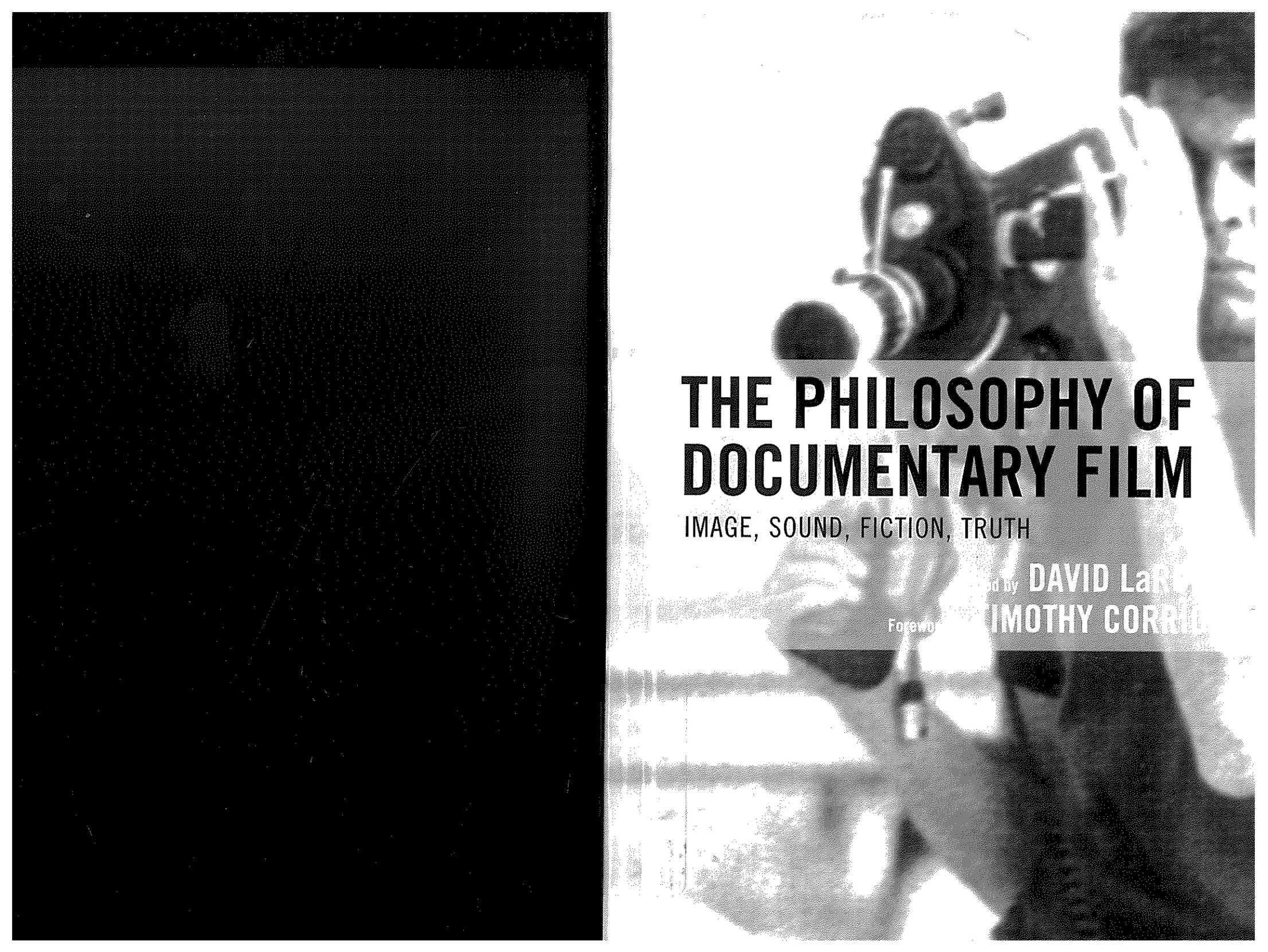

THE PHILOSOPHY OF DOCUMENTARY FILM

IMAGE, SOUND, FICTION, TRUTH

Edited by DAVID La

Foreword IMOTHY CORR

The Philosophy of Popular Culture

Series Editor: Mark T. Conard, Marymount Manhattan College

The Philosophy of Popular Culture series comprises volumes that explore the intersection of philosophy and popular culture. The works are devoted to a subject in popular culture, such as a particular genre, filmmaker, or television show. The essays investigate the philosophical underpinnings, or do a philosophical analysis, of the particular topic. The books will contain smart, jargon-free essays that illuminate texts (films and TV shows) in popular culture, and they will introduce nonspecialists to traditional philosophical ideas and issues. The governing ideas of the series are that texts in popular culture are worthy of philosophical analysis and that philosophical thinking and traditional philosophical concepts can enlighten us and enrich our everyday lives.

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The Philosophy of Documentary Film: Image, Sound, Fiction, Truth, edited by David LaRocca

The Philosophy of Documentary Film

Image, Sound, Fiction, Truth

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David LaRocca

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Dedicated with affection and admiration to
Stanley Cavell
and to the memory of
Chantal Akerman, Abbas Kiarostami, V. F. Perkins, Amos Vogel,
and Haskell Wexler

can be represented through sounds and moving images. At the center of these vigorously realized works of criticism and passionately argued theories have remained questions of why and how documentaries matter.

The Philosophy of Documentary Film emphatically demonstrates why and how. Just as philosophy involves many approaches to and angles on truth and reality, the essays in this collection circulate through film history, criticism, and theory—across a capacious number of film forms, and, most importantly, with a variety of big ideas (both carefully articulating the ideas and offering considered reflections on them). These works in hand are contemporary perspectives on, for me, the most vibrant practice in contemporary cinema. They call us to think carefully and seriously not only about the truth claims and strategies of specific documentary films but also about why documentaries are so central to our age.

Introduction

Representative Qualities and Questions of Documentary Film

David LaRocca

PROLOGUE: PHILOSOPHY AND THE PROFILMIC

Is he or isn't he? That is to say, is the cameraman on the cover of this book a documentary filmmaker or an actor playing a documentary filmmaker? Fans of Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* (1997) might squint to see a young Max Cherry, and so we have a clue that the actor Robert Forster is behind the Eclaire 16mm camera. But is Forster being photographed while working as a cinematographer—perhaps as part of a parallel career path? Or is he *acting* as a cinematographer in a film? It will require familiarity with Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* (1969) to assemble a reply to these questions—and sure enough Robert Forster *is* playing John Cassellis, a television news cameraman. That easily discovered orientation, however, is upset by the film itself, which blends de rigueur narrative feature filmmaking with (1) preexisting documentary footage (e.g., from U.S. military training camps in Illinois) *and*, more radically, (2) the intervention of scripted action into a live, non-scripted event, namely the riots that took place at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. (It's as if Wexler took Jean-Luc Godard's move in *Breathless* [*À bout de souffle*]—to film fictional characters mingling with the crowds gathered along the Champs-Élysées to wave on Eisenhower and de Gaulle's procession through Paris—and sustained the gesture beyond a glancing intersection of the fabricated and the everyday to achieve a full, feature-length hybrid. A poster-sized photo of Jean-Paul Belmondo—from the iconic 1960 film—in John Cassellis' apartment suggests that Wexler is simultaneously aware of his debts to Godard's strategy and clear about his ambition to employ and expand it.) Wexler's stunt yields some stunning questions for us to consider about the medium of film: What happens to Wexler's filmed footage at the point where (or when) two commonly distinguished forms of

filmmaking—namely, narrative and documentary, fiction and nonfiction—occupy the same time and space within the frame? Depending on where one dips in, a discrete piece of celluloid from *Medium Cool* may contain a through-line of the fictional story we have been following *and* a bona fide documentation of live events as they play out, unrehearsed, in real time. With Forster/Cassellis in the crowd, we are back to our initial question, once again unresolved—and perhaps endlessly renewed and deferred. Is he or isn't he?

In an unmistakable and yet still mysterious way, the book's cover image sets out the kinds of philosophical questions we are asking in this volume as we address the philosophical significance and pertinence of documentary cinema (and the broader range of such images that we find in mainstream media, broadcast television, industrial filmmaking, and media art as well as on our personal mobile screens, disseminated in social media sites and on apps, and among the range and quantity of digital video that expands rapidly and exponentially with each passing hour—including the emergence of 3D and virtual-reality [VR] technologies as a means for professional *and* citizen journalism, and innovative, unprecedented narrative techniques). As Bill Nichols has observed: "Most films, as metaphorical statements about the world around them, also possess an inherent ambiguity. Because they say what they mean indirectly, by means of their perspective on and representation of a distinct cinematic world, room for different interpretations, stressing different aspects or qualities of a film, always exists."[1] Documentary films—perhaps in large measure because the claims of truth, verifiability, assertion, and authenticity continually press up against our acknowledgment of the distortions the film medium must include (because of film stock or digital rendering, lenses, *mise-en-scène*, editing, text, captioning, graphics, animation, sound, music, voice-over, and much else)—are almost uniquely charged with "inherent ambiguity." Hence the need to investigate what we mean when we say—or refer to—"documentary film."

When we face a new image, that is, an image that is new to us, we are recurrently impelled to sort out its status according to familiar (and often strictly enforced if not clearly defined) binaries: it is real or it is fake; it is a shot from the moment of encounter (e.g., in "real time") or it is doctored and manipulated ("photoshoped"). But are these and similar splits satisfying? Do these divisions seem accurate? And are they enough to describe the range of images we live with (and create)? What about hybrid forms (the fake that is staged to look real, or the real that is so uncannily caught that it seems fake)? What about inversions and deceptions and a general lack of orientation, information, and perspective—what do we do about our sense and definition of *those* images?[2] What about the distortive effects of media-as-such—for example, that any image, even if made in earnest, presented as a "witness" account, is still framed, still housed in an intermediary form

(a place *between* viewer and incident)? What, in short, is our relationship to the profilmic event, that is, the stuff we believe is taking place in front of a camera at the time of its capture on film or digital media?[3] The following collection of essays and remarks—written by some of the most incisive, most compelling, and not surprisingly, most influential theorists and thinkers who ever gave thought to the nature of "the documentary" as such (and especially as it relates to what we have come to call "documentary film")—is presented as a substantial, one might reasonably hope, enduring, set of deeper, more elaborately and elegantly wrought engagements on the brief, rapid-fire list of queries thus far adduced.

FILM, AS IF MADE FOR PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of documentary film—as an area of study—seems very much the model of an ancient quandary made new again, namely, when Plato noted (even in his day, 2,500 years ago) that "there is from of old the quarrel between philosophy and poetry."[4] What else, we might say, has cinema become over the last century or so but a form of poetry—visual, sonic, elastic reports projected to the screen and broadcast globally? Today, whether the cinematic image appears on the device in one's pocket, through a range of differently sized screens, or within the elaborate technologies of 3D IMAX and VR environments, the moving image remains a dominant form for artistic expression and thus a vital factor in cultural life; it also has contributed to, and radically transformed, our conceptions of story, narrative, and the possibilities for meaningful ideational content.[5]

Plato would say the seventh art is, doubtless, part of the regime of poetic expression and as such is dubious as a resource for truth, or the proper guidance of the (private) soul [*psyche*] and the (public) city [*polis*]. What of the quarrel remains then? Though two and a half millennia have elapsed since Plato estimated the "effect of poetic imitation"—that it "waters and fosters these feelings [viz., sex, anger, pains, and pleasures] when what we ought to do is dry them up, and it establishes them as our rulers when we they ought to be ruled"—we are, with streaming video and three-story movie screens, blazing sound and sumptuous visual effects, life-like renderings via computer-generated imagery (CGI) and aerial drone footage—still coming to terms with his assessment that such imitation is at odds with the better ordering of our psyche, and contradictory to its reasoning parts.

Perhaps nowhere in the broad expanse of types of film is the old "quarrel between philosophy and poetry" more evident—and also more vitally relevant—than in the genre or mode of film known as documentary. Put tersely, the nature of documentary for many theorists involves a debate about what is

real (or authentic) on film and what is fake (or fabricated); the binary interestingly, if stubbornly, persists. Documentary films present footage that seems to be making an assertion about the kind of representation it is (e.g., as true or as corresponding with the world it purports to show), while fiction films are thought to deviate from this kind of assertion, instead creating, as it were, a world unto themselves; it may *seem* like our world—indeed, it is likely filmed there! on the very streets we walk upon!—yet it is not, we are told, *our* world.[6] Plato would find this distinction unconvincing. Documentary film is just another form of poetic imitation, in its variety of instances and complexity of fabrication, it is just as much caught up with the limitations—and effects—of mimetic art, including fiction film.

What can a philosophy of documentary film do, then, if it takes Plato's critique and concern to heart? It can first, admit that documentary film is not easily or intuitively defined, and therefore stands in need of careful accounting. But, perhaps as important, it can remind us—as critics and readers—that if, as Stanley Cavell has said, "film was as if made for philosophy," then one of the ways in which this match seems fortuitous is the degree to which the philosophers may be called in—by the poets and filmmakers—to address the nature of their creations.[7] A philosophy of documentary film, then, principally undertakes to offer a commentary on what documentary film thinks it is doing—and achieving; and, more propitiously, given that we stand late in the progression of the creation of and reasoning about documentary film: to venture the articulation of correctives, when necessary, of that project. A philosophy of documentary film, then, is essentially—but also humbly and genuinely—committed to the quarrel between philosophy and poetry, yet not for the sake of "dismissing" poetry from the city, but rather for the constructive aim of helping filmmakers, movie-goers, theorists, and fellow cineastes appreciate what is going on with and in documentary film.[8] What are its claims to truth? What kind of truth can it reveal, if any, and how does it go about such illumination? In what ways is "documentary" a smokescreen for understanding the genre's *similarities* with fiction film? Is documentary film—or even just the assignation "documentary film"—potentially *more* manipulative than films that make no such claims to isomorphic representations of the world, our world? These are the kinds of questions the critical philosopher—concerned with film's challenge to our capacity for reasoning—will want to ask and reply to. And so the quarrel continues, but in a new light, in a temperate mood, full of curiosity, and charged with the anticipation of getting clearer on the terms and conditions that define the contemporary experience of documentary film—and our inheritance of the medium as it evolves into ever more realms of our daily life, in ever more mesmerizing permutations.

