

Truth, Dare or Promise

Truth, Dare or Promise:
Art and Documentary Revisited

Edited by

Jill Daniels, Cahal McLaughlin and Gail Pearce

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P U B L I S H I N G

Truth, Dare or Promise: Art and Documentary Revisited,
Edited by Jill Daniels, Cahal McLaughlin and Gail Pearce
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Dedicated to Anita Pearce and Barbara Daniels

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FOREWORD

PATRICIA HOLLAND

Truth, Dare or Promise is a timely sequel to *Truth or Dare*, published in 2007. It revisits the parallel practices of art and documentary in the moving image and explores the overlaps and tensions which have characterised relations between the two forms. Like its predecessor the book grows out of a conference and a set of screenings in which artists and documentary makers discussed their work and exchanged ideas with each other and with commentators and theorists. Like *Truth or Dare* but unlike many books of moving image theory, it is edited, and largely written by committed practitioners for whom theory and practice inform each other.

In 2007 *Truth or Dare* recorded a moment when the separate worlds of art and documentary, which often seemed hermetically divided, were moving closer together. Documentary work was feeling the need to break the limits of a single screen and to expand into a gallery setting, while established artists were approaching subjects which had been largely seen as documentary territory. Categories were being questioned, boundaries challenged.

Six years later it seems that those categories have been radically revised and the boundaries have all but disappeared. To a certain extent the changes have been institutional: opportunities on the television screen have narrowed for innovative forms of documentary work, while gallery spaces have opened up. However, the most striking development has been the rapid expansion of interactive digital technologies. By now, 2013, these have transformed every aspect of both art and documentary practice. From mobile phone cameras to global online connections, they have brought expanding possibilities in a new era of the moving image. The addition of 'promise' to 'truth' and 'dare' could not be more appropriate.

But while the scope of today's possibilities is unprecedented, long established traditional modes have not been pushed aside. Filmmakers continue to work with established formats, while digitisation and online

availability have meant that the past has, in effect, become more present. Archives are being preserved and many works - previously known chiefly by reputation - can be made available, re-visited and re-valued.

So this book comes at a time when the practice of 'documentary' is more diverse than ever before and its boundaries, including those with works that have traditionally been labelled as 'art', have become increasingly blurred. New descriptions are needed, new labels, as the old ones become rusty and inappropriate. 'Documentary', 'art' and all shades of collaboration between them increasingly defy definition and demand inverted commas. But above all they remain *practices*, difficult to pin down, always changing.

However, although the current situation is unprecedented in its fluidity, a sense of challenge and of changing possibilities is not new. Documentary is a modernist project, and at every point in its history it has embraced new technologies and new ideas and has looked forward to new opportunities. It has been open to influence and pressures from many different forces - and its vexed relationship with 'art' began well before the arrival of the moving image. In 1859 Charles Baudelaire insisted that it was the task of the new medium of photography to stick to 'absolute material accuracy'.

Documentary history has been marked by such attempts to confine it to its austere purpose. It has been urged to eliminate those functions, which Michael Renov in *Truth or Dare* (and elsewhere) has characterised as its 'expressive' aspects. But this has been an impossible task. 'Expressivity' runs like a glowing thread through the history of documentary - sometimes dominating the mood of an age, but always latent in the visuals, the rhythm, the impact of a film (it was Joris Ivens, whose *Rain* [1929] is a classic of poetic cinema, who complained that his camera recorded 'beauty' even 'when we did not want it').

At the same time the worldly concerns, which remain at the heart of the documentary project, have inevitably affected art practices - whether these have aligned themselves with the social and political movements of their times, or have determinedly turned their backs on them.

Renov pointed to the parallels between the modernist movements in the art world in the early years of the 20th century and their reflection in non-fiction cinema - especially in the new-born Soviet Union where the striking images of the new aesthetic echoed the mood of revolutionary

freedom. Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* was a formalist exercise which became a documentary classic (1929). But while Vertov saw his camera as an extension of vision, an eye on the world ('I see because I kino-see'), in surrealist Paris Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel took a razor to their pictured eye (*Un Chien Andalou* 1936). The moment when the blade slices across the eye-ball is one of the most shocking in the history of cinema - and it makes a significant statement about the possibilities of the cinematic image. Unlike Vertov's documentary project, surrealism did not aim to look outwards. Instead it aimed to focus on the interior world of dreams, fantasy and sexuality. And this too, remains part of the documentary project.

