

Documents on the Balkans – History, Memory, Identity

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History, Memory, Identity:
Representations of Historical Discourses
in the Balkan Documentary Film

By

Margit Rohringer

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P U B L I S H I N G

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Note to the Reader	ix
Preface	xi
Part I: Introduction	1
The Genesis of the Documentary Film and Its Manifestation Nowadays ...	3
Part II: Kaleidoscopic View of the Balkans.....	67
Case Study I: The Balkans' Cultural-Historical Context or the Question: <i>Whose Is This Song?</i>	85
Case Study II: Social Context: <i>The Chinese Market</i> –The Poor Meet the Poor.....	103
Case Study III: <i>Joy of Life</i> –"Aren't We Sufficiently European?"	117
Part III: Images and Fates of the History of Tomorrow	141
<i>Chapter One:</i> Migration and the Balkans: The Greeks in the Diaspora	143
<i>Chapter Two:</i> The Biographical Approach to History or the Subjectivity of the Past.....	181
<i>Chapter Three:</i> The Making of History: The Different Faces of the So-Called Revolution in Romania	199
<i>Chapter Four:</i> Lost Generation: Too Young to Die and Too Old to Be Born Again.....	221

<i>Chapter Five: Women and War</i>	241
Appendices	283
Appendix A: Interview–Dina Iordanova: Balkan Cinema as a Study Field	285
Appendix B: Interview–Rada Šešić: Balkan Documentaries and the Public Sphere	297
Conclusion and Fragmentary Notes	309
Index	319

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NOTE TO THE READER

The majority of documentary films which I discuss in my book were originally shot in one of the local Balkan languages and later on translated into English. In the text, I have used the original title alongside the English one only when mentioning the film the first time. Subsequent title entries appear only in English. In the filmographies, both the English and the original title are listed.

An earlier version of chapter 2 of this book, "The Biographical Approach to History or the Subjectivity of the Past," appeared as an essay in *Screening the Past*, vol. 20, in 2006. An earlier text of chapter 3, "The Making of History: The Different Faces of the So-Called Revolution in Romania," was published in *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities* (Special issue: Documentary film), vol. 26 (3) (Summer 2007), 75-87. Part of chapter 5 is scheduled to be published in an edited collection entitled *Televising History: Mediating the Past in Postwar Europe* (Erin Bell and Ann Gray, eds., Palgrave Macmillan).

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PREFACE

There is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography.

—Paul Valéry

As any text, including any scholarly source, that was ever written on this planet its contents are inevitably connected with the personal life of its author. This is also the case with this book.

Life at the Border...

I grew up on a farm very close to the then Czechoslovakian border, and I often remember the early days in my childhood, when I was in the fields, trying to climb up bales of straw to look at the "forbidden territory", the dangerous lands behind the borders. From time to time I caught some of these reappearing static images that represented my neighbouring country for me whenever I succeeded in having a look at it from top of the straw. There were high chimneys of factories and the smog above them drawing grey clouds in the sky. As a child I was completely puzzled why this territory was forbidden for me/us. In other words, I could not understand for which reasons this nearby place was inaccessible for me/us or think of anything that could justify such a fact. On school trips we came even closer to the border. We were taught that the boundary stones were marking the exact border to the neighbouring country, and if we crossed this line, we would be shot.

Of course, for a child it was somehow exciting and at the same time frightening to not exactly know what might really happen, and it was only natural that we associated the "strange place over there" with the bad, the gruesome, the wild etc.—thus to similar stereotypes with which I got confronted later on when entering discussions on the Balkans with various (often also well-educated) people.

This early experience of the relevance of borders and the images that I could see when lying on the straw bales as well as those that were gradually building in my fantasy (as a compensation for not having access to the real ones behind the factories), but also the imagination which I created during my school trips and finally the adult conversations in my

village that I was listening to surely left traces on my approach to the world around me and my view of questions about nations. They definitely influenced my perception of where the differences and the common grounds of nations are, what the common grounds of mankind are as well as my thoughts about why we should depend on borders, why history is a huge narrative of border movements in our traditional history books and finally why it has so often been viewed as worth killing people in order to redraw borders. At the same time, the strange neighbouring country was somehow exotic for me, and I seemingly liked these blurred images on which I could project my own ideas and fantasies. Most probably it was in these early days when I also started to protest against everything which for my taste was described as too simple and/or too static (and most often stereotypes are of this kind). And as these simplified constructions often become applied to phenomena outside our daily universe, also against judgements on the "unknown" which I saw as unjustified and often as an attack against the "other" in its various forms.