A philosophy of film (generally speaking) can mean undertaking a Platonic critique of art, principally including what was referred to in pagan antiquity

as poetry. In this sense, the contemporary philosophers are here to say what film does and does not say (or show), what it achieves and fails to, where it enlightens and where it deceives (and perhaps darkens our claims to clarity). A philosophy of *documentary* film would then devote steady attention to the genre we familiarly call "documentary," yet it would also endeavor to assess implications for broader film theoretical concerns; to conduct an inquiry into film as such in its variable epistemological and metaphysical capacities to document reality. Meanwhile, any philosophy of film, again speaking more widely, will therefore act as a clarifier and corrective to the art's apparent claims for artistic expressiveness and conceptual rigor. Film—like painting and politics—is a medium, an in-between, an interloper, a milieu, a proxy, a visual synecdoche, and therefore it is susceptible to manipulation and distortion.[9] The Platonic critique of art (especially in its power to deceive), if preserved for the time being, therefore, will help retain a philosopher's skepticism about what art can achieve, and therefore will guard philosophy's role as a mode of criticism in the service of challenging that achievement.

But what are we criticizing? As with much philosophical reflection, we could say the familiar habits of how we talk and think about the ways we structure our sense of reality—in this case, the ways we use film, and how we think about what they do for us. Among many points of reference, we might cite the vernacular regard for documentary film as a form of truth-telling. Here, the myth of documentary cinema as objective has been naturalized to such an extent that it is no longer perceptible as a claim, or at least as a debatable and enigmatic proposition. On this naïve what-you-see-is-what-you-get model, a documentary is a window onto a world full of revelatory meaning. Yet are we granted such a "window" in, or by means of, documentary film, or is it a (perhaps perniciously) misleading metaphor? In *Film as a Subversive Art*, Amos Vogel wrote: "However 'authentic' the image, it remains a distortion of life. Not only does it lack depth or density, the space-time continuum, or the non-selectivity of reality, but it emphasizes certain aspects to the exclusion of others by isolating them within a fixed frame in a constantly evolving concatenation of blacks and whites, objects and ground."[10] Cognizant of Plato's lasting critique of art, Vogel concludes: "It is thus no longer possible for an artist creating within this historical period to portray reality along mimetic lines (art as the imitation of reality) or to view it as a coherent, fully intelligible construct, capable of apprehension through his sense organs and in its documentary aspects, a valid representation of the universe."[11] Vogel's observation that superannuated understandings of mimesis have given way to some new vision (part of what we are involved in articulating in this volume), was explained, in part, by Walter Benjamin when he said: "For clearly the observable world [*Merkwelt*] of modern man contains only minimal residues of the magical correspondences and analogies that were familiar to ancient

peoples. The question is whether we are concerned with the decay of this faculty or with its transformation."[12] Well, which is it? Perhaps both; this binary, at least, may have collapsed upon itself. For though we have likely lost a copious range of "magical correspondences" that animated our antediluvian lives, we still sit in dark rooms watching the flickering light. If we are clued into the fabricated nature of cinema (not tricked by it as if by prestidigitation), then we might ask what *kind* of analogy with the real (or reality) we want to claim for documentary film. What do we, as viewers, as critics, as creators expect of the medium and its modes of representation?

To reply to such a question, it seems we need both philosophy and poetry in tandem in order to capture our fuller, truer experience of human reality. If philosophy aims at truth, its reports, nevertheless, often mislead and thus can seem like lies (not intentionally, just accidentally). Meanwhile, poetry—and by this I mean art, including film—whose power is so inherently dependent on the lie (deception, deflection, decentering) also—and perhaps at times even more reliably than the sincere efforts of philosophy's agents—yields penetrating, lasting, world-making truths. Plato would not be startled by such reversals, for our contemporary circumstance underwrites the many ways in which we are prone to question the "documentary" for its point of view, in short, its politics, while we are willing to let the vast seas of fiction film wash over us without nearly as much suspicion.[13] As with advances in continuity editing that made film reality feel seamless—"erasing the cuts," which to say, hiding them in plain sight—so fiction film itself has become an aggregation of undigested realities.

As documentary films (as well as filmed journalism more broadly) have evolved in terms of technologies and techniques, into well-paced narratives, often full of high-end production values, one can feel a slippage where such nonfiction films are watched as if on par, or in partnership, with fiction features. "[M]anipulation in documentaries is a touchy subject—especially for viewers expecting unvarnished truth," notes Ben Kenigsberg.[14] Meanwhile, Abbas Kiarostami asks aloud about his own tactics as a filmmaker: "Is what I do . . . manipulative? Perhaps, but manipulation isn't always a bad thing. It has always been a valid way to capture truth on film."[15] Errol Morris, a director made famous, in part, by *The Thin Blue Line* (1988)—a documentary that employed reenactment as a method, and to such effect that the film led to the exoneration of its incarcerated subject—asks us: "Is the problem that we have an unfettered capacity for credulity, for false belief?"[16] And Morris concludes, as if paraphrasing Plato: "If seeing is believing, then we better be damn careful about what we show people, including ourselves—because, regardless of what it is—we are likely to uncritically believe it."[17] And yet, for Kiarostami, manipulation leads to truth, and for Morris, the fictions of his documentary (as "an essay on false history") revealed highly consequential truths (viz., an innocent man was set free).[18] If the articulation of these definitions and arguments feels ephemeral and mandarin, the stakes of the debate are anything but. More than once, lives are on the line.

The scandal of poetry in Plato's time is replicated and proliferated by film in our own. And the crisis about what a *documentary* image or film is—how to define it, how to articulate what it does—adds another valence of significance to Stanley Cavell's claim that "film was as if made for philosophy."[19] "Documentary film," so-called, makes more prominent and more problematical the attributes about film that so often draw the philosopher's attention, and it would seem fittingly, her wonder. Among many categories that might be adduced we would surely find: reality, nonreality, and the surreal; fact versus fabrication; depiction as opposed to fiction; live events (filmed in real time) and/or staged events; acting and reenacting; what the medium itself contains (traces? records?) or what its products should be called (documents? works of art?), and so on. Still, Plato's concern with the "lie" at the heart of poetry may be one of the most durable philosophical concerns about art through the ages.

FILM AS LIE AS TRUTH

There is no difference between film and documentary film. In short, all film is fiction film. Can we sign up for the validity of this twinned claim? Two prominent issues arise if we pursue this line of thinking: (i) the pejorative description of "manipulation" in documentary cinema becomes instead a euphemism for "creation" or creative expression—a productive intervention; and (ii) if all film is "created"—both in the sense that it is not found, *and* in the sense that it is not objective—then the *truth* of film is necessary coextensive with its *fabrication*.

(1) Carl Plantinga's work is a touchstone for recalibrating our notion of what a documentary film is—and along the way, for diminishing what might be considered our "magical" desire for what we *want* it to be. For one thing, Plantinga notes that "both fiction and nonfiction films are creative in their manipulation of their materials."[20] Given this shared feature, then, Plantinga suggests that our inherited practice of distinguishing the two kinds of films "stems from conflating the word 'document' with the word 'documentary,' or confusing a document with a nonfiction film."[21] Sustaining this point, Cavell has also observed that, for some, "the real distinction [to be made] is not between the fictional and the factual within the art of film but between film as art and film as document."[22] As we think of nonfiction film in opposition to a document, antagonisms appear, such as the French word for documentary—*reportage*—which also curiously alludes to a certain practice of accounting,

and thus stokes an impression of intimacy between film image and document. But then, who and how is that accounting being conducted? Plantinga, like Noël Carroll, sees intention, assertion, and social context as informing the definition of what we mean by a documentary film—and helping to differentiate, on a clearer criteriological basis, fiction from nonfiction. In other words, how the film is intended to be received by an audience contributes to its status: given these proposed factors, we can identify the "assertive stance" of nonfiction as separable from the "fictive stance" of fiction film.[23]

"To see a film nonfictionally, then," according to Plantinga, "is not to see it as a document, but is rather to see it as a communicative artifact which embodies a social contract by which the audience is cued to take its representations as occurring or having occurred in the historical world. The distinction between fiction and nonfiction resides not merely in the mind of the audience or in films, but in the realm of implicit social contracts and conventions."[24] The filmmaker along with her or his culture—not the individual viewer—decide whether a film is fiction or nonfiction. Being a "documentary" is, then, not an essential quality of a film (e.g., an ontological state or set of inherent characteristics) but instead a description of our *regard* for its standing (or "stance") in relation to us. Plantinga shifts our focus away from identity to ascription: turning us away from what the film *is*, and toward what we take it *as*.

One of the reasons that we viewers can experience such pleasure in watching how the aliens (i.e., the Thermians) in *Galaxy Quest* (1999) treat episodes of the eponymous television show as "historical documents" lies in the effect of their mistaken treatment of fiction films *as if* they were, in Carroll's phrase, films of "presumptive assertion," or in Plantinga's lexicon, films with an "assertive stance." The Thermians believed the television show was documenting real exploits, and thus making claims about the real world (*their* world)—much as we expect from nonfiction films as well as filmed journalism. In the case of *Galaxy Quest*, we viewers are in on the joke, and it is satisfying to have a laugh at the expense of the Thermians. Trouble is, sometimes the joke is on us.

What happens when we watch one or another of Werner Herzog's documentaries now—years, perhaps decades after their creation? Do we laugh *with* him about how much he fabricated? Or do we feel stupid for not seeing the tricks and shifts and lies on the first or second screening? Our relationship to Herzog's documentaries is much the same as the Thermians' relationship to episodes of *Galaxy Quest*: we have been treating (largely unbeknownst to us) fiction film *as* documentary. The errors being made in both contexts—by Thermians and by we humans—usefully clarify Plantinga's insistence that we make a distinction between *documents* and *documentary films*. These are not equal or interchangeable terms. Herzog's manipulated documentaries are not

as earnestly presented as "truth" (what he would call the "accountant's truth") as say, Ken Burns' large-scale, high-profile, predominantly public television productions.[25] But both Herzog and Burns, regardless of differences—even diametrically opposed strategies—of intention, intervention, and result are not producing documents.

And yet, as Plantinga points out, there are works of mixed pedigree—and for these Plantinga's theory leaves us puzzling. How do we describe or categorize, for example, Dusan Makavejev's *Sweet Movie* (1971) given its gleeful imbrication of varied sorts of filmed materials?[26] "It is true," Plantinga writes, "that some films are hybrids, and for those films we will not be clear about their status as fiction or nonfiction."[27] Ohad Landesman notes that "the emergence of films that blur or simply ignore the distinctions between fiction and nonfiction" confirm "[o]ne of the most striking developments in recent documentary cinema."[28] The lack of clarity native to mixed forms, or hybrids, of course, is alarming—especially after it seemed Plantinga, along with Carroll and others, had sorted the criteria for distinguishing one type of film from another. But an awareness of hybridity itself seems quite grave, since—in a hybrid work—how would we go about distinguishing one "kind" from another? Hybridity is a metaphor that suggests we might tease apart distinct strands, and yet this may not be something we can do; so it may be better—more honest, and more true—to use a trope of contamination, where no quarter is spared, and no such disambiguation of discrete parts is possible.[29] Given Plantinga's admission, then, despite our awareness of a filmmaker's intention, despite our acknowledgment of the film's "assertive stance," despite our appreciation for the cultural context in which the film appears, the film's hybridity (or contamination) may leave us, in the end, unable to distinguish a fiction film from a nonfiction one. We are back to where we started.

As we do in Part III of this volume, let us turn to someone who makes films—and who thinks about how that making informs the meaning of what is produced. Abbas Kiarostami has said:

> Cinema is nothing but fakery. It never depicts the truth as it actually is. A documentary, as I understand the word, is a film made by someone who doesn't intrude a single inch into what he is witness to. He merely records. A true documentary doesn't exist because reality isn't a sufficient foundation on which to construct an entire film. Filmmaking always involves some element of reinvention. Every story contains some level of fabrication because it bears the imprint of the person who made it. It reflects a point of view. Using a wide camera lens for a swooping twenty-second shot rather than a narrow lens for a static five-second shot reflects the filmmaker's biases. Colour or monochrome? Sound or silent? These decisions require that the filmmaker interfere in the process of representation.[30]

Kiarostami's idea that a "true documentary doesn't exist" is not meant as a contrast to a "fake documentary" (such as a mockumentary, a pseudodocumentary, or a metadocumentary), but as an expansive dismissal of what might be unconsciously taken to be the passivity of the lens; the neutrality of the film stock or means of digital recording, of editing, and other forms of authorial creation and artistic intervention. Even a fixed surveillance camera shoots from a specific point of view and is shaped by resolution, color, focus, light, and other factors. For Kiarostami, the sheer fact of intrusion or interference (what we think of as the work of the artist) dissolves any criteriological boundary between fiction and nonfiction film.