At certain moments over the history of the moving image, both documentary and mainstream art practices have tended to rigidify; their methods and their approach limited by their funding and the organisational structures within which they must of necessity operate. But, repeatedly over the years, other practices have grown up outside those institutional limits. Various described as experimental, avant-garde, oppositional, underground, or independent, they range from the Film and Photo League of the 1930s to the New York underground of the 1960s; from the London Filmmakers Co-op and the community workshops of the 1970s to the YouTube publishers of today. Occupying a liminal status, often balanced between 'art' and 'documentary', these have followed their own paths, refusing the conventions of the mainstream. Michael O'Pray has described such film practice as 'fluid, eclectic irreverent, with no stable mode of production, distribution or exhibition. ...no fixed aim...It is essentially a promiscuous activity'. To these movements on the margins we could add various vernacular practices, especially home movies.

In 1975 Peter Wollen identified two avant-gardes - one which challenged the art establishment, another whose aim was largely political. But the two could not remain separate. 'Alternative' underground work is in its very nature democratising and has a political purchase. By seeking out the accessible technology of the day - whether 8mm movie cameras or mobile phones - it opens both art and documentary practice beyond the limits of the professional mainstream. In particular the feminists of the 1970s argued that every aspect of production - 'documentary', 'art', call it what you will - must be radicalised. They challenged the authenticity of the photographic image itself (no 'absolute material accuracy' for them) and set out to evolve new relationships in the practice of production and distribution.

These are the antecedents of projects like those described in *Truth, Dare or Promise*: the ‘mobile-mentary’ work described by Max Schleser: the collaborative activism of Andrea Luka Zimmerman: Jill Daniels’ highly personal exploration.

I’d like to end with a few words about ‘truth’ - after all, the word dominates the title of both books. In *Truth or Dare* John Ellis argued that ‘art’ and ‘documentary’ must always be separate because they have radically different aims. Unlike ‘documentary’, ‘art’ is not committed to ‘truth’. Yet both the ‘art’ practices and the ‘avant-garde’ and ‘underground’ film-making which have shadowed mainstream documentary throughout its history, have argued, as the 1970s feminists did, that some forms of documentary truth are themselves misleading. Some truths are beyond the scope of ‘material accuracy’. Werner Herzog has claimed that his documentaries express an ‘ecstatic truth’.

Truth, Dare or Promise sets out to explore these other truths.

INTRODUCTION

As Pat Holland suggests in her foreword to this book, *Truth, Dare or Promise* explores more than the previous publication, *Truth or Dare* was able to. This book, also arising from a conference, attempts to get to grips more viscerally with the creation of art and documentary. The conference, held at Goldsmiths College, University of London in May 2012, over two days, supported by showings of films at the South London Gallery, attracted over a hundred delegates, including artists, filmmakers, writers and teachers. Discussions were lively and dialogues with the audience were particularly useful. What became apparent was how relaxed any perceived divisions between art and documentary had become. There was a real desire for a coming together.

A number of themes have emerged. Many of our contributors have commented on the exigencies and practicalities of showing moving image work in galleries. This has become much more prevalent over the past half dozen years and our writers take a number of positions, exploring the restrictions and innovations theoretically and aesthetically. Also, many of the concerns of the writers overlap and they have chosen similar film examples to develop their thoughts. In this way we hear about films on the Irish political activist, Bernadette Devlin, from a number of different positions that offer a fascinating insight to a range of stylistic approaches. The films of Chantal Ackerman also appear in the context of the apparatus of the viewing space as a theoretical consideration.

To continue the convergence, we called the three sections that comprise the book, *Making*, *Showing* and *Watching*, three distinct but increasingly merging stages of art/filmmaking, and have grouped our writers accordingly. As before, many ideas and themes overlapped. In developing our *Making* section we had the opportunity to invite makers to explore their initial positions and to reveal some of the themes behind their productions. We chose to begin with Hito Steyerl who takes us to the theory behind images and authenticity, via philosophy, politics and history, at the start of documentary in her thoughts on *Art or Life?* Andrea Zimmerman has been working in Hackney with groups of tenants, who have become her friends, to energize and integrate a social housing

scheme in its last moments. This has been life-changing for many of those involved. Cahal McLaughlin's work with the Human Rights Media Centre, Cape Town, especially on reparations after apartheid, also engages with a community over many years. Jill Daniels refers to the strategies she chose in making a highly personal autobiographical film that explores memory and trauma.

