OCEANS	2010	Jacques Perrin, Jacques Cluzaud	Documentary	France, Spain, Switzerland	2 845 492
LET'S MAKE MONEY	2008	Erwin Wagenhofer	Documentary	Austria	69 595
THE COVE	2009	Louie Psihoyos	Documentary	USA	4 324
THE WORLD ACCORDING TO AMIGALATI	2006	Maria-Antoinette Robin	Documentary	Germany, Canada, France	
ZOOLOGIST ADDENDUM	2006	Peter Joseph	Documentary	USA	See rights
11 <sup>TH</sup> HOUR	2007	Laila Petersen, Nadia Conners	Documentary	USA	
ERWIN	2007	Alexander Fritzsche, Mark Linfield	Documentary	Germany, UK	1 390 401
WE FEED THE WORLD	2007	Erwin Wagenhofer	Documentary	Austria	138 578
SOLENT GREEN	2006	Richard Fleischer	Documentary	USA	



*The Cove*, 2009. The documentary is undoubtedly the film form most associated with eco-cinema

Criteria : films most mentioned by press and spectators. Data regarding the documentaries is available on Allo.Ciné and Commeaucinéma. Sources: For the press: selection based on the articles presented on the figure The Green New Wave of Cinema; For the spectators: comments left (mainly between October and December 2009) by a group of 205 spectators who subscribed to the French website AlloCiné and who declared having watched the French documentary *The Titanic Syndrome*.

**The “star documentaries” of ecological cinema are unquestionably documentaries using a male mediated figure to embody the presentation on the subject of ecology**

Based on the figure, the first conclusion is that whenever the press or spectators talked about green cinema, environmental documentaries, ecological films or greenbusters in the public space, what they really referred to were documentaries. Among those, the productions released in 2009 mentioned most often are *The Titanic Syndrome*, and *Home* and *Here to Stay*. Despite the fact that an audience sometimes deemed they were tired of so-called “eco-cinema” due to the consecutive release of several eco-documentaries during 2009, it seems that the press and audiences easily recalled the films released during that specific period. Undoubtedly – though it is not part of the sample we observed – *An Inconvenient Truth* emerged as a significant contribution to the representation of ecological cinema. *Let's Make Money*,

**FAHRENHEIT 9/11**

Directed by Michael Moore, USA, 2004. 122 mins.

**TITANIC SYNDROME**

Directed by Nicolas Hulot, Jean-Albert Lièvre, France, 2009, 93 mins.

**HOME**

Directed by Yann Arthus-Bertrand, France, 2009, 120 mins.

**AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH**

Directed by Davis Guggenheim, USA, 2006, 97 mins.

**HERE TO STAY**

Directed by Pierre Barougier, Olivier Bourgeois, France, 2009, 87 mins.

*The Cove* released in 2009, or *Oceans* and *Think Global, Act Rural* released in 2010, registered far fewer mentions both in articles and other comments. Still, as opposed to fiction films, the documentary is undoubtedly the film form most associated with eco-cinema: both French viewers and the press mention eleven documentaries, mostly French or North American, all dealing with the natural environment.

**TRENDS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF ECO-CINEMA BY THE PRESS AND SPECTATORS:**

Additionally, the “star” documentaries of ecological cinema are unquestionably films that use a male mediated figure to embody the presentation of the subject of ecology. The movies talked about the most in terms of mentions in the press (56) or among spectators (20) are the ones featuring Nicolas Hulot (who lent his voice to the narration of *The Titanic Syndrome*), Yann Arthus-Bertrand for *Home*, and Al Gore for *An Inconvenient Truth*. Most viewers said that they believed that popular figures contribute to making a bigger part of the audience aware of the urgency of the situation of an ecological crisis. Others welcome any eco-documentary initiative, as much as they do mediated figures, in the sense that they not only allow for the exhibition of ecological documentaries in cinemas or television, but also foster debates about ecology in the public space as shown in our next article about de-ghettoising the subject of ecology through the documentary. \_

**LET'S MAKE MONEY**

Directed by Erwin Wagenhofer, Austria, 2008. 110 mins.