(2) Kiarostami's summative assessment invites a paradox, for as surely as he says that "Cinema is nothing but fakery" and "everything [in cinema] is lies, nothing is real," he also is sure to emphasize that "it all suggests the truth."[31] The notion that documentary has (anything) to do with truth—perhaps even that its (primary) business is the conveyance of truth—is not new, and neither is the idea that *lies* might be the best, most effective way to tell the truth. Arguably the founding figure of documentary cinema, Robert Flaherty, said, "[s]ometimes you have to lie to tell the truth."[32] Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) is a familiar touchstone on this and related points, since the director staged the very people whose lives he aimed to "document"; among other interpositions, he encouraged them to reclaim practices and behaviors that were no longer a part of daily life.[33] "One often has to distort a thing," Flaherty notes, "to catch its true spirit."[34]

After World War II, Jean Rouch transformed Flaherty's practices and ideologies to pursue ethnographic filmmaking in Africa and also in his native France; in the latter case, for example, in *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un été*, 1961), Rouch and codirector, Edgar Morin, interview nonactors, then screen those filmed scenes for the nonactors, and subsequently film their reactions to what they have seen. Questions arise: Are these nonactors acting? Does such acting on the part of nonactors prove a "phony naturalness" or does it reveal genuine truths? Are the participants "hams" or "exhibitionists" or something else altogether? Can anyone articulate the relationship between the fake and the true? For Rouch, sustaining Flaherty's sentiment, "Fiction is the only way to penetrate reality."[35]

As a filmmaker liberated by new portable technologies—including synchronized sound—Rouch's camera was not a fixed observer, but a participant. For Rouch, "The camera assumes an entirely new function: no longer simply a recording device, it becomes a provocateur, a stimulant, precipitating situations, conflicts, expeditions that would otherwise never have taken place."[36] Playfully, we could say Rouch is a kind of Heisenbergian theory of documentary film: the mere presence of the camera changes the way other "objects" behave. Given his preoccupation with "cine provocations," it is not

surprising that Rouch is credited with innovating the term—and the practice—of "cinéma vérité."[37] Yet "cinema truth" is not a quick or equivalent translation of Dziga Vertov's "kino pravda," but instead a declaration for the intervention of the camera with what it is used to film, and an invitation to interactivity with those subjects and scenes of encounter. Though the names may confuse, it is, in fact the school of "direct cinema" that is more fittingly defined as "observational" in nature, a cinema of *distance* from the object—of looking, of witnessing.[38] There are many lines of similarity between the aesthetics and ethics of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema—for example, as practiced by Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, and the Maysles brothers, Albert and David—but Rouch, more than these contemporaries, advocated a stridently interventionist approach to filming his subjects. In fact, Rouch pushed past ethnography as it was known (with its entrenched aspiration to merely record what others were doing, as if on their own—and thus, uncontaminated by foreign or outside influence) and into something more justifiably, and thus satisfactorily, named ethnofiction. For Rouch, as with Kiarostami later on, the filmmaker's interference (at the scene) was essential to the provocation of truth (on the screen).

The tradition of displacing authorial (or directorial) intentions, and highlighting the social and interactive nature of documentary filmmaking, appears echoed—if also transformed—in the Dogma 95 movement instigated by Thomas Vinterberg and the endlessly provocative and controversial Lars von Trier.[39] The ethics and politics of cinema come to light anew with team Dogma (Trier points out that "it is no accident that the phrase 'avant-garde' has military connotations"), since it has as its target "the individual film [which] will be decadent by definition! Dogma 95 counters the individual film. . . . To Dogma 95 cinema is not individual."[40] As revolutionary as the movement may sound, especially as it aims to displace the "personal taste" of the director (indeed, officially-sanctioned Dogma 95 films are not allowed to credit a director), the "supreme goal" of the mission "is to force the truth out of my characters and settings."[41] While it is laudable that Dogma 95 seeks to challenge the cult of the auteur—inviting us to reconsider any latent faith in the (individual) authorship of films—the pursuit of truth by other means (collective, technological, etc.) remains under-theorized. Since the talented founders and acolytes of Dogma 95 so thoroughly invest their mission with qualities and credentials familiar to (almost any) documentary filmmaker (e.g., shooting on location, using a handheld camera, and no ADR), we are prompted, once again, to reflect and reassess the truth or truths we want and can expect from film.

Our motivation to think further through the issues raised above in (1) and (2) is continually stoked by the appearance of new works of nonfiction film, especially those that alter norms or adopt new techniques. Among many promising

and provocative examples, we could note how Lucien Castaing-Taylor does not sign his film collaboration, *Sweetgrass* (2009), with the customary "director" or "directed by," but instead "recorded by." The decision makes a subtle comment on the way we understand and frame what it is documentarists do: Are they, after the French name for director, a kind of *réalisateur*, or rather an agent of a different sort? Agency and direction come in for reconsideration in *Victoria* (2015), since the film comprised a single 138-minute take captured by cinematographer Sturla Brandth Grøvlen. Moreover, since we know precisely where and when it was shot—in Berlin on April 17, 2014, between 4:30 am and 7:00 am—we cannot forestall the urge to see the film *as* a documentary. Knowing, however, that the events captured are not in fact of the sort that Grøvlen has happened upon (as if haunting a group of amateur bandits with a camera-in-wait), there is good reason to take up the film as something like a "documentary of fiction," and find ourselves—with high-end digital video equipment in hand—returned to the practices of early cinema where live theater was caught by celluloid (albeit without sound). In *Amy* (2015), a documentary in which sound is paramount, director Asif Kapadia dispenses with the ubiquitous, seemingly ineluctable, use of "talking heads," leaving us only with the voices of commentators. While the viewer is focused on the true subject of the film, Amy Winehouse, commentary is identified by on-screen lower-thirds and motion graphics (as are many of her song lyrics) but we never see who speaks. Kapadia's innovation comes in the form of an absence or an evisceration of a norm that felt essential, especially to biographically oriented nonfiction films. He seems to import a tradition from nature documentaries where the likes of David Attenborough speak from a disembodied position, joining the company of the viewer as an understated expert and convivial accomplice—and in those roles offer orientation to the subject at hand.

These contemporary examples of directorial ascription (or its lack), implications of the one-take movie on the fiction/nonfiction divide, and varied techniques of using sound, are pre-dated by issues such as the relationship between realism and propaganda. Indeed, many documentaries (and "newsreels") made during the 1930s and 1940s give credence to the claim that one person's realism is another person's propaganda, for one's commitment to the truth claims of Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* (1942–45) or Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, 1935) will likely depend on one's political allegiances and opinions about nationalism, race, and religion. After World War II, the problem did not dissipate; instead, beginning in the late 1940s and into the 1950s, the realism/propaganda tension seemed to become part of the very fabric of filmmaking. As Erik Barnouw observed, "Several trends emerged as the smoke of battle cleared. One was toward documentary-like fiction. The widespread ruins of war helped set this trend in motion: they served as invitation to reconstruct the war experience and at the same time to mythologize it."[42] One does not, then, have to look far for why many Italian films of the immediate postwar period are referred to as "neorealism." "While they showed the influence of war documentaries," Barnouw says—including the "rubble films" of Germany—"they were really a step back into the latitudes of fiction."[43]

In the shifting definitions and relative prestige of "documentary" films across time, we find, for example, that the high accord given to such films during wartime was transferred to the fiction creations made after the war by directors such as Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica (Italy), René Clément (France), Wolfgang Staudte (Germany), and Fred Zinnemann (Switzerland). Shot mostly on location, and in many cases on the former sites of real battles, the sheen of the documentary film so familiar to wartime audiences was naturally grafted onto or into the fictional works. Indeed, theorist (and neorealist apologist), Cesare Zavattini, contended that "reality is hugely rich," and that by means of a neorealist approach to it, viewers would have a view of "real things, exactly as they are."[44] Films shot in America, however immune the country was to the physical destruction of war (save Pearl Harbor), also capitalized on this impression (or contention) of realism. As Barnouw points out: "*On the Waterfront* (1954), directed by Elia Kazan and shot in New York locations by Boris Kaufman, was also referred to as a 'documentary.'"[45] One is tempted, at least at the present moment, to add an exclamation point to the previous sentence for the documentary credentials of the film—so far as we understand the term today—seem decidedly remote; perhaps we should consult the theorists of "ubiquitous nonfiction" to parse the claim (see below). De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, 1948) is a standard bearer for "neorealism," and yet it takes advantage of preexisting industrial models of fiction filmmaking, among them casting choices (even if among nonactors), melodramatic flourishes (not least the swooning music), and plot shifts and patterns that bespeak anything but "realism," new or not. We might do better, then, to table the "realist" credentials of De Sica's film, and instead focus on its artful and effective transformation of found spaces for the purposes of achieving highly affective (and effective) melodrama. In the case of *Bicycle Thieves*, the purported authenticity of locations allows De Sica to manipulate these documentary elements to serve the shape and feeling of his fiction film.

Drawing truth claims from the authenticity of objects or places, as De Sica did, is one among several contested approaches to achieving realism—or resisting that realization. Along these latter lines, consider any number of films by Chantal Akerman—but especially *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), which, to be sure, relies heavily on its location, but more than that presents a rethinking of the meaning of filming in real time. Unlike one-take wonders such as *Russian Ark* (2002) and

Victoria, which use the "running film"—a useful double entendre for live capture *and* the traveling camera—as an implied, almost material strategy for conjuring a narrative frame, Akerman's long takes antagonize that linearity.[46] Perhaps even more evident in *The Room* (*Le Chambre*, 1972) and *News from Home* (1976), Akerman's stationary camera, set on axis, turns her long takes into something more akin to a tableau—but with a twist: as if she were framing a still life, yet coaxing it out of stasis through the animated movements of people. We are given an invitation to the *exceptional* power of looking (not its banal everydayness)—and in that studied attention, we can feel ourselves as voyeurs, as judges, as present to the scene (yet in a mode of absence from it), and perhaps most importantly, as aware of temporality (on both sides of the screen). Moreover, Akerman's work, across a range of instances—from documentary to narrative fiction—reconceives the suturing effects of classical-style continuity editing (with its familiar cutting, selection of shots, points of view, transitions, complementary use of music, etc.); if we are caught up with Akerman's long takes in real time, it seems more a function of *our reality* (our capacity to attend to the film[ed] event), than to the tactics of filmmaking that would hand it over, or for that matter, hide it from us.

For Akerman's capacity to linger—to let the camera role, as it were—her work, in *Jeanne Dielman* and elsewhere, encodes undeniable documentary effects: a sense of directness or immediacy with what lay within the frame, even if, at the same time, the *duration* of such shots (the very attribute that registered their achievement as intimate), may prove alienating—as if such availability was not an admission of truth but another Brechtian trick to remind the viewer of the film's artifice (and perhaps his or her own). In *Jeanne Dielman*, Akerman does not intend to create a documentary, but, in some sense, as those who argue for "ubiquitous nonfiction," her directorial method invites this impression. And yet, Akerman—in her final appearance on film, in a documentary about her and her work—at once unsettles and clarifies the matter, when she tersely declares, "As soon as you frame, it is fiction."[47]

Contemporaneous with De Sica and Italian neorealism, and decades before Akerman, we find Alfred Hitchcock in *Rope* (1948) using just a dozen or so long takes—some of them up to ten minutes in duration—to comprise the entire film; importantly, though, unlike De Sica, et al., Hitchcock's film is decidedly bound to the stage set. Decades after Akerman's indelible early work (though not neglecting the achievements populating her entire corpus), Sofia Coppola cited her *Jeanne Dielman* as an inspiration for shooting in real time when making *Somewhere* (2010), and Akerman's *The Meetings of Anna* (*Les rendez-vous d'Anna*, 1978) was a touchstone for Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003).[48] We may even pause to wonder what a feature director, such as Coppola, is appealing to in this notion of "real time": Does she mean

to imply that the minute-to-minute parallel between the live event and the filmed event somehow transfers reality to the screen? As if shooting in real time was, in fact, a way to *circumvent* the mediations of the medium? Replies will illuminate our own presumptions on this matter. Traveling through cinema history a bit—from De Sica to Hitchcock to Akerman to Coppola—it is perhaps easier to the glean the ways in which the production of fiction filmmaking can mobilize the techniques familiar to documentary filmmaking, and yet still, resolutely, remain defined by its status as a fabrication. In short, turning the camera on and letting it role is not enough to grant us truth. But then, if De Sica, et al. are operating the camera, we may prefer instead the truths afforded by fiction.

These illustrations should then confirm the extent to which the practices and definitions of documentary film appear engagingly, but also endlessly contested—at once inherited and reworked—perhaps especially so when we see striking reversals. Postwar film documentarians, by and large, abandoned the use of "scripted scenes using actors," and, as Barnouw observed, "foreswore such reconstructions, which were felt to belong to historical fiction."[49] At present, among representative examples of the opposite trend, we find two-time Academy Award-nominated director Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012) and the quieter, but somehow more devastating, *The Look of Silence* (2014), in which perpetrators of genocide are invited to (figuratively, fictionally) act out and reenact past events recollected from personal memory.[50] Oppenheimer's methodology could be described as a twenty-first century version or revision of Rouch: metaethnofiction.

If one of the hallmarks of such a concept is self-consciousness—on the part of the one holding the camera and the ones being filmed—then metaethnofiction may be a brush to a paint a wider swath of contemporary filmmaking. Indeed, filmmaking has become so seamless in everyday twenty-first century life—from the streaming video via Skype or FaceTime to the movie production capacities nearly everyone carries in his or her pocket—that any person with a camera-enabled phone (or body-camera or GoPro) is potentially, or more likely inadvertently, a documentary filmmaker or citizen journalist. There's even synchronized sound! In an age whose moving pictures are defined by the accessibility to and ubiquity of YouTube—and the myriad websites devoted to still images and moving ones, including Instagram, Vimeo, and Vine—we all, by mere virtue of acquiring a "smartphone" (or similar digital video capturing device) are positioned to create and meditate on the meaning of the moving images we create. Yet, the "smartness" of the phone does not protect against our own (in)capacities to read its created images: cognitive perception and cultural prejudice inform our interpretations—and can be wrong, sometimes grossly.[51] Still, even with the caveat about the need for savvy interpretations, the proximity, immediacy,

and relatively low cost of operation and "production" makes the video phone an uncanny tool for documentary ethics, action, and declaration. Where once Erik Barnouw saw fit to distinguish the documentarian by a signature trait that would define him or her as creator, but also signal a certain place in time and space, now a single person equipped with a single smartphone might make dibs on any one or more of these evocative titles: prophet, explorer, reporter, painter, advocate, bugler, prosecutor, poet, chronicler, promoter, observer, catalyst, and guerrilla.[52]

Increasingly, the possession of a movie camera in one's pocket—again, remarkably, including sound—has proved decisive in shifting cultural and political discourse from the streets of Los Angeles in the mid-90s to Cairo during the Arab Spring to Staten Island, Ferguson, Baltimore, Orlando, Paris, Brussels, Nice, Istanbul, Bangladesh, and Syria in the twenty-teens. In a place such as Palmyra, the losses are not human, but humanity's patrimony—the irreplaceable artifacts of antiquity that are video-captured as they are being blown to oblivion.