In our *Showing* section, Adam Kossoff's thoughts on experiencing cinema in the gallery gives much to consider about the audience while making work. Anne-Sophie Dinant uses her experience of working with artists and cites examples of work by Clarisse Hahn, Manon de Boer and Omer Fast. Her work at the South London Gallery and elsewhere leads her to reflect on artists' observations and the ways they are presented in the gallery. Liz Greene compares three distinct styles of documentary that share the same subject. Minou Norouzi's discursive exploration of the moving image, informed by her work at the Sheffield Fringe Festival, gives examples of work by Saskia Olde, Richard Grayson and Renzo Martens, all innovative in their presentations in the gallery. Max Schleser offers ways of employing technologies empowering users through art within a documentary framework via his mobilementary, the mobile as a means of creating documentaries. Daniel Jewesbury explores the potential of experimental film to dramatise the political.

In the *Watching* section, Gail Pearce considers installation in the gallery as a form of documentary. Miranda Pennell explores the boundaries of performance and the translation into documentary. John Ellis has been a gallery visitor as well as a long-time independent producer of documentaries and is also a writer about television theory. His observations set out a wry and amusing position about the possibilities of viewing. Babette Mangolte, an experienced filmmaker and artist, has observed changes in the presentations of artworks and documentaries over many years and reminds us how diverse these have become.

The *Promise* of the book leads us to approach you the reader to include more of the digital world, more of the unknowns of the future. We have attempted to pinpoint this moment through our chosen writers and practitioners. The range of subject matter and approaches reinforces the indefinable nature of this work.

Jill Daniels, Cahal McLaughlin and Gail Pearce

CHAPTER ONE

ART OR LIFE?

DOCUMENTARY JARGONS OF AUTHENTICITY

HITO STEYERL

No work of art may appear completely alive without becoming mere semblance, and ceasing to be a work of art. The life quivering in it must appear petrified and as if spellbound in a single moment.

—Walter Benjamin¹

‘Long live life as it is!’² Dziga Vertov’s triumphant exclamation from the 1920s is one of the most famous rallying cries of documentary film. To record life as it is, without addition or distortion, is an old dream of many documentarists. According to Vertov, life not only had to be lively but also genuine, real – ‘as it is’. Yet this small appendix – ‘as it is’ – unfolds unforeseen meanings. On the one hand it affirms the identity of life with itself. But precisely by doing so, it raises the suspicion that life could also be totally different – artificial, illusory, distorted. A gap suddenly opens up between the false and the genuine life. Alain Badiou has also identified this sudden onset of doubt as a key characteristic of the ‘passion for the real’³ that marked the 20th century: ‘the real [...] is never real enough not to be suspected of semblance.’⁴ The passion for the real calls forth the desire for a purge, for the cheat to be exposed. The genuine must be cleaned of the false at any cost. Even life itself could be mere semblance. The seemingly harmless little addition ‘as it is’ in Vertov’s jubilant call reveals itself as a highly dynamic supplement that unsettles the main proposition of the sentence and, at second glance, even reverses it into its opposite.

Indeed, on further reflection, it is of course absolutely impossible to capture life as it is with documentary means. Life cannot pass into an image ‘as it is’. At the very moment when it turns into an image, it disincarnates itself and becomes its Other. It is its own doppelganger,

simultaneously genuine and uncanny, original and copy, real and surreal. Documentary life as it is can be everything except itself. But Vertov's text affirms the absolute opposite: *actual* life is created in the documentary image in the first place. He raves about the 'kino-eye' that 'creates thousands of different people in accordance with preliminary blue-prints and diagrams'.⁵ It combines the 'hands, the strongest and most dexterous; from another [...] the legs, the swiftest and most shapely; from a third, the most beautiful and expressive head – and through montage [it creates] a new, perfect man.'⁶ Through montage Vertov's kino-eye creates more than common life: it creates a kind of uberlife, the genuine life, or life 'as it is'. However: this life cannot exist in reality. For only the recording invites the question of authenticity. It isn't until copies enter the game and forgery is a looming threat that the question of authenticity makes sense. "Genuine" life is a copy without an original. Life itself is at best real. It exists, or maybe it doesn't. It can only become "genuine" as a clone of itself. Only the documentary form claims to certify the authenticity of life, and on that account feels superior to fiction. But this "genuine" life is created nowhere else than in its documentary reproduction.

The supplement in Vertov's slogan thus completes its subversive effect. For only the life that is not itself, because it is caught and authenticated in the image, can be 'as it is'. The genuine life is always already a ghost. And therefore we are able to understand why, simultaneously to the euphoric rhetoric of real life, a whole army of ghosts, zombies and mummies haunts the documentary discourse.