Changing the Direction...

In school, I was more interested in subjects that left room to imagination and interpretation like history, literature, languages, geography and the like, and that were rather connected with images than with abstract letters or figures justifying clear facts and rules. Later on, I studied literature for a short time and then went on with sociology and communication sciences only to end up in the sub-field of sociology of film and to finally change to film studies. I never lost touch, however, with the questions in which I was interested in the past and which had sociologically informed in the course of my studies...

It was at the beginning of the 1990s when a summer job (teaching a pupil at the Adriatic Coast during vacation) changed my direction on the European map and placed my focus to the South of my native Austria, and at that time to the Dalmatian Coast of the former Yugoslavia.

I can hardly express what was going on exactly when I got off the bus on a rural road and went along a tree-lined walk to the campsite of a small place called Pakoštane. It felt like coming home after a long journey. All I experienced in this place afterwards confirmed that initial feeling; I prolonged my holiday and started to work as a tourist guide, and thus partly got to know the mentality of the people/s of the former Yugoslavia. I started to make myself familiar with the language of the place in order to be able to have modest conversations with the people I met; I built up friendships...

It was like experiencing a whole new universe of living and approaching the world around and at the same time like feeling at home far away.

One year later the war in the former Yugoslavia broke out, and by that also my personal experience with the new universe was disrupted.

My own private undertakings were ripped apart and I was forced to think about borders and the problems concerning national identities even more intensively, about what could people induce to kill each other for the sake of territory and for the urge to defend historical remembrance and so-called truths. It was the first time that war was so close that I actually knew afflicted ones who experienced its every moment while I was breathing and living in safe territory near the war-afflicted region.

I was more or less unconsciously looking for other paths to continue my personal journey, namely via film. Thus, my "private thoughts" conflated with my studies at the university, and it felt somehow natural that I started to write my doctoral thesis on the Yugoslav feature film from the decade before the outbreak of the war, and so to confront myself with the potential causes of the conflict.

During my research, I realised that the conflicts which had emerged in the Yugoslav societies in the pre-war period had not just been about nations, but to a similar extent about social conflicts and in particular about gender as well as generational conflicts. Only at that time did I discover that a similar approach was pursued by some theorists of the project "Cultural Studies" (among others Stuart Hall and Angela McRobbie).

Later on, when I was working in the cultural field, I organised a film festival together with my Greek colleague Agorita Bakali in the framework of the project *Context-Europe 2002: Artistic Impulses from South-Eastern Europe* (Theater des Augenblicks, Vienna)¹ where documentaries made in and about the Balkan space were for the first time prominently screened in Vienna in a small cinema called *Admiral*. It was then when I gradually learned more about the Balkan space as a bigger territory and about the common grounds between the Balkan societies that could be identified and the local imprints at the same time.

Some time later, I was lucky to learn about Dina Iordanova's book "Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media" (2001). At this time very few sources on Balkan cinema existed. Iordanova's book was a rich source for my studies as I had the chance to get to learn about new

¹ With this project "Theater des Augenblicks" wanted to inspire a dialogue on contemporary art production in the Balkan space and particularly reflect on clichés about the region.

theoretical approaches to the topic I had already been working on for ages. Later on I had the opportunity to work in a project that was led by Dina Iordanova. It was the project "Balkan cinema: Film and History", and this book is one of the several sub-projects within its scope. The project was supported by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK) and hosted at the University of Leicester to be continued at the Film Department of the University of St. Andrews which was actually founded by Prof. Iordanova.

Here We Are...

This was the "official" start of my book project. I was lucky because I was given a chance to continue my studies on films from the region and to look for further explanations for the different fates that I could observe in the different societies and cultures that I lived in or visited as a scholar and also as a private person. When watching films that were made in and/or about the Balkan space, I particularly tried to find out the reasons behind the separation of the universe called Europe into two parts.