Being a witness-by-way-of-impromptu video capture has become an increasingly prominent instigator of social upheaval and transformation (for good and ill); a video-enabled mobile phone has become a potential instrument not merely of documentation, but of social awareness and perhaps social justice.[53] The resemblances between gun and camera have been noted before (especially in the context of war), but there is—in the technology of portable, personal live broadcast—something uncanny about the competition between the two types of "shooting," especially the way the camera-phone is unmooring the familiar habits and authority of historical, broadcast journalistic mediation.[54] While such pieces of video documentation may be used for evidence of systemic injustice, we see also occasions when videos are used to punctuate shocking moments of graphic violence—such as the Islamic State's video telegrams of on-screen executions, which as a collection might comprise a (documentary) subgenre of their own (jihadist snuff films). Partly owing to the shocking content of the films, a shock sufficiently severe that it may encourage disbelief in the truth of its images, one hears from media outlets that the videos must be "authenticated." Such vetting and validation—that such events did, in fact, occur—only heightens their affective power. And yet, the ubiquitous presence of the camera-phone-movie-studio need not always have such pronounced historical effects; they can as easily be proximate, personal, and private.

When I film my young daughters with my iPhone and they immediately ask to see the footage—proving that the old rhythms of film development and screening dailies are compressed to the duration of the microsecond—I am forced to give them a good reason *not* to watch it. Are we recording this moment because it is interesting, or of some value? Or are we interested in this moment *primarily* because it was recorded (regardless of the interest or value of the content we captured)? Even at this very intimate and everyday level—to say nothing of the *professional* study of documentary film (of which this volume aims to contribute)—we are drawn into a difficult and demanding controversy that calls out for articulation and clarification. Still, while we labor to make these articulations and clarifications, we can take note of the abundant and varied effects these tools are having on consciousness, ideology, and both private memory and public memory (usually just called history).

Today, with Werner Herzog's hectoring skepticism at hand—he has famously declared "there is no truth in cinéma vérité"—we encounter a veritable figure of (and maxim for) postmodern thinking, including the erosion of any faith in realism and by extension, in the intuition that documentary film is, in a word, authentic (or, again, drawing from journalism's regular pronouncement that such media can be "authenticated").[55] What are the epistemic presuppositions that make this kind of deliberation possible—and necessary? If the footage is authenticated, for example, does that aid our reflections on what we understand to be an authentic documentary film? Realism's boast was its potential (or achievement?) of showing "life as it really is," much as John Cage wanted to "allow sounds to speak for themselves."[56] For Vertov, as Vlada Petric notes, film was meant to offer "an outstanding cinematic transposition of 'life-facts,'" and so each shot was thought to disclose "Life-As-It-Is [*zhizn' kakaia ona est'*]."[57] With realism, the medium was, it seems, meant to evaporate. Meanwhile, and in tandem, documentary's objective, according to Susan Hayward, was centered around "two major axes: first, that of the truth, and second, that of who is the speaking subject, that is, who is the purveyor of this truth—the filmed subject, or the filmmaker, or both?"[58] Viewers of Herzog's films, in part because of his unvarnished willingness to interfere with the sober and sincere ethics of the documentary tradition (perhaps needing its pretensions and humorlessness challenged), have become very savvy about the constructed nature of the cinematic arts, even and especially the documentary—an art, we should say, that so often pushes beyond "mere representation" to advocacy and propaganda. When one adds Herzog's regular use of fabrication and fabulation, or Errol Morris's reenactments, or Michael Moore's chronological reshuffling of scenes, a viewer quickly becomes enmeshed in the complicated—and complicating—powers of the form.[59]

Herzog's counteroffer to truth (what he disparagingly calls the "accountant's truth") arrives with a Teutonic inflection summoning the misty mountaintops of the Bavarian Alps as "ecstatic truth."[60] Yet, for all of Herzog's awareness of film's subliming and poetizing potential—and for the just-made association of his approach with the so-called postmodern—the raw nerve

of his point can be found very early on in documentary film practice, for example, when in 1935, at the height of the Great Depression, amid the prevalence of newsreels, *The March of Time* series was inaugurated, and set forth to proudly antagonize the status quo with its combination of "actuality sequences" and "freewheeling dramatizations."[61] The sponsor of these provocations was none other than Henry Luce, who declared, defensively, that the films were "fakery in allegiance to the truth."[62] Rouch and Kiarostami might have said the same—and in so many words, they have.

Meanwhile, duplicity can be used for nefarious purposes, as when Nazi filmmaker Fritz Hippler was assigned by Joseph Goebbels—out of his oxymoronically named Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda—to create a documentary about the Jewish people "in their natural state": the result, *The Eternal Jew* (*Der Ewige Jude*, 1940), not only used footage from the heavily bombed Warsaw ghettoes as evidence for the delinquency and mendacity of the race (with narration fortified by condescension and bombast, and replete with lies and fallacies), but also deployed clips from *fiction* films to serve as illustrations and proof.[63] Despite the use of fiction material, the mandate of the film was still to "produce an anti-Semitic 'documentary.'"[64] Still, though Hippler's was an invidious use, the practice of using fiction footage as part of a documentary can be found in John Grierson's *Conquest* (1930); and when Esfir Shub created the documentary *Spain* (*Ispaniya*, 1939), she included material from Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930).[65] If we flatter ourselves with being more attentive viewers now (perhaps at an advantage in our film literacy by virtue of the quantity and variety of works we have access to), and thus can more easily spot the interventions of fictional elements in the flow of documentary works, we should still dwell on the peculiar claims at issue in this practice of using fiction to substantiate our grasp of reality and truth.

Not incidentally, the water flows in the other direction as well: it is, by now, a common (and for that reason, seemingly sanctioned) practice to use documentary images to lend credence to works of fiction—to subsidize fiction with fragments of facts.[66] Because cameras were on battlefields as soon as the technology allowed, a massive quantity of bona fide footage from the front is regularly deployed in fiction films; the practice was especially widespread in the 1940s as the machines of war and of Hollywood churned in parallel, and at times overlapped. We also catch a variation on this theme in the way *mock* news footage has become increasingly prevalent since, at least Samuel Fuller's *The Big Red One* (1980). The emerging, arguably established, convention of beginning war films or their correlates—postapocalyptic/dystopia films—with a "helter-skelter montage of dire news reports informing us that humanity has been nearly decimated" reveals the trick of turning authentic-looking footage against us as viewers (of course, "against us" because for our entertainment).[67]

This counter-technique of presenting (1) genuine broadcast journalism footage; (2) ersatz documentary footage; or (3) a peculiar hybrid: genuine broadcast journalists acting in fake documentaries can be easily glimpsed in recent variations of war films, especially in the opening sequences of *District 9* (2009), *Red Dawn* (2012), *World War Z* (2013), and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014).[68] Narratively these documentary interventions achieve not only a thrilling jolt to the audience (by heightening the switch from everything-is-okay to full-out panic and catastrophe), but they also cover a huge amount of backstory in a few minutes of rapid-fire, jump-cut editing. The technique is not reserved solely for big-budget rehearsals of destruction and loss, since we find an erstwhile "newsreel" at the front of William Wyler's morsel of a mid-century fairy tale, *Roman Holiday* (1953); an instinct for "establishing shots" that tether a fictitious story to an empirical location—such as in the opening shots of John Huston's *Maltese Falcon* (1941); and still earlier, glimpses of this approach emerging when William Wellman steps off the sound-stage in *A Star is Born* (1937)—that is, when his confection of Hollywood dreams finds some reality in the "metropolis of make-believe."[69]

The use of authentic documentary footage can serve yet another purpose in dramatic fiction films. In *Downfall* (*Der Untergang*, 2004), a fully fabricated fictional film about Hitler's final days is framed—bookended—by documentary footage of an interview with Traudl Junge, his former secretary; a real person, as it were, authorizes *avant la lettre* the fictitious narrative and its dramatic (re)presentation. After proceeding entirely as a staged photoplay, *The Last King of Scotland* (2006) concludes with documentary footage of Idi Amin. In *The Iron Lady* (2011), documentary footage of the historical Margaret Thatcher is intercut within the fictional narrative featuring Meryl Streep-as-Thatcher, as if introducing a bit of legerdemain to help us mistake the one figure for the other. It might not be lost on us that these three random examples involve political leaders of renown and/or ignominy. It would seem that the reality of their exploits, for good or ill, as depicted as acting performances on film is somehow bolstered by the use of "historical documents" (such as found footage). Taken together, the "fiction film in documentaries" approach and the "documentary footage in fiction films" approach signal that we still, despite slippery, often misleading definitions, retain a faith in the *difference* between fiction and nonfiction. Filmmakers, it seems, are prone to capitalize on this difference—and our steadfast allegiances to the meanings of the difference—whenever they trade back and forth. Yet, even with the suggestion that such faith abides, we recognize a general habit in which fiction courts its affiliation with the truth (e.g., "inspired by true events"), while nonfiction fights fraud; both forms, then—or even film as such—seem aggressively oriented to the *truth* as a bid for legitimation. Plato's admonition about the dangers of mimesis—of *poiesis*—returns to our scene with refreshed significance.

If the sober examples of documentary footage in films about world leaders (*Downfall*, et al.) suggest something about our trust in—and need for—historical materiality as a way of legitimating reality, memory, and, yes, history, we should not be distracted from the fact that the purported split between fiction and nonfiction creates a frisson that may simply be entertaining. In *Zelig* (1983), Woody Allen—in this case, writer, director, and star—imposes himself in the form of his character, Leonard Zelig, into the newsreels of the 1920s, in effect *fictionalizing* the historical record. Here (the real) Saul Bellow, Susan Sontag, and Irving Howe reflect on Zelig's (fictitious) participation in (fabricated) events said to have occurred some half-century earlier; again, the use of actual personages—such as Bellow, Sontag, and Howe—marks a further summons to believe in the (reality of the) eponymous character's exploits. A decade later, *Forrest Gump* (1994) has its title character doing much the same—interacting on screen, in the same frame, with John F. Kennedy and Elvis Presley and John Lennon. In yet another permutation, in *The Trip* (2010) and *The Trip to Italy* (2014), we find Steve Coogan playing "Steve Coogan" and Rob Brydon playing "Rob Brydon," and much of our pleasure derives from the self-lampooning that comes from an awareness of both "sides" of these people. An even more ingrown example can be found in *Adaptation* (2002) for which screenwriter Charlie Kaufman "writes himself into" the film as the character "Charlie Kaufman," who is a screenwriter.[70] Kaufman's film is offered up as a cinematic ouroboros. In still another version of such exercises, *In a World . . .* (2013) begins by weaving newly shot footage (of the film's actors playing their characters) coupled with footage of nonactors being interviewed (in a mode of straight documentation familiar from broadcast journalism). The result? The television interviews with nonactors lend authenticity to the staged or faked "documentary" of the actors-as-characters. To end with a more cerebral and celebrated instance, consider how, in *Sans Soleil* (1983), Chris Marker transforms ethnographic filmmaking into an epistolary/essayistic sci-fi montage meditation on time and memory drawing from images made in Japan, Guinea Bissau, and Iceland as well as from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*—and interspersing all of this material with digital effects and electronic music. In this sketch of variations on a theme, we may catch a glimpse of the ways filmmakers have capitalized, often to great artistic and intellectual effect, on the tension inherent in our perception of the documentary image—perhaps especially our lack of confidence in what we understand it to be, or do, or mean.

Even when a fiction film dispenses with the imposition of documentary footage (the sort of material one is tempted to call, in this context, a kind of relic), we regularly find early intertitles that make beseeching declarations such as "inspired by true events" or "based on a true story." When the film's creator disseminates these insistent slivers of metacommentary how are viewers

supposed to react? One conjecture: the statement is nothing short of the casting of a spell—if we *tell* you this, or something "a lot like this" happened, you can access new reserves of trust, and by extension, pathos. A declaration that truth and reality are nearer-than-not to the film representations to come could be said to activate otherwise unrealized melodramatic force. Remember, it is only very late—indeed, functioning like something of a bookend to the opening state of proximity to truth—that we lingerers-among-the-scrolling-credits read the fine print: "The story, all names, characters, and incidents portrayed in this production are fictitious. No identification with actual persons, places, buildings, and products is intended or should be inferred." The origins of this boiler-plate "disclaimer" go back to 1932, when Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was sued for libel—and lost. Fiction filmmakers giveth the truth and then they taketh it away.

Whether it is *Rasputin and the Empress* (1932), the film that got MGM into trouble, or more recent fair, such as Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), fiction films variously state or insinuate that truth is *in* the film—that it is part of its composition. But then viewers, critics, journalists, and historians are left to suss out what of this composition is true or mostly true (and, more perspicuously, what is false). But then none of the questions about how much truth is "in" a film can be clearly made, and therefore none could be clearly answered. Verification would require something like a correspondence check between reality (do we yet know what we mean by this term?) and the movie. This appeal to truth may seem bankrupt, but it inadvertently reveals that there is another way to approach the claim "based on a true story"—namely, by emphasizing not *truth* but the idea of something being *based* on truth. With this emphasis in hand, the appeal is to fiction through and through, ever and always (and isn't this precisely what that disclaimer is assuring us of?). At the other end of the film, namely, at its beginning, the point of "based on a true story" is not to say: you will see the truth in this film, but that we (the creators) have used found elements (facts, truths, empirical data, historical materials) in order to fabricate the conditions for fiction. In this light, "based on a true story" is a euphemism for "fiction that now and again may invoke referents from the scope of empirical history, while duly noting that *none* of those invocations are part of historical truth."