Ghosts, *plastrons* and mummies

For Siegfried Kracauer photography is a 'ghost'.⁷ It 'provides access of a limited sort to the life of the original'⁸, while also destroying it.⁹ Contrary to photography, film, thanks to its reality effect, is able to redeem life itself so that it may be filmed.¹⁰ "Life" and film, according to Kracauer, share a general reciprocal affinity.¹¹ The film theorist André Bazin goes one step further in the invention of bold metaphors. In his essay on 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' he identifies mummification as the origin of fine arts, and hence an attempt to symbolically overcome death and preserve life.¹² While photography can be compared to a death mask, the filmic image is 'change mummified',¹³ and film is no longer a mere representation of life but synonymous with the creation of a wholly autonomous, ideal and real universe.¹⁴ Bazin thus creates the myth of a cinematographic genesis where the power of creating the world is

transferred to the author and death plays an important role as well. In the image, the reality of things is mummified: preserved as though it were a relic.¹⁵ Roland Barthes also uses this metaphor when referring to photographs as worldly relics.¹⁶ Barthes himself feels embalmed by photography, modelled, shaped, killed and even turned into a plastron (a passive victim).¹⁷ According to Barthes the photograph does not so much document certain postures than produce them. It not only forms the body but creates or mortifies it.¹⁸ The photograph is a perverse muddling of the real and the living. Because it testifies to the reality of the object, it implies that the object is also alive. But because it simultaneously records what *has* existed, it also suggests that it is already dead.

In the realm of specifically documentary discourses as well, life plays an important role, for instance in John Grierson's documentary film theory from the 1930s. According to Grierson the documentary form should be 'vital' and 'photograph the living scene and the living story'; the subjects should be 'taken from the raw'.¹⁹ In the 1970s Direct Cinema put together a detailed catalogue of devices with which life as it really is was to be captured: making the camera invisible, using only original sound without comments, etc. Life was to be overheard, or you could even spy upon without giving away the position of the observer. In this line of thought, the definition of documentary life occasionally slipped into folkism. Klaus Wildenhahn, among others, argued in the 1970s that the documentarist's duty was to develop an 'ethic' which he claimed existed as 'a living ideal in the people' or as a 'living culture'.²⁰ The social situationism of *cinéma vérité* is not so much concerned with representing life 'as it is' than with recording it as it is 'being provoked'.²¹ Life must manifest itself, prove itself or reveal its spontaneity. This unbridled euphoria for 'life as it is' was deemed highly suspicious by feminist critics in the 1970s. In 1975 Eileen McGarry argued that the documentary 'parading of life as it is' perpetuates the bourgeois-patriarchal ideology by representing stereotypes as reality or reality as stereotypes.²² 'Life as it is' came under ideological suspicion in those years: whatever is presented as "nature" or "original" is nothing else than the dominant ideology.²³

The jargon of authenticity

The 1980s witnessed a conservative turn in the use of the contentious term 'life'. Martha Rosler describes how the topos of 'real life' was used in 1980s documentary photography as an ideological weapon against 1960s socially engaged photography.²⁴ 'Real life' is seen as something

simultaneously precious, irrational and rather uncanny, which is best listened in on by means of voyeuristic, apolitical and theory-averse observation. The reference to 'real life' is in truth a polemic that emphasises the purportedly 'authentic' against 'left-wing ideological top-heaviness'. The result, according to Rosler, was a general swing to the right of the established photographic discourse,²⁵ marked by the Darwinist dog-eat-dog mentality of the 1980s.²⁶ The preferred procedure to capture this "authenticity", claims Rosler, was 'aimless sociological snooping around'. These conceptions of life as it really is were further developed with the various reality formats of the 1990s. In the mid-1990s television created new documentary practices of authenticity in which 'life' was tried and tested under laboratory conditions. In film, DV realism (Lev Manovich)²⁷ and surveillance aesthetics competed with each other for greater authenticity.²⁸

The rhetoric of 'real time' conveyed the impression of immediacy.²⁹ Simultaneously, in the realm of visual arts, besides a number of journalistic and sociological documentary styles, other formats become popular in which artists document their own actions. Boris Groys likens this form of documentation to art as 'the shaping of life'.³⁰ The documentation of artistic processes invests them with the aura of direct contact with the local and the authentic, 'an aura of the original, the living, the historical'³¹ that is digitally reproducible. Again, the documentary camera does not document – it creates the 'real' life. It must not only prove the merging of art and life but accomplish it through its gaze.