**THE COVE**

Directed by Louie Psihoyos. USA, 2009, 92 mins.

**OCEANS**

Directed by Jacques Perrin, Jacques Cluzaud France, Switzerland, Spain, 2009. 104 mins.

**THINK GLOBAL, ACT RURAL**

Directed by Coline Serreau, France, 2010, 113 mins.



# SCREENING TRUTH TO POWER

A READER ON  
DOCUMENTARY ACTIVISM

Production still from *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* by Alanis Obomsawin. Obomsawin is interviewed in the book and her film, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years....*, appears on several of the book's top documentary lists. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada

*Through a series of essays Screening Truth to Power illuminates and brings into relief a sliver of the cultures and communities of creativity and resistance that flow from activist/political documentary. We bring you an excerpt from the book below.*

WORDS SVETLA TURNIN AND EZRA WINTON \* PHOTO SHANEY KOMULAINEN

## INTRODUCTION: ENCOUNTERS WITH DOCUMENTARY ACTIVISM

**“If power is exercised by programming and switching networks, then counterpower, the deliberate attempt to change power relationships, is enacted by reprogramming networks around alternative interests and values, and/or disrupting the dominant switches while switching networks of resistance and social change.”**

Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (2012, 9)

### MANUFACTURING DISSENT

Our network began humbly, as two separate nodes in a yet-to-be connected system involving individuals, institutions and media. The inception of Cinema Politica (CP) was inspired by two independent but related viewing experiences of the inventive and

witty *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*. Both of us saw the film on two separate occasions in different settings: Ezra Winton at a community film festival in his hometown of Courtenay, British Columbia, and Svetla Turnin in a communication studies classroom in Montreal, Quebec, along with dozens of students, all awestruck by Chomsky's astute analysis and rigorous disclosure of the troubling confluence of government, corporations and media in the manufacture of public consent. Common in both cases, however, was the nature of the space, where discussion and debate concerning the viewed material was not only facilitated but actively encouraged.

Combining our mutual interest in politics, media and documentary in particular, these two mind-opening experiences allowed us to see the immense potential of an open space to not only inspire a conversation but also activate social engagement. Reeling from these revelations, we decided that the most natural thing to do would be to establish a documentary screening series on a university campus brimming with student engagement and sustained political debate — a space where a project like Cinema Politica would germinate and grow, and eventually come to celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2013.

Manufacturing Consent seemed to us quite unique, even revolutionary, in its attempt to not only playfully portray an intellectual at work but also underline the protagonist's commitment to effecting social and political change throughout his life — a remarkably sustained engagement to be sure. The documentary embodied a very similar undertaking, one exhibited in the vast hoard of socially and politically committed documentaries nestled like treasures in university library catalogues, waiting to be (re)discovered. We dusted off some of these gems, and screenings of *Berkeley in the Sixties*, *The Corporation*, *Before Stonewall* and *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* marked our first attempts to engage with the wealth of ground breaking, status-quo-challenging films that we felt compelled to share with our university community of rebel-rousers, local organizers and student activists, classmates, professors and others (...)

### ON DOCUMENTARY ACTIVISM

A filmmaker once said that cinema takes place somewhere between the audience and the screen, which is to say that audiences, along with producers, have agency and investment in making meaning, packing and unpacking mediated messages, and interpreting art. Documentary activism, as a concept, is similarly constitutive and reflexive: it is a force or phenomenon that occurs when certain destabilizing elements combine, and it is a form of political and artistic expression that responds to larger societal currents. Documentary activism brings together worlds we love, labour in and call home: the dynamic, diverse and devotional spheres of art and activism.