I inescapably interconnected questions around the existence of the rich and the poor Europe with the many questions that kept nagging me in regard to the reasons for the split universe and especially for the fact that the war in the former Yugoslavia generated yet another split which particularly concerned my "then more intensively experienced small universe".

Reconsidering my research results in the context of the discussion on the so-called new crisis of finance and economy, I can clearly see that questions of social inequalities have been repressed for ages (with the simple excuse that because communism failed, capitalism and/or neo-liberalism have been viewed as the only justified systems that would work. An excuse which was always too simple for me and could definitely not justify this huge gap between life circumstances of peoples). Today many politicians and particularly the media behave as if they have discovered a new problem. Suddenly, because the crisis has also reached the Western spheres, a re-evaluation of the economic system has become possible and even trendy. During my Christmas shopping last year, I could frequently find "Das Kapital" by Marx in the shops, which I experienced as similarly ironic as it showed that the market at once reacted on the new headlines in the media and more or less consumed its ideological antagonist. At the time, nearly all other topics were erased from the news reports by the media. I regarded this circumstance as equally disturbing as in the past

since other problems were still going on in the world at those times that were consequences of the for a long time hidden crisis.

At the same time a shift in the evaluation of the interaction between the mechanisms active in the financial and economic systems on the one hand and the culturally informed stereotypes of the region and culturally sanctioned power structures on the other took place within just a few weeks. This shift resulted from some harsh criticism of a nowadays well-known fact that was then only expressed by a minority group of scholars, politicians and NGOs. It felt strange that four years ago when I had started to write on strategies of how some societies are held in the backyard of power centres while others manage to keep themselves right at the centre, these thoughts most probably would have been qualified as so-called leftist ideologies by many academic opinion leaders but especially also by the rest of the world outside academia.

Thus, some results of my research most probably would have been regarded as obsolete leftist thinking (which definitely would have been too simple a view on them) a few years ago; nowadays, however, my critical statements would probably be labelled completely differently. Today these critical viewpoints on all sorts of turbo-capitalism are at least partly placed as "common knowledge" and thus form a dominant discourse which first of all shows how media can change people's attitudes more or less over night.

I decided to leave those critical statements, which I had written before the crisis was officially proclaimed, the way they had matured at that time of writing so as to show the natural genesis of my thoughts at a certain point of time and history (this preface is of course also a product of its historical time) and not to update them under the pressure of a sudden shift in the mass media when parts of this knowledge and discourses became common knowledge from one week to the other simply because the media had managed to conjure up general interest for formerly minor discourses. I sincerely doubt that these new insights held by the masses in these days are based on a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of today's situation and thus can be viewed as a grown and matured view. For me, it is rather a sample case for how quickly certain information and/or processes can become blurred by the aggressive concentration on certain media news (while the "real" tragedy of the crisis and the "real" extent to which we are facing a tragic moment in history is most probably only comprehensible for a few chosen ones and the masses can just rely on "narratives" invented by the media and certain other institutions). Leaving apart its rights and wrongs in the specific case, this case as well demonstrates that such mechanisms which are mainly controlled by the

media and other powerful institutions of the global economic and political networks can happen again any time.

Now, what can the documentary films under review in my book tell us about the historical developments leading up to the point where we are today? Which atmosphere do these films convey?

It is a fact that since 1989, a huge number of documentaries were produced in the Balkan space. My systematic research encompasses films that were made between the fall of the Iron Curtain and 2004, the year when this project was born, which means that I try to cover 15 years of documentary production in and about the region.

Most of these films convey an atmosphere which is common for all those situations when people are confronted with their existences in a remote periphery. At the same time, the films represent specific strategies some of those people developed in order to survive. These strategies helped them to arrange themselves with the disadvantages they have been confronted with. Many of the protagonists in the films, including a lot of war refugees, try to escape their misery and to find happiness in the West or simply to build up an existence there. A high number of documentaries solely addressed the Bosnian War and its consequences for the civil society, more than 200 films were made on this topic alone worldwide. Besides showing the daily life of the people in the Balkan societies, the directors usually offered revisions of their national histories and identities at the same time.

Studying Balkan Documentaries—The Project...