Documentarism and life

The merging of art and life manifests itself in the realm of documentary images as a constantly renewed and re-edited jargon of authenticity, or as Theodor W. Adorno already put it sharply in 1964: as an infatuation with the living.³² In the social field, however, the ghostly potential of documentary forms wields extremely destructive power. It catalyses processes that the ambivalent term 'biopolitics' can only inadequately describe.³³ The kino-eye as an accomplice of obscure life ideologies effectively becomes an uncanny creator, an inventor of populations, types and ideals. From its inception, the documentary form was transformed by the production of knowledge and truth into a potent tool of police control and surveillance as well as of ethnographic categorisation and subordination of populations. The limits of the population were defined at the same time as the knowledge about it, and this knowledge was also used

to subjugate the population or divide it into “useful” and “useless” constituents. Colonial regimes, for instance, produced their own “documentalities”, which were closely linked to the regime of the ethnographic gaze, the production of racist knowledge, and military technologies. The supposedly authentic culture of a given population became at once an argument for its oppression and education. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have described the production of colonial imagery as a panoptical situation that is closely linked to colonial rule, the scientific and aesthetic disciplining of nature and the simultaneous expansion of capitalism and imperialism.³⁴ Even more drastic imageries, such as the pseudo-documentary National-Socialist propaganda film *The Eternal Jew* (1940), prepared the ground for the genocide of European Jews with their “racial” scientific rhetoric.

The claim for documentary “authenticity” – for the representation of life as it is – is uncannily mirrored in a political passion for the real that suspects entire swathes of the population to lack “authenticity”. Only the discourse of “authenticity” triggers the paranoid impulse of purification and destruction, because authenticity, as opposed to reality, is fundamentally threatened. In the political dimension of authenticity we recognise to what extent the documentary discourse of ‘life as it is’ ties in with questions of power – the power to realise the “authentic” life, life the way it should be.

Authenticity

Political authenticity, as was to be expected, is invested with various interests. Historically, the emphasis and the discursive context of this concept have changed several times. Etymologically, the Latin word *authenticus* refers to the Greek *authentēs*, which means ‘master’, but also ‘ruler’.³⁵ This definition lays the emphasis on an activity that ‘achieves something on its own’.³⁶ In the German-speaking world, from the 16th century onwards, the word *authentisch* referred to that which was genuine, original and guaranteed, particularly in relation to the authenticity or authorship of writings. In the 18th century another meaning came to the fore. Authenticity now meant representing reality as truthful as a mirror, and consequently referred to the ‘truthfulness of representation’.³⁷ Around this time the referentiality between object and representation became ever more important. In the 20th century the term was increasingly applied to individuals. At the same time new discourses from the realms of psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, ethnology, literary studies and other

disciplines came into play.³⁸ Individuals were henceforth characterised as authentic or inauthentic.

Parallel to this development the concept of authenticity also played an important role in the political theory of modernity as a source of legitimisation for political contracts. These were increasingly founded on the authentic will/nature of the contractual parties; therefore this will/nature was also constructed theoretically in various political theories from Rousseau to Nietzsche via Hegel and Marx. The criterion for authenticity is the correspondence with a mysterious essence of that which is represented, which is just as manifest as it can simultaneously be unconscious, hidden, submerged, etc. – its ‘genuineness’.

The political function of authenticity permeates the history of western civilisation, inventing communities, creating nations or serving to devalue other groups or nations. The vision of authentic national cultures was therefore just as central to the emergence of the bourgeois national state as it was to the self-assurance of postcommunist and postcolonial societies.³⁹ This explains why the political scientist Thomas Noetzel proposes a conclusion that documentary theory has reached time and again: ‘Authenticity is a politically contested figure of legitimacy, and hence also the subject of political struggles.’⁴⁰ ‘Life as it is’ is far from showing us reality as such; rather, it shows us the reality of a will for power that conveys itself through documentary images.

Art or life?

The jargon of authenticity, Adorno writes in his eponymous treatise from 1964,⁴¹ reinforces the clichéd view according to which art has become inauthentic and must find a way back to life. Yet why would art even have to encroach on life? Has the old dream of the avant-gardes – to make art come to life and to turn life into art – ever produced something else in the documentary arena than half-animated fetishes or ‘factishes’ (*faitiches*), as Bruno Latour has coined the hybrid between fact and fetish?⁴² The factish belongs equally to the realm of rational science and that of the totem and idolatry. It merges genetic engineering and magic. We can understand “authentic” documentary images as factishes that pretend to clone life with great accuracy, but eventually manipulate it like voodoo puppets.