Documentary activism takes shape when the filmmaker and subjects, the screen and the audience, and event organizers and collaborators come together. It is an impulse that combines the affective and effective powers of documentary cinema, along with the cultural, political and social transformative community spaces that grow out of and inform documentary while activating new forms, pathways and modalities for social change. Documentary activism evolves with the representation of subjects of documentary, accounting for their historical circumstances, social, economic and cultural realities, moves through the documentary art form into screening spaces, and diffuses out into the wider currents of audiences, publics, movements and organizations. This sociopolitical force is continually in motion, forming imbricated spheres of influence, experience and impact. Just as a social movement could inspire the making of a documentary, a documentary in turn could activate a social movement.

Meg McLagan and Yates McKee, in their recently published and wonderfully interdisciplinary volume *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmental Activism*, write, “Cumulatively, there is a continual feedback loop whereby political actions, cultural forms, and technologies of mediation interact with each other, each with their own dynamics of innovation, but in mutual interdependence” (2012, 23). It is in the interdependent relationship between art and action that we find the greatest potential for progressive social transformation. Documentary as a particular art practice can activate us, and can serve as a pry bar to separate the layers of political domination and cultural oppression, revealing the light, imagination and hope that are continually and deliberately obscured by status quo culture and politics.

Doc activism (doctivism?) is often seeded in the filmmaking process, it is re-activated during screenings, and it extends beyond the projections into the everyday lives of audiences, subjects and filmmakers. As John Walker says in one *Cinema Politica* artist talk,

“Documentary is a conversation, a conversation in a moment of time with a confluence of people interacting, filmmakers interacting with real people, coming to certain ideas and conclusions and experiences, events, whatever it might be. A film has to stop, it has to end, but the conversation has to continue.” Each film is then in the hands of interpretative communities — audiences who process the information, respond emotionally and act upon what they have seen and heard on the screen and at the screening. This live wire of inspiration and activation is a kind of interpretation of the artwork, and it is articulated through social relations that, when compounded, can have a real, tangible, positive effect.

For our part, the documentary activism that inscribes our lives comes out of what McLagan and McKee call the “image-complex”, the constellation of social, political and cultural contexts in which visual culture is disseminated. In other words, our activism revolves around the space of documentary, or the organized screenings of political independent documentaries. For us, putting on these screenings is a political act. Providing a platform for documentary is essential, and we agree that “Platforms are not neutral spaces, but sites, that produce the image [in our case, the moving image] politically” (McLagan and McKee 2012, 17). Although we are encouraged by documentary's recent ascension in the popular imagination and across corporate media platforms, we are determined to not only acknowledge but nurture the ties and associations non-fiction cinema has with its history of speaking truth to power — of upsetting the power balance, confronting the status quo and tackling difficult issues head on. Untethered from this history and embedded in entertainment–consumer regimes like megaplexes, Netflix and many commercial film festivals, documentary loses some of its transformative power. That is to say, the image–complex forecloses on radical intervention, political action and expression in order to maintain apolitical, neutered, “neutral” spaces of capital, where consumers are free to consume without the bothersome additives of activists and organizers, and plug-in and take-away opportunities for audience engagement.

To be sure, the more documentary out there in the mediascape and in venues, the better, but we temper that enthusiasm with the reflective notion that if documentary is to contribute to documentary activism, quality of experience should transcend comfort and pleasure and should be embedded in regimes of political radical action, imagination and expression. Bodies in a space become a collective voice and a threat to dominant institutions of power when given the opportunity under the right circumstances: we've seen this kind of documentary activism succeed too many times to allow doubt.

In personal correspondence with us, Joshua Oppenheimer, co-director of *The Act of Killing*, argues, “the aim of art is to help us gaze unflinchingly at truths we fundamentally already know, but have been too afraid to acknowledge, and perhaps too afraid even to remember. This makes radical activism possible, but it is not the same as either activist journalism or activism itself. By forcing people to contemplate our most painful truths, non-fiction film opens the space for us to address our most frightening problems.” We agree, and suggest that confronting and uprooting truths is all the more powerful in an open documentary screening space.