Broadly drawn, then, we can identify the mood of the skeptic (with regard to cinematic truth or veridical filmic assertion), and, in opposition, the stance of the realist (or objectivist).[71] For the former, as Michael Renov has written, we find a willing admission that the documentary film, like other texts, is subject to "contingency, hybridity, knowledge as situated and particular, identity as ascribed and performed."[72] Renov reminds us—borrowing a line from Hayden White—that "all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively."[73] Here

Noël Carroll parses White's insight and its relevance to the created nature of documentary film:

> The narrative structure in the historical recounting is not true or false; it is fictional. It is imposed on events by the historian and . . . it is thought to distort, presumably necessarily. Thus no historical narrative can pretend to accuracy or objectivity because in virtue of its possession of a narrative structure, it is both fictive and distortive. It merely pretends to refer objectively to the event-structures that plot structures appear to depict, because those event-structures are in fact the fabrications of narration. . . . That which plot-structures seem to portray has no independent historical existence outside of narrative discourse.[74]

To make this somewhat more concrete: where an actor in a feature fiction film may be described as a (true) pretender—someone we are meant to believe is playing a part, inhabiting a role—the subject in a documentary film might be called a (false) pretender: someone we are meant to believe is herself, when in fact, she is, at last, playing a part within the "fabrications of narration." The documentary subject, like the Hollywood actor, may be described as a character. Documentary truth would then seem to be just another staged event (and participating in a "discourse"). Furthermore, such effects, of course, can easily go beyond the actor, her lines, and the film locations, and appear in editing, ordering/chronology/plotting (*syuzhet*), production design, titles, captions, scores and sound tracks, special effects, CGI, graphics, marketing, distribution, exhibition, and much else.[75]

Among those who defend the idea of objectivity in documentary film, we find Carroll, who claims that so long as a work embodies the creator's commitment to "the practice of reasoning and evidence gathering," and so long as the work "can be intersubjectively evaluated against standards or argument and evidence shared by practitioners," then it may be deemed objective.[76] Plantinga contends (and clarifies) that we may be better served by seeing how "Carroll's understanding of objectivity pertains more to justification than to truth."[77] Consequently, Carroll's defense of objectivity, according to Plantinga, "leaves the status of the objective documentary *vis-à-vis* reality undetermined."[78]

Because philosophical theories, like so much else, so often appear at opposite extremes, in contentious binaries and dichotomies, we should also note Brian Winston's rejection of documentary-as-objective. "Surely Winston is right," notes Plantinga, "that if one defines an objective documentary as one that lacks any subjective or mediating element, then there are no objective documentaries."[79] Here the philosopher-theorist (Winston, Plantinga) and the theorist-filmmaker (Kiarostami) line up in agreement. While Winston has insisted on a classificatory bifurcation—dividing subjective from objective documentary, in fact, dismissing altogether the legitimacy of objective documentary—Plantinga, again in a role of mediator, has suggested that "while no documentary film reaches the objective ideal of absolute realism, we might nonetheless find one documentary more objective than another."[80] Plantinga, then, is suggesting a gradal approach, rather than a sortal one. Thus, while Winston "holds that the entire project of documentary films can be questioned," Plantinga proposes, with more circumspection, that the qualities of documentary films—especially in relation to issues of truth and realism—may be better served by an emphasis on degree instead of kind.

TOWARD A SCHEMA OF THE TERM "DOCUMENTARY FILM" (TYPES, TAXONOMIES, AND TELL-TALE SIGNS)

Reference to a film genre—say, Western or musical, film noir or political thriller—does not usually, or naturally, invite consideration of the film *medium*; there are exceptions, to be sure: *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) comes to mind as exemplary in this regard. But the generic diminution (dismissal or denial) of the medium is not the case with the genre we call "documentary film," where its doubleness—as a genre *and* as a medium—are apparent, if not always promoted, in every frame. Unlike genre films that invite immersion into them, the documentary (even if it isn't meant to be an agitation) is constitutionally suited to self-consciousness. As viewers, we are aware of the film—and its creators—as making certain kinds of (assertive) claims, and so though we may become caught up in the film-as-story (because it may successfully deploy the same kinds of immersive techniques familiar to film-as-entertainment), its characteristics as a medium are endlessly on trial. Where we are familiar with other titles in the Philosophy of Popular Culture series, for example, in which a director's work comes into focus (e.g., *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman*), or an established, enduring, but also evolving genre (e.g., *The Philosophy of War Films*), here *Documentary Film* as a title or phrase, then, is not redundant but illuminative of two functions: (1) to provoke our thinking about the conventions and claims that define a genre (especially insofar as those traits are static and dynamic), and (2) to stimulate our consideration of the way the materiality and construction of film contributes to our capacity to represent our ideas (what is in/on the film) and to reflect on them (what is in us, as viewers, as inheritors of these works). These two functions seem to lie at the heart of any philosophy of documentary film. As a genre *and* a medium (two-in-one) its philosophical credentials appear at once to be assured and also to call out for critical attention.

If this description of documentary film "as genre and medium" provides an initial context for distinguishing it from other kinds of genres and media, we find other approaches to typing and taxonomy in foundational work by

Erik Barnouw, Patricia Aufderheide, and Bill Nichols. For example, Barnouw gives us names to describe the temperament and style of documentarians: explorer, reporter, advocate, observer, et al. (the full list noted just above).[81] Aufderheide proposes six "subgenres": public affairs, government propaganda, advocacy, historical, ethnographic, and nature.[82] Nichols schematizes "Six Modes of Documentary Film"—(1) Expository (*Why We Fight*, Frank Capra and Anatole Litvak, 1943–45); (2) Poetic (Werner Herzog's *Wodaabe*, 1989 and *Lessons of Darkness*, 1992); (3) Observational ("sometimes referred to as direct cinema," and represented by the work of Frederick Wiseman, Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, and Albert and David Maysles); (4) Participatory—"sometimes referred to as interactive documentary or cinéma vérité" and illustrated by the films of Jean Rouch (*Chronicle of a Summer*, 1961) and Claude Lanzmann (*Shoah*, 1985); (5) Reflexive (*The Man with the Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov, 1929); and (6) Performative—emphasizing the "affective dimension [of] lived experience," for example, *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, 1955); *The Gleaners and I* (Agnès Varda, 2000).[83]

Because of what has been said about the interaction between genre and medium, Nichols' account of the defining traits of the Reflexive film, however, seems to be a fitting and useful general statement for all documentary film: "Like meta-communicative statements, it draws attention to the type of film a documentary is. It makes the viewer aware of the conventions, the expectations and assumptions that usually go unspoken. It stimulates reflection on the viewing process and how it differs from viewing a fiction film."[84] Notice how Nichols' description of Reflexive filmmaking does not stimulate reflection on the other five modes of documentary filmmaking but, instead, on *fiction* film. Below I will take up consideration of documentary film's reflexivity—across modes—to consider the further significance of this attribute.

As my adjustment or expansion of Nichols' schema makes clear, any attempts to categorize—to define and divide one work from another—invite a savvy viewer to push back. Is not Resnais' *Night and Fog* also Expository and Poetic and Observational? Given Nichols' criteria, the film seems to share in the work of these other modes as well as its prominent or dominant mode. We are prompted not just to see how the films we know fit into such modes and categories, but also how they might not. Are there other modes and categories to add, for example, do Mockumentary, Pseudodocumentary, Metadocumentary, and Metaethnofiction deserve their own columns, or are they best regarded as a subset of Reflexive cinema?[85] And if there is not another independent category, then perhaps should we speak of subcategories or hybrids—for instance, Participatory-Reflexive as a way to discuss and categorize illusive cases such as *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* (1968), *David Holzman's Diary* (1968), *Daughter Rite* (1979), *Jane B. by Agnès V.* (1988), and *Medium Cool*, the last of which began our proceedings?

Categories and taxonomies, as Barnouw and Nichols illustrate in their efforts to create them, require differentiating one sort of thing from another; and just as the ink dries on such divisions, exceptions arise, questions are asked, and one reaches for an eraser, which is no good against the ink. Odd that the permanency of film—that we can watch Cary Grant as easily today as audiences did in the 1930s and 1940s—should result in the impermanency of our account of what it is or shows. For its own sake, documentary film so-called possesses a rich history of debate about how to characterize the form. Susan Hayward states that "narrative cinema's function is storytelling, not description, which is, supposedly, a part [or] function of the documentary." Her reticence—"supposedly"—is telling.[86] Likewise, even the form's most illustrious progenitors and benefactors, enthusiasts, and canonical figures emit competing (and sometimes contradictory or corrective) visions. We may be taken aback to learn that John Grierson, thought to have coined the term "documentary" in response to Robert Flaherty's *Moana* (1926), held an impression distinctly at odds with our contemporary vernacular sense of the word; for Grierson, in a documentary "we pass from the plain (or fancy) descriptions of natural material, to arrangements, re-arrangements, and creative shapings of it."[87] Instead of purporting to be an objective or scientific (or even aspirationally scientific) genre, documentary film for Grierson was, as Plantinga puts it, "an art form rather than the mechanical documentation of some bit of reality."[88] If truth and reality are part of Grierson's regard for documentary cinema, it is not insignificant that nearly a century ago, these would entail a truth and a reality derived from art and its attendant "creative shapings."

Grierson is also well known for a partner description in which the aesthetics of documentary cinema should be regarded as the "creative treatment of actuality."[89] A few years later, in 1935, Paul Rotha echoed Grierson's phrasing, noting that among the "first demand[s] of the documentary method" is "the creative dramatisation of actuality."[90] Robert Gardner both alludes to and distills Grierson's and Rotha's definitions when he states a preference for "actuality" in place of documentary.[91] Vertov, contemporaneous with Grierson, in the 1920s, held a more stridently literal sense of "actuality," for his definition(s) of *kino pravda* (or *cine pravda*) meant to emphasize and elicit the way moving, cinematic images do, in fact, provide access to truth.[92] By contrast, some decades later, Frederick Wiseman encouraged us to see his own documentaries (and perhaps those of others) as "reality fictions," a phrase which upon hearing we may ask: Is this a playful oxymoron and/or a penetratingly honest invitation to understand what he is up to?[93]

Antedating these terminological debates and variations, it is useful to recall that Grierson reached for "documentary" in the first place (as a way to describe Flaherty's *Moana*) because the word *documentaire* was already in service by

the French, used specifically to describe travel films.[94] In the fin de siècle, and early into the twentieth century, Auguste and Louis Lumière, Thomas Edison, and many other film entrepreneurs employed a range of terms to capture the qualities, associations, and possibilities of their nonfiction films, among them: "*documentaires*, actualitiés, topicals, interest films, educationals, expedition films, travel films—or, after 1907, travelogues."[95] Thus, Grierson, and those who followed him, did not invent new terms for nonfiction films *ex nihilo* but were already, in the 1920s, in debate with a robust set of descriptions for the sorts of things nonfictions films were understood to be.

The debate about what to call or how to identify a documentary (bracketing the folk intuition that "I know one when I see it"), can be traced back to the earliest instincts that governed the use of the medium. Siegfried Kracauer describes such instincts as "tendencies," and contends that the works and outlooks of Louis Lumière and Georges Méliès instructively illustrate two such options: the former was a "strict realist," while the latter "gave free rein to his artistic imagination."[96] For Kracauer, the simultaneous emergence of these two tendencies is not "sheer accident," but a function of experiments in the "potentialities of the medium [of film] as are in accordance with its substantive characteristics."[97] While Lumière "appealed to the sense of observation"—and in this term we can hear a nascent credo of documentary cinema take shape—Méliès "still remained the theater director he had been. He used photography in a pre-photographic spirit—for the reproduction of a papier-maché universe inspired by stage traditions."[98] Lumière's "realistic tendency" and Méliès' "formative tendency" are still palpable in our contemporary assessment of the "potentialities of the medium"—and we might add, its *actualities* as well.

While Lumière and Méliès come to life as filmmakers, according to Kracauer, with opposing aspirations for the cinema, we may be as intrigued by the fact that they shared the same medium. Film was the common denominator. But if film is one thing (viz., one medium) how can it be so effectively claimed by two clashing temperaments—the realist *and* the fabulist? For a reply, consider William Rothman's expert gloss of an insight made by Stanley Cavell in *The World Viewed*: "Cavell gave Bazin's idea [that the emergence of film in the nineteenth century stemmed from a wish to see the world re-created in its own image] a crucial dialectical twist by reflecting on the fact that it is precisely because the medium's material basis is the projection of reality that film is capable of rendering the fantastic as readily as the realistic. Reality plays an essential role in all films, . . . [b]ut in no film is the role reality plays simply that of being recorded or documented."[99] We have grown accustomed to thinking, indeed have been encouraged to think, that documentary footage is a kind of "autopsis"—literally, as in the translated title of the Latin in Stan Brakhage's film, *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* (1971). But the *act* of seeing with one's own eyes does not confirm a privileged access to reality or truth; it is but a *grounding* for the beginning of interpretation or testimonial or criticism. In short, seeing *when* or *that* does not equal seeing *why* or *how*.[100] Indeed, even Brakhage's film—with its astonishing directness of address to its subject—does not convey a message or a lesson. Rather the film stirs the audience to thought and feeling. Watching the film, then, becomes the condition for the possibility of thinking—not an encounter with the thought itself. As Rothman continues: "Documentaries are not inherently more direct or truthful than other kinds of films. . . . What particular documentary films reveal about reality, how they achieve their revelations, are questions to be addressed by acts of criticism, not settled a priori by theoretical fiat. . . . How are we to acknowledge what separates what we call 'documentaries' from what we call 'fiction films' without denying what they have in common? (What they have in common, first and foremost, is the medium of film)."[101]

"Documentary film," as noted, is often used as a synonym with "nonfiction film."[102] Most users (even some theorists and critics) trade back and forth with these terms as if they were interchangeable without loss or conflict. This familiar usage is confusing, and therefore is both interesting and problematic: interesting because it highlights a historical equivocation between *documentation* and *truth* (the latter term being a positive way of describing *non*fiction), and problematic because documentation is—well—not strictly an act of conveying an isomorphic experience of time and space. In this latter case, documenting/documentation is thoroughly, necessarily mediated, which is to say *transformative* for reality and thus, for truth. So, an abiding issue in the current volume is not just, as Rothman describes above, a recognition of the shared material basis of cinema, but also—on metaphysical and epistemological terms—to what extent, if at all, a documentary film *is* a nonfiction film.