The subtitle of my book—*History, Memory, Identity: Representations of Historical Discourses in the Balkan Documentary Film*—is designed to be at once indicative of the book's core subject matter, the interrelationship of constructions of historical discourses and the constructions of memory and identity in films of and about the region, whilst simultaneously descriptive of the book's theoretical main content, namely that historical discourses in film are not allowed to be seen as a true account of historical events and developments but as various ways of representing them. As there are different definitions of the Balkans and its member states, I will already at this point explicitly name those represented in my book. My research thus concentrates on films from/about Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey.

It is a fact that within the scholarship, interdisciplinary projects are still rare although being widely promoted. Still, film studies gradually also take

into account theories inspired by social sciences, history and the like, and on the other hand the latter disciplines which are still focused more consequently on interpreting written sources have already started to enter into discourses on image-based information (Bordwell and Carroll 1996),² with documentary film being only one of many objects of studies here. Content and mode of representation have become equally important to explain the construction and reconstruction of discourses; often also intertextual references and contexts of production and reception are meanwhile integrated in the so-called traditional "text studies". As much as I felt confident when trying to develop an interdisciplinary approach to the documentary film of the Balkan region, the study is still mainly embedded in film studies, area studies, (cultural) history and geopolitics and only secondarily in media studies in general, cultural studies, anthropology and politics.

Coming back to the broader developments in the sub-field of documentary film, a renewed interest has not only arisen in the Balkan region but in the European documentary film in general. A growing number of documentary directors, the provision of new funds, and the appearance of various festival platforms for documentaries in the Balkan region can—at least partly—be regarded as a reaction to the need to revisit history after the official end of the Cold War. A widely accepted view is that some of the most interesting investigations explore the complexities of Balkan history and politics of especially the 20th century. Apart from wars, population exchanges, the fate of ethnic and religious minorities, the (post-)socialist/communist transition, political and economic upheavals, generational conflicts, and the prevailing patriarchal structures in the region are the predominant topics in these films. Some of the films were co-produced by one or more Balkan countries and their Western European partners.

As most of the mentioned subjects are vividly represented in the films of or about the different Balkan nations and thus have a cross-cultural relevance, a *transnational approach* is required here to adequately tackle shared historical legacies (like the Ottoman legacy), shared experiences and consequences of migrations before, during and after the Ottoman rule, the specific patriarchy and other cultural and social contexts as well as a shared economic dependency. The chosen cross-cultural approach allows not only to reflect on the similarities between the Balkan nations but also on their regional differences. As in my doctoral thesis on Yugoslav feature

² Bordwell, D. and N. Carroll. 1996, eds. *Post-Theory. Reconstructing Film Studies*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.

film, my approach here also explores a range of identities that go beyond the *national*; it looks at *generational*, *gender*- and *class*-related identity formations as well.

The above mentioned important identifications of humankind alongside the path of our past are often ignored. But is it not worth asking how war—as a part of nearly every national history—can be related to local patriarchies, or how generational conflicts led to certain historical events and developments, while making others impossible at the same time. And as the financial crisis shows it is also more than worth taking into account global economic developments when reflecting on the culturally sanctioned world map of nations with its judgement on higher and lower cultures, in our specific case on Europe's cultural centre and its periphery (as the Balkans are often referred to).

One of the many consequences of the culturally informed centre and peripheral statuses in Europe is that there exist only a few exceptions among the directors from the Balkan region who are internationally renowned, as for example Emir Kusturica and Theodoros Angelopoulos, and even those are mainly feature filmmakers.

Most documentary directors I discuss here rose in importance in this field only as late as the 1990s and afterwards. Their works show in most cases a rather self-critical approach and their conceptions usually oppose the traditional (broadcast) documentary format in their ideological setting as well as in their aesthetic expression.

This book thus provides a sound cross-section of the foremost *newer forms of documentary film* in and about the Balkan region, also because it is especially these alternative forms in the Balkan space that deal with individual and collective memory and its impact on identity constructions.

A basic result in regard to the Balkan space is also that not only common patterns in approaching topics on a content level are observable, but the films' use of stylistic elements in correspondence with their self-conception of newer forms of documentary film becomes transparent at the same time.

The central aim of this project was to explore the various ways in which historical but also present discourses on national, regional and other forms of identity in film are structured around *constructions of memory* and how these identity constructions get "mediated" by the (documentary) film.