Not only is our *modus operandi*, screening truth to power, fundamentally different from that of “social action entertainment” and all the other iterations of the troubling capitalist convergence of entrepreneurship, liberal NGOization and documentary cinema, but screening film and video is also, as far as our efforts are concerned, at the heart of resistance and community-building. Screening truth to power is a derivative of the phrase “speak truth to power,” used >

## EXCERPT

first in a pamphlet during the mid-1950s by Quakers, who were calling for alternative voices — pacifist voices, to be precise — to separate from and stand against those of the fascists. Our twist on this activist maxim implies that beneath the din of state and corporate mainstream media, where the self-entitled elite claim to speak for the common folk, there are alternative and radically different perspectives that require space, respect and attention.

Such are the perspectives in Fahim Alam's work. Alam is a UK-based filmmaker who wrote to us on this topic, saying: "For the first time in history, subjects of empire, especially within the centres of it, have the ability to propagate to the masses, i.e. to each other, with relative ease. Furthermore, we have the ability to do this through the production of media that is as dynamic as that of the major media machines, due to the technologies at our disposal." Alam was charged and placed under security surveillance for supposed rioting (the charges were later dropped) during the 2011 riots. He made his first documentary, *VoiceOver | Riots Reframed*, as a response to mainstream media's failure to reflect back to the population the complexity of the topic, the diversity of voices and the radical, political and altogether intelligent perspectives put forward by people of colour and activists. His film puts into sharp relief the structures that determine who speaks, which truths are told, and who has power.

Alam's comments also remind us that we live in an age of abundance and contradiction, where speaking or screening truth to power is a deeply political act. Never before has so much information been available to so many, never before the potential so strong to grow a base of support to resist and topple the dominant institutions and ideologies of power that control and shape most of the information

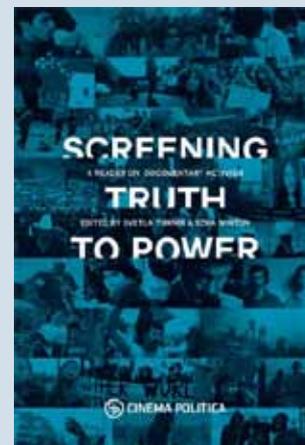
we access. The wealthy classes have consolidated their resources at an alarming speed, and never before have so many been so absurdly wealthy. Yet never before have so many lived in such contrast to that wealth: income disparity, inequality and the oppression of the world's jobless and working poor amount to the collateral damage of free-market capitalism and a globalization machine that keeps injustice and distraction whirring at a dizzying speed. Still, never before have there been so many creative, critical and essential audio-visual artefacts circling the globe, ready to instruct, engage, inspire and activate audiences. This is what screening independent, alternative, radical, anarchist and non-market driven documentaries is all about.\_

### SCREENING TRUTH TO POWER A READER ON DOCUMENTARY ACTIVISM

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and Ezra Winton  
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# THE SOUND OF RESTRAINT



*Director Christy Garland and sound designer Peter Albrechtsen talk about their collaboration for this issue's DVD, **The Bastard Sings the Sweetest Song**. The film is the tale of Mary, a drinking poet and her son the bird owner, Muscle, who tries to protect his mother by locking her up. But like the birds, Mary sings to her own tune.*

WORDS CHRISTY GARLAND AND PETER ALBRECHTSEN

**Christy Garland:** At screenings for *Bastard*, people have noted that it seems to have more in common with the use of sound in a fiction film – a heightening of the location sound that brings the audience as close as possible to the characters' inner lives.

**Peter Albrechtsen:** That's something I really loved to do for this film. It was an obvious choice because there were so many sounds surrounding our main characters. I like to use sounds in a musical way and for me, that approach came very natural with *Bastard* because from very early on we talked about sound and music as one. Tom Third, the composer, was part of our very first meeting so it was very natural to talk about everything at once.