Given what has been said thus far, and what is to come in this volume as a whole, we could dwell on the resiliency of the dyad fiction/nonfiction. If Grierson, Rotha, Rouch, Wiseman, and Gardner, among so many other practitioners of the form—including, more recently, Herzog, Kiarostami, and Lars von Trier—resolutely resist the truth-making or truth-giving power of nonfiction film, why does its aura of illuminative attributes, its sheen of authenticity persist? Plantinga has described this dyad as "ubiquitous fiction" (position 1) and "ubiquitous nonfiction" (position 2).[103] These phrases mean what they say: position 1 = everything you see and hear in a documentary is fiction; position 2 = everything you see and hear in a documentary—*or* a feature film for that matter—is nonfiction. If positions 1 and 2 focus strictly on the medium, a third position draws attention to the audience: here, in position 3, the meaning of documentary film is a matter of reading and reception, and "assigning reference"—and not about text, context, or technology;

position 3 is the film equivalent of "reception theory" in literary studies.[104] Yet, Plantinga is quick to point out that position 3 makes a fatal error of ascription: "to confuse a document with a documentary film is a serious error of categorization."[105] Plantinga's gloss on this criticism involves a reminder that it is not the audience's reception of a film that defines what it is, but instead, social constructions. Still, Plantinga admits, author intentions may define or classify a work; we must, however, be attuned to cases when an author/auteur/director misleads us through his or her description of the film (either internally, or externally, to the film text).

Another approach to the definition or characterization of nonfiction film can be distilled from Gregory Currie's distinction between the image as a *trace* (which is independent of belief) and as a *testimony* (which is belief dependent).[106] On Currie's reading, we should understand that the way a camera records its subjects is *not* dependent on the beliefs of the camera operator; consequently, a film renders an objective "trace," whereas, by contrast a painting is entirely subjective—dependent on the beliefs of the painter, and is therefore a testimony.[107] The "ideal" documentary for Currie is "a filmically sustained narrative the constitutive film images of which represent only photographically: they represent only what they are of."[108] Thus, to offer a concrete example, a significant part of the scandal surrounding the making and release of Casey Affleck's *I'm Still Here* (2010) had to do with the director's shift from claiming, out the outset, that his film is made up of traces to admitting, after the fact, that the depictions were, in fact, testimonies.

Just as position 3 makes a category mistake (in likening documentary films to documents), so does Currie when he signs on for the same equivalency. Plantinga helpfully suggests that Currie's faith in the documentary film-as-document may derive from "a lingering influence of the direct cinema or cinéma vérité movements of the late 1950s and 1960s."[109] The "aesthetic of authenticity" surrounding the documentary image during this era is strikingly at odds with our more contemporary (skeptical? postmodern?) notion that a documentary film is a "structured rhetorical discourse."[110] Plantinga usefully reminds us that "the first sixty-five years of documentary" filmmaking—as originated and exemplified by Robert Flaherty, John Grierson, and Humphrey Jennings—were *not* preoccupied with authenticity; they were "not hesitant to employ stagings and recreations of events under the banner of documentary filmmaking."[111] What has seemed, perhaps, like innovation in documentary practice over the past few decades (viz., stagings, recreations, chronology shifting, etc.) is, in fact, a return to form: from *Roger and Me* (1989) and *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) to *Man on Wire* (2008) and *The Act of Killing* (2012), much contemporary documentary filmmaking has embraced film's fabricated nature as a fact, and as something to be exposed, explored, and experimented with. According to this logic, in recent decades, inheritors of documentary

film have suffered from a kind of cultural amnesia. As a result, the present is looking like the past, while the middle period seems like an aberration (albeit a long and influential span)—a time when forgetfulness gave way to fancy, generated peculiar hierarchies of value, and imposed a division in the definition of the medium that was never solicited.

Substantiating Plantinga's point about documentary film (by those who might use the term for their own work), as a "structured rhetorical discourse," we can find further moments of illumination in experimental films. Among many trenchant examples, it is particularly rewarding to contemplate *Alone. Life Wastes Andy Hardy* (1998), where Martin Arnold transforms our capacity to attend to the effects of manipulating—not the image—but its rate and direction of playback, repetitions and reversals, and attendant distortions of sound. Or *Removed* (1999), where Naomi Uman changes found pornographic footage—not by editing it—but by making direct, chemical interventions on the celluloid itself. And as a last example, *A Movie* (1958), a film-as-collage-and-composite of clips—none of them newly shot or defaced—but gathered and arranged by Bruce Conner in counterpoint with Ottorino Respighi's *Pines of Rome*. All three artists draw from existing footage, but use it in distinctive ways. Each case renews and makes resonant the qualifications of film as a medium of potentiality, and acts a reminder that similar kinds of artistic inventions are part and parcel of the "structured rhetorical discourse" we familiarly call documentary cinema.

In addition to trace accounts, and reflections in the wake of experimental film, another significant sphere of definition and characterization of nonfiction film can be found in what are called theories of communicative action.[112] Here, in a bit of analogizing with linguistic forms, and dependent on the ordinary language philosophy of J. L. Austin, we find film theorists, such as Noël Carroll, describe documentary film as a kind of "speech act."[113] Or more specifically, in Austin's lexicon, as an illocutionary act—that is, using "words, gestures, or some other expressive means to perform one of several kinds of actions, such as making an assertion, a request, or an apology."[114] In the realm of documentary filmmaking, this analogy draws a line of affiliation between the content of the film and the world it addresses; unlike a fiction film, which aims at creating a world unto itself, the documentary film is poised to generate assertions about the actual (i.e., extra-filmic) world, which, to make things more complicated, no doubt, also includes the history of film. Carroll refers to documentaries as films of "presumptive assertion," which means that we, the audience, are meant to take the film (and its "propositional content") as depicting the world we know and inhabit, and as making assertions about it.[115]

Trevor Ponech proposes a theory of communicative action concerning "cinematic assertions" where documentary film is understood as an "action of indication."[116] Consequently, Ponech's approach leads to an intentionalist

account of a documentary film's identity—namely, where the intentions of the filmmaker prevail when determining what kind of thing it is.[117] Carroll, for his part, has drawn his communicative action theory to what he calls an "intention-response" model "that presupposes that the artist or maker of a work indicates that the audience is meant to respond [to that work] in a certain way."[118]

When considering cases in which images "sometimes show rather than say, and thus leave some of the propositional content of their moving images and sounds unspecified," Plantinga argues that "we should take the documentary as an 'asserted veridical representation'": "In the case of its propositional content, a documentary is meant to be taken as truthful; in the case of its recorded images and sounds and their ordering, it is designed to be taken as a reliable guide to relevant elements of the profilmic scene, without necessarily being taken as a particular account of the scene's propositional content."[119] Plantinga's mediatory position provides a way in which we can appreciate a range of "documentary styles and techniques" and yet maintain an allegiance to the "illocutionary act characteristic of the typical documentary" (namely, as an act that aims to "provide veridical, . . . implicitly truthful, reliable, and/or accurate representation").[120] Still, we have a sufficient abundance of accomplished documentary films that have upset our ability to identify the world in the film as our own (from *The War Game* [1965] to *Close-Up* [1990] to *Stories We Tell* [2012]) that we are perhaps understandably cautious—skeptical?—about enlisting our full faith in documentary film's consistent production of illocutionary acts. (Errol Morris might make a cameo here to remind us how evidence suggests the contrary that "we have an unfettered capacity for credulity.")[121] Even if a documentary turns out to be a ruse—a fake or fraud or otherwise a muddle of fact and fiction—it does not bar the film from making significant "assertions" about our (nonfictional) world. Such is our familiar habit in the case of fiction feature films—including science fiction fantasies and brutalizing war films, elaborate period melodramas, and violent Westerns—so why not also with documentaries? We readily supply our fixed and extended attention to fiction films, and then walk away from them deriving all sorts of profound truths about life, truth, and reality. The unstable status of any given documentary film (is it fact or fiction or a blend of both?), then, does not have to undermine or eviscerate the credibility of the film's lessons *for* our world, just perhaps our naïve faith in the stability of the film's veridical assertions *of* our world.

TOPICS IN DOCUMENTARY FILM I: REAL, UNREAL, SURREAL

Amos Vogel once declared that "it is appropriate that it was a surrealist [viz., André Breton] who so well expressed the curious combination of technology and metaphysics that is cinema."[122] It is sufficiently insightful for Vogel to have merely noted that cinema is a "curious combination of technology and metaphysics," but it is a familiar sign of his perspicacity that he gleans the significance of a surrealist making the concatenation. For one thing, Breton might be saving us from a debate between the real and the non-real, and supplanting it with an attention to the surreal. Film, in effect, is too uncanny in its *re*-presentation of the world for us not to be hypnotized by its power, and thus to slip—again and again—into a faith in, or into love with, its particular, or better, peculiar reality. In common speech, when a person is overwhelmed by an event—a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, a Hollywood red carpet—we hear variations on "It feels just like a movie," or "It's surreal." Indeed, even a hostage released by the so-called Islamic State says that his captors see *themselves* as being part of a movie; there is such a love of compelling film narratives about "heroes," and of the resulting fame, that time and again we find many people, even terrorists, "playing a part . . . in their own movie."[123] These remarks are meaningful, if inadvertent, confessions of ordinary language, and we could do worse than to notice how they ratify resemblances between cinema and the surreal. Not surprisingly, Jean Mitry made a related observation years ago: "If research into the supernatural is an attempt to discover what a certain philosophy compares to the 'essence' of things or, at any rate, whatever transcends the power of our senses, one could say that in the cinema, reality and fantasy show themselves as different aspects of one and the same thing."[124]

Mitry puts us on notice that "'realism,' interpreted initially as a category of art, degenerated fairly rapidly into a style."[125] In sum, what seemed like the metaphysical capacities of film (as articulated by André Bazin, e.g., in his vision of "total cinema"), devolve into aesthetics or politics, and more often than not both. *Bicycle Thieves* goes from being a window (onto a world) to being a socio-political prod to the viewers. Mitry tells us "[f]ilm is unable to capture the essence of concrete reality through an arbitrary representation," and he concludes: "[film realism] is therefore a question of content before it is a question of form," and as such, *whatever* apprehension we can claim to make of the world through cinematic capture, it will be found in "the truth of the signified far more than in a style of signification."[126] It is precisely at this moment when Mitry directs our attention to content—what he elsewhere calls "the importance of the subject matter"—that we are tempted to think we are talking about realism (or the realism of the filmed object), yet since all this is happening through film, and thus through a medium that transforms the metaphysics of things, we are, instead, in the realm of the surreal.

No matter how many ways or times one approaches the issue of film realism—especially in a discussion of documentary film—it can come as something of a surprise. But then indicators keep lining up to make the same

point. Jean Rouch credits his discovery of surrealism, when in his early twenties, for stimulating him to follow after the fusion of fiction and documentary that would come to define his ethnofiction.[127] Paul Henley described Rouch's methodology as aiming "to document the manifestation of the surreal in the forms of the real."[128] Rouch himself captured this idea with characteristic flair and gnomic provocation: each of his films are meant to be "a postcard at the service of the imaginary." Eliot Weinberger descried the uncanny overlapping of traditions and techniques when he wrote that surrealism "introduced an aesthetic based on chance, improvisation, and the found object—an aesthetic which would seem tailored to the actual conditions of a Westerner making an ethnographic film. Yet the genre [of ethnographic film] has had only one surrealist: ironically, the founder of *cinéma vérité*, Jean Rouch."[129]

But not so fast. When Robert Gardner, celebrated ethnographic filmmaker of *Dead Birds* (1963) and *Forest of Bliss* (1986), referred to the iconic surrealist, Luis Buñuel, Gardner said: "I always thought of him as my cinematic father." Buñuel was, for Gardner, "my great illuminator."[130] The attributes of surrealism that Weinberger notes as especially complementary to ethnographic filmmaking—"chance, improvisation, and the found object"—are also evident in Gardner's films, and therefore in the legacy of his contribution to the field.[131] In *Forest of Bliss*, for example, there is no voice-over commentary, no lower-thirds, and no dialogue; the footage, though obviously edited together, is also remarkably undigested. The effect is a sort of immediacy of the moving image, and thereby, one might imagine, a certain potential for immersiveness on the part of the viewer.

In 1957 Gardner founded the Film Study Center at Harvard, which was a production and research division at the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology. More recently, Harvard is home to the Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL). Directed by Lucien Castaing-Taylor, SEL describes itself as "an experimental laboratory . . . that promotes innovative combinations of aesthetics and ethnography. It uses analog and digital media to explore the aesthetics and ontology of the natural and unnatural world. . . . It opposes the traditions . . . of documentary that are derived from broadcast journalism."[132] Several of the representative works emerging from SEL include *Still Life* (Diana Allan, 2007), *Sweetgrass* (Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash, 2009), *Leviathan* (Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, 2012), and *The Iron Ministry* (J. P. Sniadecki, 2014).[133] By dispensing with formal characteristics "derived from broadcast journalism," SEL-style documentary simultaneously inherits and innovates Gardner's methodology.

If Mitry, Rouch, Gardner, and the SEL crew are attuned to the surreal quality of cinematic metaphysics (especially as experienced through "chance, improvisation, and the found object"), we ought not to lose track of the degree to which Breton's other element—technology—has transformed our relationship to the cinematic image. To begin in our contemporary frame and work backward, Castaing-Taylor and Paravel's use of small digital video cameras (in their most commercially popular form, GoPro units) has enabled them to put a camera in places where a camera—much less a person—would seldom fit or survive. These self-contained, waterproof units, barely the size of a deck of cards, generate images of sufficient quality to project at any theatrical venue. When the cameras get so small, the vision for how to use them can become quite big.