Only art interrupts their unbridled momentum. For life, according to Benjamin, does not form part of art. It is its outermost boundary. A work

of art that crosses the boundary of life ceases to be art and becomes mere semblance. Art is only created when the life in the work of art is arrested and disrupted, when it is held spellbound and when the magic of its “genuineness” is broken.⁴³ Benjamin calls this resolute intervention the critical power, or power of the truth.⁴⁴

Truthfulness instead of genuineness: can documentarism resign itself to being art and relinquish the jealously guarded property of genuine life? Can it relinquish its inherent ‘passion for the real’ and the paranoia of authenticity that it engenders? Documentary art, in any case, continuously draws a fine distinction between itself and life – a narrow line where semblance and truth drift apart. It is a near-imperceptible boundary showing us that the only clearly true thing in documentarism is an impossibility – the impossibility of the concordance of life and image, and hence the impossibility of any documentary authenticity. This boundary is not genuine – it is real. No claims of power or representation can be founded on it. But without it, not only documentary art but also documentary truth is unthinkable.

Notes

¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘On Semblance’, trans. Rodney Livingstone, in Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1 1913–1926*, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, page 224.

² Dziga Vertov, ‘Provisional Instructions to Kino-Eye Groups’ [1926], trans. Kevin O’Brien, in Annette Michelson (ed.), *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984, page 71.

³ Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, page 52.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Dziga Vertov, ‘Kinoks: A Revolution’ [1923], in Annette Michelson, *op. cit.*, page 17.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Photography’ [1927], trans. Thomas Y. Levin, in Levin (ed.), *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, page 56.

⁸ Kracauer, *op. cit.*, page 54.

⁹ See Kracauer, *op. cit.*, page 56.

¹⁰ Joachim Paech, ‘Rette, wer kann (). Zur (Un)Möglichkeit des Dokumentarfilms im Zeitalter der Simulation’, in Christa Blümlinger (ed.), *Sprung im Spiegel. Filmisches Wahrnehmen zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit* (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1990), 110–24, page 113.

¹¹ See Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1960.

¹² André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', trans. Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Summer 1960), pages 4–9.

¹³ Bazin, op. cit., page 8.

¹⁴ Paech, op. cit., page 114.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Quoted in William Guynn, *A Cinema of Nonfiction*, Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1990, page 18.

¹⁷ 'Nothing would be funnier (if one were not its passive victim, its plastron, as Sade would say) than the photographers' contortions to produce effects that are "lifelike".' Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981, page 14.

¹⁸ See Barthes, op. cit., page 11.

¹⁹ John Grierson, 'First Principles of Documentary' [1932], in Catherine Fowler (ed.), *The European Cinema Reader*, London: Routledge, 2002, page 40.

²⁰ Klaus Wildenhahn, 'Siebente Lesestund', in Eva Hohenberger (ed.), *Bilder des Wirklichen. Texte zur Theorie des Dokumentarfilms*, 142–53, page 147.

²¹ See Bruce Berman, 'Jean Rouch: A Founder of the Cinéma Vérité Style', *Film Library Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4 1978, 21. Quoted in Mo Beyerle, 'Das Direct Cinema und das Radical Cinema', in Mo Beyerle and Christine N. Brinckmann (eds.), *Der amerikanische Dokumentarfilm der 60er Jahre. Direct Cinema and Radical Cinema*, Frankfurt and New York: Campus 1991, pages 29–49; page 29.

²² Eileen McGarry, 'Documentary Realism and Women's Cinema', *Women and Film*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (Summer 1975).

²³ Claire Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', in Johnston (ed.), *Notes on Women's Cinema* London: Society for Education in Film and Television, 1975, pages 24–31, page 28.

²⁴ Martha Rosler, 'Drinnen, Drumherum und nachträgliche Gedanken (zur Dokumentarfotografie)', in Sabine Breitwieser (ed.), *Martha Rosler – Positionen in der Lebenswelt*, Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1999, pages 105–48.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Lev Manovich, 'Vom DV-Realismus zur Universellen Aufzeichnungsmaschine', in *Black Box, White Cube*, Berlin: Merve, 2005, pages 145–70.