A comprehensive scholarly source that helped me enormously to find my way round the study field of Balkan Cinema was, as mentioned beforehand, Iordanova's book "Cinema of Flames" (2001). A further major source I could rely on was the work of Todorova, especially her

book "Imagining the Balkans" (1997) that predominantly deals with the stereotypical associations with the Balkans and their often deliberate use in Western politics. Last but not least the work of Rosenstone, a historian who dominantly writes on the relationship between history and film, substantially influenced the theoretical foundations of my study. He believes that in our image-driven world more attention should be attributed to film when studying history and invites us to reflect that history "is always a series of conventions for thinking about the past," be it in film or in written form (Rosenstone 1995, 12).

Anderson again helped me to name the (sometimes) blurred images that people (both in reality and film) carry around with them. Those people sometimes do not even know their homeland "in real" as they have mainly lived in exile but still feel part of a chosen "imagined community", a construct based on their (sometimes only told or received) memories and usually nurtured by the media. Basically, this phenomenon led me to the assumption that identities in some sense are informed by a certain mix of real life circumstances and experiences on the one hand and imaginations and projections of desired or feared life experiences and visions of the past and the present life on the other.

Other meaningful contributions to my study encompass the book "Offene Bilder: Film, Staat und Gesellschaft im Europa nach der Wende", edited by Bernhard Frankfurter (1995) as well as the edited volume "Die siebte Kunst auf dem Pulverfass: Balkan-Film" (Grbić, Loidolt and Milev 1996).³ These books somehow formed my first scholarly sources when specialising on Balkan film, and their reception was later on followed by the interviews which I conducted while writing my doctoral thesis, but especially those I made in preparation for this book, the many discussions with friends and colleagues from the Balkan region and from other parts of the world, especially those which came up during *Context-Europe 2002*, the precious contributions of my students in my course "Researching World Cinemas" at Leicester University as well as in other courses at the University of Vienna. All these discussions helped me to reflect more deeply on regional specifics but also on concepts such as Eurocentrism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, post-modernism and on other even more recently emerging discourses that could potentially be applied to issues around Balkan identity or at least spur the development of my thoughts.

³ Frankfurter, B. 1995, ed. *Offene Bilder: Film, Staat und Gesellschaft im Europa nach der Wende*. Wien: Promedia; Grbić, B., Loidolt, G. and R. Milev 1996, eds. *Die siebte Kunst auf dem Pulverfass: Balkan-Film*. Graz: edition blimp.

Dealing now with various forms of identities, one thing that this book wants to prove is that—contrary to post-structuralist thinking—we do not (yet) have any good reasons for neglecting or even abusing the term "identity" and the different characteristics of its various forms. Instead my suggestion is to face reality and acknowledge that those times, in which we can ignore (group) identity formations and their consequences, are still far ahead from us—in part because we still depend on the desire to belong to certain communities, in part because politics and the economy have been interested in keeping these patterns of group identification alive to be able to deal with certain communities of the society in a calculable manner. Part of the result of such strategies certainly is the crisis we are confronted with in the present.

Such debates on (group) identity formations should not be repressed in the academic world (this in my view happens often indirectly) but need to be yet enhanced to allow us to better reflect on why people feel what they feel and think what they think.

Furthermore, I considered it important to highlight new forms of communication about history by providing case studies whose principal objective is to integrate the study of the *private space*, often created through the usage of autobiographical records that show "ordinary citizens" in these films and to confront them with existing macro debates in politics as well as with the dominant discourses within the academic community. The use of autobiographical sources is another main characteristic of the more recent films in the Balkan region.

Exploring the "private space" not only allows the reader to have a clear idea of how processes of identity formation are directly launched and later on maintained, but also to comprehend the impact they have on people's real and everyday life. In correspondence with this approach, this study has the courage to go one step back and to invite the reader to reflect on dominant discourses in the academic community, to look at their justified relevance but also at their given ignorance of certain contemporary phenomena rather than to promote one discourse or completely reject the other.