I love when the music is pretty much there already when I start the sound edit because it means that I get very inspired by the texture of the music and the two melt together more naturally. It also means that I can add in rhythmical elements in the ambiances which fit together well with the music. There's lots of that kind of stuff in *Bastard* as well, all the way from the timing of bird tweets to the sound of rattling cages.

Of course there was a lot of noise on the tracks but it's quite remarkable what can be done with modern software tools and I'm not afraid of noise. Noise is everywhere in the world and it actually makes things come alive. Of course, it can be a problem if you can't hear the dialogue but the dialogue editing really helped those issues. And the interplay between words, music and sound effects can help a lot, as well.

**Christy Garland:** We connected immediately with your approach, because as you describe sound design in musical terms, Tom very often approaches music as sound design, particularly in his use of instrumentation. Most important, from my perspective, was that you both shared an attitude of restraint, which is so rare in documentaries. *Bastard* packs a few heavy emotional wallops, so it was a delicate balance, I think, conveying the chaos of that place with the quiet of the main character Mary's solitude and the depth of her loneliness, without stomping on it with "sad music" or putting too much tension in the ambience.

The obvious example is when Mary drops the bomb about the babies, your rhythmic use of those crazy tree frogs, combined with a subtle, but unsettling, tympanic sound in Tom's cue (I think he used a violin like a drum, bouncing chop sticks on the strings) – it underscores just enough of our own emotional reaction to Mary's pain without telling us what to feel.



Those are the moments, where the sound and music choices can intelligently anticipate (or undermine) an audience's emotional reaction, and I felt you and Tom always stayed on the right side of that.

And that kind of sensitivity isn't easy with the very limited time you both had.

**Peter Albrechtsen:** Our sound editing process was actually extremely compressed – sound effects editing and dialogue editing happening at once with great help from my terrific colleagues, Morten Groth Brandt and Nicolai Linck. But because you, Tom and I had such a good, specific talk before the sound work started, I felt that we were in sync all the time. We aimed to create an evocative, musical and very dynamic soundscape and I actually think we achieved that most of the time.

The thing about short-time processes is that you don't really have time to get a distance to the things you're working on – it can be difficult to feel how an audience will perceive everything. Here it helped that you and Tom had such a great fresh view on things when we were mixing. That was the toughest part about the process – the short schedule – but looking back I never felt we rushed anything.

I still haven't seen the film with an audience, actually. I'd love to try that. I love when you sit in the theatre and people are quiet and alert in the right places. That's when you know you've done a good job. \_

## DVD IN THIS ISSUE

### **THE BASTARD SINGS THE SWEETEST SONG**

Directed by Christy Garland

Canada, Denmark, Sweden, 2012. 73 minutes

## THE EDN CO-PRODUCTION GUIDE

EDNs new tool THE EDN CO-PRODUCTION GUIDE will be launched during Sunny Side of the Doc, June 23 – 26 and will be available on [edn.dk](http://edn.dk)

THE EDN CO-PRODUCTION GUIDE is your gateway to the co-production possibilities for documentaries in 30 European countries.

EDN has commissioned 30 experienced producers to collect information from their funds and broadcasters – a lot of the information not previously published – and brought it together in an easy-to-use format: Short enough to get an overview and detailed enough to create a co-production strategy.

THE EDN CO-PRODUCTION GUIDE lists the documentary profile of the funding bodies and provides contact info, guidelines, deadlines, links etc. in 30 countries. Also:

It 'translates' this information into production reality:

- **which** titles were funded and co-produced by which countries;
- **who** were the co-producers;
- **what** was the funding amount;
- **and** a lot of other relevant information for the producer with an international film project.

If the information is available, you'll find it in THE EDN CO-PRODUCTION GUIDE.

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HOW WE PLAYED THE REVOLUTION by Giedre Zickyte, produced by Dagne Vildziunaite - Just a moment in coproduction with 13 Productions & in association with Histoire, Lithuanian National Radio and Television - 2012

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