²⁸ Wolfgang Beilenhoff and Rainer Vowe, 'Das Authentische ist Produkt einer Laborsituation. Ein authentisches Gespräch mit Wolfgang Beilenhoff und Rainer Vowe'. Interview with Judith Keilbach, 1 December 2000, <http://www.nachdemfilm.de/content/das-authentische-ist-produkt-einer-laborsituation> [accessed 10 November 2007].

²⁹ John Fiske, 'Videotech', in Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, London: Routledge, 1998, pages 383–92.

³⁰ Boris Groys, 'Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation', trans. Steven Lindberg, in *Art Power*, Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 2008, page 55.

³¹ Groys, op. cit., page 64.

³² See Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* [1964], trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973, page 17.

³³ For a critique of the term, see also die röteln (eds.), *Das Leben lebt nicht*, Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2006, Introduction, 1–8, which describes various highly contradictory uses of the word.

³⁴ See Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

³⁵ Thomas Noetzel, *Authentizität als politisches Problem. Ein Beitrag zur Theoriegeschichte der Legitimation politischer Ordnung*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999, page 18.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Noetzel, op. cit., page 19f.

³⁹ Noetzel, op. cit., page 39.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Adorno, op. cit.

⁴² See Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, trans. Heather MacLean and Cathy Porter, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009. See also Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, op. cit., page 224.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

CHAPTER TWO

MAUREEN NEVER GAVE UP

CAHAL McLAUGHLIN

Maureen Mazibuko is showing us around the shell of her new house, which, at the moment, is constructed of bare breezeblock and is roofless. She proudly shows us the spare bedroom where her grandchildren will eventually stay when they visit. She hopes her son will help her finish the building after Christmas, so that she can move in from her adjacent corrugated tin shack, which seems smaller and damper than our previous visit of seven years before. I film her as she moves from room to room, explaining their functions and her hopes for the future.



Maureen, *We Never Give Up II*, Human Rights Media Centre 2012

It is 2009 and we are in a township in the Western Cape, South Africa, to record how the participants of our previous film, *We Never Give Up* (2002), have fared in their experiences of surviving decades of apartheid¹ in South Africa and their struggle for reparations from the government, as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).² Both films are collaborations between the Human Rights Media Centre (HRMC), Cape Town, Khulumani Support Group Western Cape, a support group for survivors of apartheid, and myself, an independent filmmaker with university resources.³

I will consider the relationships between a relatively privileged filmmaker and those who struggle to survive poverty on a daily basis, as we seek to represent the legacy of decades of state racist violence. Questions of power, resources, ethics and aesthetics will be addressed. How do you tell a story that is compelling for an audio-visually literate audience and also respect the need to witness the story as it is told in person in front of the camera? How do you listen and watch carefully and also edit out aspects of that story to create a larger narrative. In other words, who decides what to tell to whom, where and when?

First of all, in order to contextualise the film, let me briefly refer to the issue of reparations. The TRC Final Report noted, 'Without adequate reparation and rehabilitation measures, there can be no healing and reconciliation'.⁴ A TRC Commissioner, Yasmin Sooka, later wrote, 'A victim's programme is not short-term, but requires mechanisms to provide appropriate care over the next fifty years..... Furthermore, victims' needs change constantly and any programme has to take account of this.'⁵ Despite such observations, the African National Congress (ANC) government has so far provided only one-off individual reparation payments of 30,000 rands (about £5,000) to approximately 21,000 individuals. The wider issue of community reparations, as well as the issue of the tens of thousands who were excluded from the TRC process have still not been resolved, despite the TRC Final Report being completed in 1998. The Department of Justice has developed a draft policy for the remaining funds of one billion rands in the President's Fund for reparations to be spent on limited health and education support, but only for the 21,000 identified by the TRC. This has been rejected as inadequate by Khulumani and the South African Coalition for Transitional Justice.

Shirley Gunn⁶, the producer of *We Never Give Up*, is the director of the Human Rights Media Centre, and was also chair of Khulumani Western

Cape at the time both films were made. She and I had talked during the intervening years about making a follow-up film, but no funding was forthcoming. Seven years later, I persuaded the University of Ulster to provide the travel funding and camera equipment. Although not a seasoned camera operator or film editor, I had enough experience and motivation to risk making a low-budget production.⁷ We filmed over two short periods in 2009 and 2011.