Looking back a century, though, we see a structurally similar innovation in the rise of the 16mm film camera—from its early standardization by George Eastman, et al. in 1923—which lent a first indication of the technical liberation of the medium from bulky, stationary, temperamental, and expensive machines.[134] These small cameras—often used in conjunction with a separate sound capture device—provided the necessary conditions for everything from Vertov's *kino pravda* to Rouch's *cinéma vérité*. An image of a movie camera on one's shoulder has become a veritable icon of/for documentary film: as on this book's cover, technological portability is part of the art.

The freedom and independence of the filmmaker has an analogue in the film works themselves. In his now-classic essay, "From Lecturer's Prop to Industrial Product," Rick Altman, traces the early twentieth-century shift from films as ancillary to a performer's live presentation to stand-alone entities that could, as it were, speak for themselves in the absence of their creator or contextualizer.[135]

TOPICS IN DOCUMENTARY FILM II: THE DIGITAL AND THE DOCUMENTARY (AN ANIMATED COUPLING)

As we see in Mieke Bal's contribution to this volume, the category of "documentary film" must make room for documentary *video*—and also, arguably, should include documentary still imagery since, in the realm of the *digital* fabrication of an image, the sensor that creates the still also creates the video; they share a site of origin and a mode of becoming. Bal's *Nothing is Missing* (2006–10) is not a documentary film per se, but, a "multiple-screen video installation."[136] Given the plentiful, varied, and increasingly (approaching exclusively) digital tools—for the creation of documentary film, video, and photographs, we may be better suited to refer to all of this media with the single, more inclusive coupling *documentary imagery*; thereafter, we may want (or not) to distinguish traits of the still versus the moving image.

Bal's observation reminds us that "film" is, if commonly forgotten, a medium—that is, a very specific kind of matter, traditionally celluloid. In recent decades, "film" has achieved its apotheosis and transubstantiated into

a metaphor: now "film" often means any moving picture, including those generated by digital means. The feature nonfiction work *Tangerine* (2015) was shot using iPhones, yet it is still referred to as a film.[137] If, in several forms or fashions, we have been asking thus far what a documentary film is/does/means, we are now prompted to rethink the underlying presumption that it is, or has been, or has to be *film*. From Arnheim, Bazin, and Eisenstein to Perkins, Cavell, Rodowick, and Dudley Andrew, among many others, film theorists have been (justifiably) obsessed with the medium of film, especially what it means ontologically.[138] What happens, then, when the medium for "film" is no longer film? As we approached the end of the twentieth century, Lev Manovich asked, "What is digital cinema?" and in his reply found an initial contrast worth dwelling on (especially for thinking about the documentary qualities of the image): he conjectured that the cinematic image involves "the art of the index; it is an attempt to make art out of a footprint," whereas digital cinema, put bluntly, is not.[139] Consequently, "computer media redefine the very identity of cinema," and thus the ontological basis of our definitions of documentary cinema.

For all of the cataloging and critiquing of the similarities and differences of fiction and nonfiction film, it may be easy to lose track of an obvious (and for that reason hard to make) observation: "Fictional films are *live-action* films," writes Manovich, "that is, they took place in real, physical space." The same can be said for nonfiction films. In watching a film-as-such, we are, as Cavell has described it, "not present *to*" what is on screen but "present *at*" it.[140] "From the perspective of a future historian of visual culture"—and here we are a couple decades after Manovich wrote this, and therefore occupy this future—"the differences between classical Hollywood films, European art films, and avant-garde films (apart from abstract ones) may appear less significant than this common feature—their reliance on lens-based recordings of reality."[141] Taking us right back to the top, that things appear before a camera at a specific time and place—the so-called profilmic—is not just evidence for those who insist on the case for "ubiquitous nonfiction" but also marks a distinction between all celluloid-based film and all digital media production. In a little over a century, we have gone from the profilmic to what Garrett Stewart calls the "postcinematic."[142]

Scanning through the many instances of digital cinema that now lay before us, one of their common features is their lack of being filmed as an event. Digital cinema—and here we must more overtly include animation—dispenses with the profilmic. "As cinema enters the digital age," Manovich tells us, and again, we might say that we already inhabit this age, ". . . cinema can no longer be clearly distinguished from animation. [Cinema] is no longer an indexical media technology but, rather, a subgenre of painting."[143] For one thing, the ready-to-hand definitions of cinema, of the fiction/nonfiction divide, however contested they have been, come in for radical readjustment in the light of this uncanny recursion. Jean-Luc Godard, who jolted our thinking about film's binary *and blend* of fiction and nonfiction in *Breathless*—more than half-a-century ago—is now restlessly contending with the painterly status of the digital image, for example, in *Goodbye to Language* (*Adieu au langage*, 2014). Clearly, the end of film need not mean the death of cinema.[144]

Where cinema, especially in its early history, like photography, stood in stern contrast with painting (and drawing), it is now—in the twenty-first century, in the midst of new non-celluloid technologies—thrown back into company with its estranged aesthetic combatant. Drawing from Currie's lexicon, we could say that the digital is instantiating a shift from the trace (back) to testimony; painting and cinema are now, more than ever, evolving out of an agonistic rivalry and into a mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationship. Twenty-first-century "film studies" is, in fact, more akin to eighteenth-century studies of painting as we find them in Johann Winckelmann's *Reflections*—or earlier, from a summoning made in Timothy Murray's illustrious syntagm, a "digital baroque"; or earlier still, to Plato's remarks on painterly mimesis in the *Republic*.[145]

Laura Mulvey has, like Manovich, begun to reckon with the "crisis of the photographic sign as index" caused by the emergence (and increasing dominance) of the digital. She recognizes that "the digital, as an abstract information system, made a break with analogue imagery, finally sweeping away the relation with reality, which had, by and large, dominated the photographic tradition."[146] The intimacy between film's "material base and its poetics" meant that, in a very literal sense, (the) film had to be there at the moment of exposure to the profilmic event. The medium was a *witness* simultaneously with its status as an *embalming* agent.[147] If the digital is not "present" to an event in the same way as film—because it is painting instead of indexing—we may skirt scandalously close to thinking that photographically based film offers "more reality" than the digital brush. In an odd coda to our struggle with the values and virtues of the photographic/film image, it is, in fact, the digital that is delivering new credibility to the once maligned seventh art. As D. N. Rodowick puts it: "The digital reasserts the aesthetic value of analog images as somehow more real than digital simulations, not only at the cinema but also in computer gaming and other new media."[148] Did we notice what Rodowick points out, namely, that "most of the key debates on the representational nature of photographic and filmic media—and indeed whether and how they could be defined as art—were deduced, rightly or wrongly, from the basic photographic/cinematographic process"?[149] Taking stock of this question may be among the implied central tasks of the current generation of theorists.

The metaphor (or analogy) of the brush—where paint displaces the photochemical—obscures the agency of digital cinema (who or what is "doing the painting"), which it would seem must involve our consideration of those who instantiate, order, and manipulate numbers; the "who," of course, is already and may increasingly be a nonhuman agent. Again according to Rodowick: "The transformation of matter in the electronic and digital arts takes place on a different atomic register and in a different conceptual domain" than the "arts of intaglio," which include photography and film.[150] Referencing Timothy Binkley, Rodowick notes that "where analog media record traces of events, . . . digital media produce tokens of numbers."[151] We appear to end up with the suggestion that, in a playful sort of concatenation of words, digital media are, in effect, "paint by numbers." We should forestall the customary association that any such "paint by numbers" is predetermined or lacks the full range of creativity (a few minutes with a lauded Pixar release will disabuse that inkling); rather the phrase is meant to emphasize that "digital media are," as Rodowick adduces them "neither visual, nor textual, nor musical—they are simulations."[152]

Tom Gunning had declared that it is "one of the great scandals of film theory" that is has so severely neglected animation (and often quite consciously).[153] Karen Beckman has undertaken to correct this embarrassing lacuna, acknowledging along the way the pioneering labors of Alan Cholodenko and the contributions of Miriam Hansen and Vivian Sobchack.[154] As Beckman points out, in one established and influential text that is meant to introduce students to film studies, *Film Art*, edited by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "documentary film" shares a chapter with "experimental film" and "animation." As Beckman reflects on this grouping: "Yet of these 'outsiders,' animation, often regarded as a childish film form and lacking either documentary's political and historical credentials or experimental film's association with high-brow categories like the avant-garde, has until recently received the least scholarly attention."[155] Beckman aims to discern "some of the intellectual and institutional conditions that have fostered this (often mutual) history of neglect of which scholars in both fields—cinema studies and animation studies—have become increasingly conscious."[156] But the headline that seems to have arrived, if not yet been made fully public (owing to a long history of habits, personal *and* industrial) is nothing less than "Digital Cinema is Animation." Manovich's fin de siècle prognostications have come to pass, and perhaps even more quickly and virulently than he, or we, could have predicted.

If, by employing digital media, we have decidedly and definitively taken a step away from the "trace" image (away from the indexical referent and toward wholesale simulacra), then what else/more/different can we learn about the *documentary* image in this new (digital/painted/animated) context?

Even as a film such as *Boyhood* (2015) reinvigorated an appreciation for the indexing capacities of film—the film itself was described as a kind of documentary of youth, with some critics citing Michael Apted's *Up* series (1964–present) as a "precursor" to Richard Linklater's twelve-years-in-the-making film—we have many innovative examples of documentaries (so-called) that are made using digital video, and perhaps most strikingly, animation.[157] Consider among many cases of films that court the familiar practices and expectations of documentary (as genre and medium) but do so without recourse to indexical imagery: *Persepolis* (2007), *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), *The Congress* (2013), and another work by Richard Linklater, *Waking Life* (2001). Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* (2013) and Charlie Kaufman's *Anomalisa* (2015) stop-motion films prompt still other issues, since we recognize that empirical forms—clay, silicon, etc.—are being filmed (as profilmic entities), and yet the meanings of those materials only come to life by virtue of the impression of motion, and the effects of coupled sounds (voices, foley work, music). And finally, we should make a note of motion graphic-based documentaries, a prominent example—if in an unexpected place—can be found during the end-credit sequence of Adam McKay's *The Other Guys* (2010); or in more expected venues such as Charles Ferguson's *Inside Job* (2010), and Davis Guggenheim's graphics-inflected works, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) and *Waiting for "Superman"* (2010), but also in myriad YouTube works, and the PowerPoint-type presentations familiar to the ever-expanding TED-talk industry.

TOPICS IN DOCUMENTARY FILM III: METADOCUMENTARY AND ETHICS

Having made a glancing survey of some hallmark questions of documentary filmmaking, especially in their metaphysical and epistemological dimensions, a turn to some moral implications is in order. Let us begin, simply, by asking whether all documentary film is always already metafilmmaking. Where the fiction film camera encourages the viewer to see through the frame to characters and their contexts, the documentary camera seems to endlessly invite consideration of the conditions of its creative application: this camera was there, at this time; these people said these things; this event happened, and so on. As viewers, we are not meant to get lost in documentary film but, instead, to find something. The form, then, seems inextricably tethered to its awareness (or better, the creator's or the viewer's awareness) of what is being represented—*that* it is being represented. A finished film is to filmmaking as human consciousness is to the brain; if the analogy holds, then it seems ineluctably the case that film—as literature, as philosophy—becomes at once

a *record* of thoughts and the *conditions* for them. A film is thinking, even before we begin to think about it.

The "thinking" qualities of film—and documentary film, in particular—go by many names, and are illustrated by myriad techniques, among them: self-reflexivity, self-reference, recursion, duplication (e.g., doubles, replication, reproducibility). Because documentary film often draws attention to itself as a created thing (to its use of a camera, to the intervention of documentary agents, to intertitles and voice-overs, etc.), and thus to the very means of making a film, it is, in many cases, constitutionally self-reflexive. Even the name "documentary" can be read as a euphemism for a gesture: "We are going to use a camera to record things in front of the camera, and so we (as creators, as viewers) should be *aware* of the fact that a camera is filming these things." Since the act of recording (or "documentation") as such calls attention to the means and modes of inscription, it is arguable that all documentary is inherently metadocumentary.

Of course, antagonizing whatever special claim documentary might make to its powers of reflexivity, Hollywood has its own cycle of fiction films—back-lot-of-studio- and behind-the-camera-type—that make the *making* of films into the subject of dramatic narrative as well as comedy, including, among many representative examples of the durable subgenre: *A Star is Born* (1937, 1954, 1976), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *8 ½* (1963), *Stardust Memories* (1980), *Barton Fink* (1991), *The Player* (1992), *Ed Wood* (1994), *Get Shorty* (1995), *Boogie Nights* (1997), *L. A. Confidential* (1997), *State and Main* (2000), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Adaptation* (2002), *The Aviator* (2004), *Tropic Thunder* (2008), *Somewhere* (2010), *The Artist* (2011), *Argo* (2012), *The Bling Ring* (2013), *Birdman* (2014), and *Hail, Caesar!* (2016). Despite whatever tempting behind-the-scenes glimpse these films might suggest, they still aim to suture the viewer, and thus to disappear the apparatuses involved in the film's creation: we are meant to be entertained by the *characters'* contentious relationship to the medium, and making movies by means of it (not our own). Still, even documentaries get in on the action of dramatizing the making of movies, among impressive instances: *Burden of Dreams* (1982), *My Best Fiend* (1999), *American Movie* (1999), *Lost in La Mancha* (2002), and *The Five Obstructions* (2003).