The Structure of the Book

In the introduction to the book, the initial paragraphs summarise the background of my study and more closely explain my chosen approach to the films; the following pages then invite the reader to a discussion on "The Genesis of the Documentary Film and Its Manifestation Nowadays" (Part I). I admit that this introductory part might not always be easy to

follow for non-experts, as especially a discussion of dominant discourses and by that often of infiltrated knowledge in the scholarship that is partly mingled with common knowledge positions (also outside academia) is presented here. These rather traditional positions are questioned and reassessed from the vantage points of present-day needs and relevance. Basically, in this early part of the introduction, the development and (changing) potential of the documentary is analysed from its birth to the present day. On the other hand, the case studies that follow in the book are very concrete because of their focus on the microcosms. In addition, the represented experiences of the protagonists are easily comprehensible. Especially here the processes of identity formation as presented in the films and prominently discussed in my study can be easily followed.

The first few of these case studies are presented in Part II—"The Kaleidoscopic View of the Balkans"—that deals with the entire Balkan region. Then a series of case studies follow that are mainly related to individual Balkan nations, bearing the title "Images and Fates of the History of Tomorrow" (Part III). Finally, the book provides an appendix of interviews with influential voices in the field of Balkan cinema that address remaining explosive questions with regard to the subject matter of the book.

The case studies of Part II and III are slightly different in quality as in Part II the higher relevance of the cross-cultural reality invites us to concentrate on different group identities and the discussion on collective grounds while Part III creates a more intimate atmosphere when predominantly dealing with single life- (or family-)stories and/or single film texts with their focus on the fate of people of an individual nation. At this point, however, I also want to stress the fact that individual and collective identities and memories are not to be understood as contradictory categories but that the objectivity of the shared national or regional history is naturally manifested in rather subjective accounts, as people inescapably share "collective terrains" wherever they live.

At the end, I want to stress that it is a huge pity that the big majority of the documentaries I discuss in my book were not distributed at all. Only a few of them were distributed, and then often offered at prices which even academic institutions can hardly afford. *Bosna!* (1994), which was made by the French intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy, and which uses a lot of footage shot by the members of Sarajevo based production unit SaGA, was distributed in various formats all over the globe, while films produced by SaGA itself were only screened at a few festivals. Thus, film directors from the West could rely on much better international exposure than most filmmakers from the Balkans (even if the first were not always

professionals). Here again the structural split becomes transparent by mirroring unequal power structures in the economic and cultural sphere and their connectedness.

Film scholar, director and curator for many European and international film festivals Rada Šešić, who is one of my interviewees in this book (see interview page 297), confirms that the big majority of these newer documentary films of the Balkan region did not find their way to the TV screens either.

A sign for hope is that since 2005 a sub-division of film studies has existed at the University of St. Andrews, which focuses entirely on "Balkan cinema" and which was established by Prof. Dina Iordanova (see interview page 285). In the long run, such a focus can certainly help to promote the films of the region also outside the scholarly field.

Future Prospects: The Balkan Region—Permanently at the Periphery or Entrance to the European Universe?

When it comes to the future of the Balkan documentary but also of the Balkan region as such, I do believe that if some efforts were made to actually give room to these newer formats on the different distribution channels, the probability would certainly increase that so far ignored or neglected concerns and fates would be more often included in discussions about history in the first place.

One needs to be aware that the term "knowledge society", which is one of the many buzzwords of our times, is not a neutral term which stands for further development in our societies per se. Similarly to films, discourses are also consciously selected and evaluated. As a consequence, knowledge is only produced and mediated on the basis of these pre-selections and evaluations.

In how far knowledge about those societies, which still exist at the periphery of Europe, is and will be defined as worth knowing in future and will become more dominantly included in the discourses on knowledge within the scholarship but also outside, is first of all rather a consequence of the before mentioned decisions, which are consciously made, than the result of certain naturally emerging developments. The main players in this context are most often individuals but also (institutionalised) groups. One question still remains: Are we at all mature enough to maintain a healthy balance in this regard?

Speaking once again about our participation in various groups, be it the nation or other collective groups, we have to be aware, as Halbwachs already stated decades ago, that in certain milieus our life has already

happened before we know about it (Halbwachs 1967, 42). In my personal case, I think here of my childhood that I spent close to the then Czechoslovakian border and of the time when I first experienced group identification processes and realised that there is a split between "us" and "them". Basically I think that those "in-between" phases or interstices, in which we only gradually become conscious members of groups and in which we take part in collective thinking for the very first time while we are still confronted with those blurred images, will still be effective later on in our lives. In my view, this is one of the reasons why people, who are convinced of their rational thinking with often good intention, cannot get over early identifications with certain ideas and feelings that limit personal development, be it the "ordinary citizen" or the political and/or economic elite. This way of approaching the world around us seems to usually belong to an immature period of life awareness. It should, however, not belong to a period of life when the same people have power to shape not only their own but as well other people's identities and destinies.