At the start of the first ten-day production period, we met with the participants from the earlier film to view that film again, to note developments in their experiences and to discuss and decide on the general themes, structure and look of the new film. As in the earlier film, the participants' stories were to be the centre-piece, with some narration to contextualise and link these. Specific images and sounds that related to the participants' everyday lives, e.g. hanging out washing and preparing food, were to complement more generic images and sounds, such as street cleaners and stall holders. We then planned the schedule for the next nine days. The meeting was warm and constructive, but also poignant; two of the original participants, Skolweni Dyantyi and Rebecca Truter had since passed away. Their stories in *We Never Give Up* concerned the violent loss of their children and property. We were not to know that another participant would pass away before filming was completed over the next two years.

Most of the participants' individual circumstances had changed. In 2002, many of them had lived in shacks, but many now lived in newly built RDP houses⁸ and, due to jobs and land claims⁹, had also upgraded these and added extensions. Another significant development was the legal class action, under the Aliens Tort Act, in the New York courts. This was taken by the national Khulumani Support Group in an attempt to hold multinational companies to account for supplying the apartheid government with services and resources, despite an international boycott.¹⁰ Because the film was to be primarily a storytelling project, this judicial aspect was to be integrated without overshadowing the participants' contributions. So the film was to be about reparations, but it was primarily about the experiences of those most affected by apartheid.

A few examples of the footage recorded over nine days are worth mentioning. In East London, in the Eastern Cape, Karl Weber described how his enquiries had uncovered evidence that the bomb which had left him with serious injuries, including the loss of his left arm, may have been

planted by the Hammer Unit, a Third Force¹¹ connected to the apartheid South African Defence Force, and not, as first claimed by the media, by the Azanian People's Liberation Army. Karl's frustration with the new government's lack of support for those damaged by apartheid was compounded by its unwillingness to investigate cases such as his. As an ex-soldier himself, he said, 'I want to meet the guys who did this and ask why?' Later, Skolweni's daughter, Thobeka, described the central role that her mother played in the family and the impact of her loss. She continued to go to Khulumani meetings to try to achieve what her mother had set out to do, win recognition and reparations for survivors. We also interviewed John de Vos, who had been unable to appear in the first film, although his sister, Carol, had spoken eloquently of his suffering. On this occasion, John told us the story of his being tortured as a fifteen year old by the police. His recording is remarkable for his re-performing of the methods used, including the use of electrocution while his hands and feet were tied together and his body was hung upside down. While this grown man was telling me this, I had to remember that this had happened to a teenage boy. I felt privileged to be a witness to these stories and also duty bound to ensure their appropriate representation.



Thobeka, *We Never Give Up II*, Human Rights Media Centre 2012

When I returned to Ireland, I realised that some of the outdoor general footage was unusable because of a camera back-focus problem, which I had not identified. I planned to return for re-recording. However this was not to happen for over a year, because of other commitments and funding

issues. There were more developments for the participants over this period, so when I returned we updated some interviews and also recorded an open Khulumani Western Cape meeting, which proved to be one of the highlights of the film. The address by the South African attorney, Charles Abrahams, who is involved in the New York class action, and the contributions from the floor of the meeting revealed the active participation by the membership in the organisation's activities. This showed a deep understanding of complex legal matters as a result of the open and democratic attorney/client relationship which saw reports delivered and questions answered from the first days of the case. The meeting ended with Monica Mayaphi, who is interviewed in the film, leading a group of women singing and dancing in an expression of struggle and joy, possibly in a sign of her awareness that this would be on film for the world to witness one day.

This film was not feasible without the close collaborative spirit that infused it. Not only were we working closely and democratically throughout, but the unevenness of the power relations were made transparent and addressed in as effective way as possible under the circumstances. As stated above, the first meeting was attended by almost all who were to contribute and they reflected on their feelings about the first film, outlined the areas they wished to cover and agreed on the overall themes of the new film. During recording, each was able to consider what images would work best with their stories and also to re-record if the interview was not working well for them. Later, rough edits were sent from Ireland to the HRMC, which was responsible for consultations with Khulumani members, and edits were amended accordingly.

So how exactly did we address such issues as power differences? I am referring here to subject positions, access to resources (economic and cultural capital), and filmmaking experience, not just within the circle of participants, but also with others we wished to record during the film process. Let me take one example of this in practice. It is not uncommon for filmmakers to land in a township and film the activities of the bustling markets and stalls, wrap up and depart, leaving a sense of exploitation of those filmed. When we drove around looking for images that we hoped would complement either individual stories or the expected narration that would contextualise and link the stories, our policy was to engage with those we wished to film. Zuki Puwana, who is the administrator at HRMC and the regional treasurer on the Khulumani Western Cape Executive, was usually the first one out of the car to talk in Xhosa with the stall holders,