My wish is that the fates and destinies of the people presented in the films under review reach the reader's universe and that they enable them to have a second look and at least partly help to overcome the earlier described dilemmas. By doing so, they will hopefully make us more mature in handling the current crisis without resorting to war and violence as well as in changing our way of thinking and readjusting future development. A second look at the many spots on the European map which were so often neglected in the past might be a bit more realistic than the usually simplified projections onto the Balkan region which are often expressed by people and institutions that usually implicitly try to (consciously or unconsciously) maintain certain power structures and by that most often protect only their own interests.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

THE GENESIS OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM AND ITS MANIFESTATION NOWADAYS

Compared to the preceding two decades, the 1990s were crucial in terms of shifts in the media regarding both technical innovation and the media's self-conception. This has not only been observable in the increasing invention of new TV formats as well as in visual products apart from TV, but also in written texts as the new technologies have been allowing different ways of combining and saving (written and/or visual) information. Examples for the above are all sorts of online publications, e-books or books that include a CD-Rom and the like. One specific trend among these developments has been the revival of reality-driven representations which has made itself felt in the arts and sciences such as literature or anthropological and film studies on the one hand and in the popular media such as reality TV shows on the other. The case study of the book entitled "Lost Generation: Too Young to Die and Too Old to Be Born Again" (see page 221) focuses on a documentary film that is even instrumentalised as a mediator between different social spheres in the real world, as a tool for trying to understand the conflict between the opponents in the film as well as in their real life.

A crucial result of the processes described is that those new developments in communication and information technology appear to be altering our fundamental perception of knowledge, of time and space, of relations between the real and the virtual, and of the local and the global (Brooker, in King, 2000, ix). By doing so, the new visual and electronic media that have become more dominant with the time passing have in general created a particular uncertainty not only about the future, but also about the past. This becomes particularly obvious in my case study "The Making Of History: The Different Faces of the So-Called Revolution in Romania" (see page 199) in greater detail.

Not surprisingly so, the 1990s can be seen as both the decade when visual media including documentary film became major means for learning, with the latter informing the audience especially about the past (Rosenthal 1988, 426) and the decade when reading fell into constant decline.

In the context of these more recent developments, Michael Renov may be right when he says that the marginalisation of documentary film as a subject of serious inquiry has come to an end as well (Renov 1993, 1). Since the 1990s, the discourse on documentary film has seen a significant reconfiguration of documentary studies. At the same time, according to Gaines, the return to the documentary is also the return to cinematic realism and its dilemmas (Gaines, in Gaines et al. 1999, 1).

In this introductory part of the book, I will focus on the discussion about the interrelationship between documentary film and fiction as well as between documentary film and history as such. Whenever specific developments in my dedicated region, i.e. the Balkan area, can be pointed out I will alert to them separately. On a global level, especially the debate on historical representation was gaining attention in the decade of digital media as the question whether documentary film could still represent history in this new media environment became once again highly relevant. As history—at any time—gets mediated by the media, as for example by film, and is not only transferred, I will rather concentrate on the documentary film's constructions of representation of historical discourses in my book by providing examples and also discussing certain developments in greater detail in the second chapter of part I entitled "Can and Should Documentary Film Represent History?". Depending on the significant impact of the discourses on memory and identity in the films under review, I will especially investigate representations of historical discourses in the films based on constructions of memory and identity primarily related to the Balkan space. If applicable, references to subsequent case studies of the book will be made. The fact is that since the tumultuous year of 1989, documentary film and video, this time again in a more autonomous way, have become some of the most important sites for critical debates related to the reformulation of national history, collective memory, and personal identity, especially in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc (see also Portuges 2001, 108).

Apart from the recently heightened focus on documentary film in former Eastern Europe and/or the Balkans and partly also all over the globe, it has to be admitted that documentary film was not only considered less important than fiction film in public discourses in the past but also that the theoretical discourse about documentary film was for most of its history based on "something bigger" and so has not been given major attention in the scholarship. It was either included in history, anthropological studies or various art discourses or it was exploited for political movements where the function of the documentary was identified as a means of (positive or negative) propaganda.

Both a new theoretical approach towards documentary film as well as a sound repositioning of documentaries in film studies ask not only for some serious reflection on its potential by means of a retrospective inquiry into its tradition but also for the courage to start the adventure of investigating documentary film beyond traditional discourses. I want to undertake this adventure in the first chapter of Part I entitled "Evolving Discourses on Documentary Film in an Interdisciplinary Mode", and point here specifically to the case studies "Lost Generation: Too Young to Die and Too Old to Be Born Again" (see page 221), "The Making of History: The Different Faces of the So-Called Revolution in Romania" (see page 199), but also to "Women and War" (see page 241), which more closely discuss the potential and new function of contemporary documentary film formats. It is important to expand the limits of the documentary discourse as we need to understand the documentary form as a consequence of changing concepts but also of changing conditions for communicating with media products in general.

The three main issues of this part and their interdependence, i.e. the evolution of the discourse about documentary film, the new potential of documentary film to represent history (and the present) and the interrelationship of history, memory and identity, reveal crucial and yet unfinished debates in the field of documentary film with the latter issue, i.e. the interaction of history, memory and identity, being especially related to the region under review. In other words: My ultimate goal of investigation is to contribute on the one hand to a repositioning of documentary film by highlighting its new potential, not least by evaluating its possible achievements in disciplines such as visual history/sociology, and on the other hand to show in how far documentaries of/about the Balkan region provide rich sources for such a discourse as innovative concepts have been identified especially in the Balkan region during the last two decades. At the same time, I want to prove that in contrast to Baudrillard's point of view, it is still possible to convey history by documentary film and that in the Balkan case the most dominant discourses of the new documentary films focus exactly on historical representations, particularly in correspondence with memory and identity discourses.

But let us now, in the following chapter, go back to the beginning of the documentary form to understand the evolvement of the documentary discourse and only based on it demonstrate the emergence of new concepts in documentary film.

Evolving Discourses on Documentary Film in an Interdisciplinary Mode

Apart from the technological innovations and the growing film industries of the first decades of the last century, various disciplines had an impact on the discourse that evolved around the documentary. More specifically spoken it was politics, sciences, the arts, factual history as well as the discourse on history, various concepts of realism¹ or psychological assumptions regarding film audiences.

For most of the time, the history of documentary film was not really harmonious since it was affected at least partly by the variety of developments and concepts mentioned above. The biggest clash was most probably caused by the emergence of the following two camps, the supporters of aesthetic forms or formalists and the champions of realist discourses. The arguments as to the preference of one over the other usually relate to wider historical (and within them also technological) developments and their dialogue with documentary film.

Some theorists argue that in comparison to other film types the so-called actuality film was a leading and commercial film product at the time of the gradual birth of the "moving image" (1895 up to 1908) (i.e. Rosen 1993, 72/73). While this opinion might be subject to dispute, it is a fact that the roots of cinema are in any case co-terminus with the documentary's own and with names such as Eadweard Muybridge, Etienne-Jules Marey, Auguste and Louis Lumières (Renov 1993, 4). Whereas Robert J. Flaherty made the first "full-length" documentary, *Nanook of the North* (1922) (Nichols 2001, 85), John Grierson is said to have first coined the term "documentary" (Renov 1993, 29). Like everywhere else, cinema emerged in the Balkan space at the very beginning of the 20th century. It was the Macedonian Manaki brothers (Janaki (1878–1960) and Milton (1882–1964)), who created the first documentary film in the Balkans in 1905. The film was recorded in Advella, today's home to a Greek community and entitled *Predilki/The Spinstresses*. Already at the very start of documentary film production in the Balkan region, the films of the Manaki brothers dealt with historical representations apart from illustrating everyday life.² Other pioneers were

¹ A more detailed discussion on this issue will be provided in the following sub-chapter "Can and Should Documentary Film Represent History?" (see page 22).

² Examples of early films by the Manaki brothers that recorded important historical events at the dawn of the 20th century are *Proslava na Mladoturskata revolucija/Anniversary Ceremonies of the Revolution by the Young Turks* (1908) or