Carl Plantinga has argued that "claims of epistemic benefits for reflexivity are exaggerated, in part because such claims depend on debatable assumptions about the documentary film (as pretending to 'transparency') and the documentary spectator (as passive and gullible), and also because reflexivity guarantees neither a complexity of representation (what [Bill] Nichols calls 'magnitudes') nor accurate and sincere self-revelation on the part of the filmmaker."[158] Plantinga's reasons for assessing this exaggeration are evident from his own research, but are also reflected in the contested field of issues at

play in what has been said thus far: in short, the metaphysics of film creates problems for our epistemic claims about what film (and documentary film in particular) can tell us about truth. However, it stands to reason whether the *ethical* "benefits for reflexivity are exaggerated."[159] Above, when I sketched Aufderheide's six subgenres of documentary film—namely, public affairs, government propaganda, advocacy, historical, ethnographic, and nature—the focus was terminological and categorical debates (e.g., as a reply to the question: What kind of film do we have before us?). Yet, if we reread those same six titles wondering about their ethical significance, the ground appears to shift beneath our feet, since in each case, whether or not such films (going by these names) were made in good faith makes a substantive difference to our capacity, as viewers, to hold them, much less herald them, as the kind of thing we think they are. If *An Inconvenient Truth*—which may lay claim to a piece of all six subgenres—turned out to be a hoax, what then? As Brian Winston astutely assesses the present situation, in which fake, hoax, and fabrication lie in wait: "Once the film-maker is liberated from implications of actuality and creativity, then ethical behaviour becomes even more crucial than it was previously."[160] This liberation has, arguably, not only been unleashed but has become the norm.

Part of the reason why we have an indication that the ethical benefits of reflexivity are *not* exaggerated lies precisely with our reaction to instances of mockumentary (understood as a knowing satire of the form, e.g., many films directed by Christopher Guest) and fake or pseudodocumentary (understood not strictly as satire, but also as a sober bid to trick based on viewer trust and audience expectations, e.g., Casey Affleck's *I'm Still Here*). Precisely because of the self-referential qualities of mockumentary and pseudodocumentary our habitual sense of the documentary's status becomes antagonized. Orson Welles' *F for Fake* (1975) is among the most enduring examples of this claim, in part, because it manages over the course of its running time to be a straight-forward documentary, a mockumentary, *and* a pseudodocumentary. Welles' characteristic brilliance is embodied by the remarkable achievement of having internalized the ethical stakes of documentary representation. In this way, he has given us a way to assess our relationship, as individuals and as a group, to the moral import of the *mise-en-abîme*. Unlike the clever reduplication of images and subtexts, and the wily film-within-a-film playfulness that we find in so many Hollywood films that lampoon—and capitalize on—our disorientation, Welles does not leave us to our own devices: he becomes our Virgil in the circles of the cinematic comedia.

Circling back to the earlier description of our stance toward documentary films being either "skeptical" or "objectivist" (the former a proxy for "postmodern" or deconstructive, the latter sometimes called "realist"), but now with ethics in mind, we can appreciate Plantinga's haunting admonition

"that the skeptical position on the documentary, in its rejection of standards of evidence, truth-telling, and rational discourse, would arguably leave us with no method to determine whether a documentary is biased or deceptive, or even to distinguish between degrees of relative bias and deception. Without the appeal to such standards, how would we differentiate between blatant propaganda and objectivity? If objectivity does not exist, do all documentaries become equally propagandistic?"[161] Plantinga, for his part, leaves these questions in the air, and by not replying to them directly, invites us to regard them as rhetorical, which is to say, they may not be questions after all but statements. To make our situation more palatable, we might rewrite the questions: first, if documentary is inherently rhetorical (in the sense of presented to argue for a point of a view), then we need not speak of "blatant" propaganda, since we seem just as susceptible to, as it were, the ways documentary films are, insofar as they attempt to influence viewers and "come with a perspective," propagandistic; second, in the absence—or at least in the bracketing—of objectivity, we need not rush to see all documentaries as "equally" propagandistic, and this inequality is borne out by everyday experiences with them as argumentative texts (some films are more effective at shaping personal and public opinion than others; and, as context changes, so may our readings of the meaning and significance of any given film).[162]

Metaphysical, epistemic, and ethical issues at stake in the making of documentary films are given a revitalized urgency when legal matters arise. It may be one thing to pull off a hoax as a challenge to our collective adoration of celebrity (e.g., in *I'm Still Here*), but what if the "ethical obligations of filmmakers to audience and to subjects" treads across legal barriers? Prominent in this regard is Joe Berlinger's three-part *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills* (1996), which, as the director describes the project shifted from "journalism" in the first installment to "advocacy" in the second and third installments.[163] As Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* was used to overturn a conviction, so Berlinger's trilogy proved crucial in exonerating three imprisoned men. The effect can go the other way, too, as when Amy Berg's *Deliver Us from Evil* (2006) "exposed and publicized the identity" of a known pedophile, Oliver O'Grady, and in that capacity, contributed to his reincarceration.[164] More recently, Emily Nussbaum generated reflection on the nature of documentary ethics when she explored Andrew Jarecki's production methods for *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst* (2015), asking, in effect: to what degree are documentary filmmakers *participating* in the events they aim to depict?[165] When speaking about the Jarecki film, *Paradise Lost* director, Berlinger, wonders about the two-year lapse between Jarecki learning about a potentially incriminating piece of evidence (a matched handwriting sample) and the airing of the series; in a bit of lucky promotion for the film, Durst was arrested the night before the finale aired on HBO.[166] Berlinger reflects on the

documentarian's twin demands: to offer a truthful presentation of facts *and* to serve the needs of narrative storytelling, the latter of which may involve manipulating chronology, withholding material, or otherwise shaping facts to serve dramatic purposes.[167] Finally, still another approach arrives from directors Laura Ricciardi and Moira Demos, who spent a decade developing *Making a Murderer* (2015), and present their work matter-of-factly as self-consciously avoiding advocacy: "We were there simply to document events as they were unfolding. We were not there to judge. We were there to listen and to witness."[168] Whether their studied, intentional neutrality is possible remains an open question for viewers.

Such a thicket of interrelated, ingrown issues is not novel, and yet, Berlinger's division of "truthful presentation of facts" from the "needs of narrative" returns us anew to the ways, in many documentary films, the two are at odds. Or, put another way, as in the case of Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*, a utilitarian calculus may prevail "that Moore's little deceptions are acceptable because his overall project leads to the greater good."[169] This violation of the Pauline principle may not rise to the level of reprobation, yet Moore's deceit, such as it is, necessarily activates our judgment about the *degree* to which such manipulations are (morally) acceptable, even if aesthetically and politically palatable, perhaps especially when a life may be on the line. A documentary film—even a raw bit of surveillance footage—may present us with a direct representation and yet for its vantage (or the nature and quality of the sound, color, resolution, or some other factor) lead us to false conclusions about what we see.[170] Why else would law courts, for example, enlist Conor McCourt, a retired Sergeant of the New York Police Department, as an expert of "video forensics" if it were not unsure about the nature of the media presented as evidence in court?[171] A piece of footage, like a claimant's remarks, is a kind of trace *and* a form of testimony, but just as we read for sincerity and authenticity in what people *say*, so we want to have a reliable sense of what films "say." Moreover, is that "saying" *proof* of anything? Whether Sgt. McCourt, while testifying in court, claims the shadowy, blurry, pixelated figure is you—or *not*—can make a life-altering difference, from one moment to the next, and therein implies how we also, even beyond the bounds of the legal system, need to be savvy, skilled readers of the documentary film image. The presumption that filmmakers "owe a 'duty of care' to those who appear in their films" extends to the duty of care we have as interpreters of those films.[172]

NOTES ON THE AIM AND CONTENT OF THIS VOLUME

There is, to be sure, a need to generate new scholarship on documentary film—on the full range and multiple registers of its works—yet, there is

also a need to reflect upon (and appreciate) accomplished contributions to the field. This volume is meant to address and, to the extent it can, fulfill this double vision: (1) returning anew to the insights of established and influential works of scholarship (some of them famous and canonical, and for good reason, while others are hard to access or unjustly neglected); (2) and turning to the revelations of new instances of criticism (some of it, while pushing forward with fresh challenges to the field is also rightly dependent on the scholarship of essential literature on nonfiction film, some of which is included here). Yet, even with this "double vision," there is a third axis to address, namely (3) the work of the theorist-filmmakers: those who live a double-life as makers of documentary films and critics of its forms and definitions. In sum, the collection presents (1) established, fundamental, formative works in the philosophy of documentary film; (2) new critical works (often involving new films, or reconsiderations of classic films, as well as novel encounters with the existing secondary literature); and (3) reports by theorist-filmmakers from the front lines of cinematic creation and innovation.

Ideally this anthology will be of immediate interest and use to theorists *and* practitioners of nonfiction film; to undergraduates getting their bearings in the field (whether figured generally as "film studies," more specifically as "documentary film studies," in the broad, inclusive terms of "media studies" and "screen studies"—or perhaps more accurately, but employed with less regularity, "sight and sound studies"); to emerging and established scholars contributing to the secondary literature; and to a general readership who may be intrigued by the kinds of questions and claims that seem native to nonfiction film, and who may wish to explore some critical responses to them written in engaging language, and populated by sometimes inscrutable, but always absorbing examples of the kind of films that are worthy of our attention.[173]

The spirit that founded the volume and guided its development is radically inter- and transdisciplinary. Dispatches have arrived from anthropology, communications, English, film studies (including theory, history, criticism), literary studies (including theory, history, criticism), media and screen studies, cognitive cultural studies, narratology, philosophy, poetics, politics, and political theory; and as a special aspect of the volume, theorist-filmmakers make their thoughts known as well. Consequently, the critical reflections gathered here are decidedly pluralistic and heterogeneous, *inviting*—not bracketing or partitioning—the dynamism and diversity of the arts, humanities, social sciences, and even natural sciences (insofar as we are biological beings who are trying to track our cognitive and perceptual understanding of a nonbiological thing—namely, film, whether celluloid-based or in digital form); these disciplines, so habitually cordoned off from one another, are brought together into a shared conversation about a common object and domain of investigation.

Individual contributors often speak from a discernable disciplinary training and set of preoccupations, yet, as those remarks are arranged and ordered for the present occasion, they are enhanced for their sequencing and juxtapositions—and sometimes contrast—with notes from adjacent, and even foreign, fields of research. As a result of this welcoming of diverse interests in film, and methodologies for speaking about it, a reader may identify different registers of relationship between philosophy and film; indeed, how we *connect* the one to the other—by means of words such as "in/as/of/and/through"—will implicitly announce conceptual affiliations and claims. Here is an instance of seeing philosophy *in* a documentary film; there, in another reading (perhaps even of the same film), we are shown that it is a case of the film functioning *as* philosophy, and so on. Of course, the book's very title—part of the series of which it belongs—ascribes one of these categories of relation; as such, with symphonic as well as cacophonous moments to follow, we are all, nevertheless, beneficiaries of these efforts to explore the philosophy *of* documentary film.

Part I offers an initial set of what have become classical, canonical readings in the philosophy of documentary film. Some of the usual (and essential) names, problems, and subjects are represented. These contributions provide access and orientation to the sorts of questions that typically get asked when thinking about the philosophy of documentary film. Along the way, one may glean some of the concepts and problems that are at stake (and that, in due course, will be referred to and responded to in parts II through V).

Part II aims to give some sense of the history of documentary film in its variety of expression (from early cinema to representative examples of such variety, including works by Grierson, Painlevé, Rouch, Herzog, and Grenier). The moral—and reminder—is simple: documentary film is not monolithic and homogeneous; it is not one thing. And like the genre it is often said to be, nonfiction film possesses both static and dynamic elements.[174] Whether those elements are philosophically defensible—and thus, whether some static elements are, in fact, dynamic, and thus debatable—sets up the inquiries that follow in parts III through V.

Part III is the result of welcoming theorist-filmmakers into conversation with film theorists. All of the writers in part III have made documentary films of their own and are active cinematic and visual media-based documentarists; all of them *also* work full time as professors on academic faculties. The idea here is to invite those who work on both sides of the theory/praxis divide (however permeable it may be, or not) to reflect on how their theories of film (including thoughts on the medium, capture and construction methodologies, and close

readings of specific films) is informed/affected by their practice; repeatedly, in what follows, this relationship reveals itself to be interactive and mutually edifying. The very nature of these inherited binaries and boundaries—such as theory/praxis—are tested, contested, and, it would seem, illuminatively limned.

Part IV is directed at unsettling—though not necessarily resolving what ensues from unsettling—some of the key ideas, claims, beliefs, and assumptions that are familiar to documentary film studies, and that may stand in need of some critique (from the treatment of sound to the nature of truth). The works here range from brief and bold manifesto to studied and erudite rethinking of the basic terms we use (or misuse).

Part V attempts to focalize attention on the depiction of individual people who are filmed, or whose lives (even posthumously) become the subject of documentary film. Here we find questions about the construction of self-identity through film; whether the self-as-composed-in-film bears resemblance, if at all, to historical subjectivities; the relationship between film narrative and personal narrative (the stories we tell ourselves and others); the way people create documentary records (again, of themselves and others)—and thus link to, or stand in tension with our notions of history (as depersonalized, as non-individuated, as objective); and how the nature of fabrication may conflict with—or, less intuitively, even constitute—what we regard as the truth of the documentary image.

If we return to the kinds of distinctions Plato made between philosophy and poetry, then for the purposes of this book, we have before us a philosophy *and* a poetry (*poiesis*) of documentary film. And both, in their own ways, reflect also on a *praxis* of documentary film. Philosophy is evident in the theoretical implications of the field's family of preoccupations (especially in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics); poetry—and its relation to mimesis—in realms of art, politics, history, psychology, rhetoric, and the unconscious conditions by which we are moved and persuaded by film. Finally, how documentary films get made often stands in some kind of relation to philosophy and poetry, if also often unarticulated or under-theorized; in this collection, we have a space for filmmakers to reflect on their praxis, to think and theorize interactively with the making of documentary films.

The book is meant to afford a prismatic perspective on documentary cinema, and thus does not presume to offer a consecutive or comprehensive account. The ambition is not coherence from essay to essay, but coherence within in each piece so that a survey of likenesses and differences across the range of content might be offered to the reader. The idea is, then, to get

a sense for the diversity of forms and ideas, and to see how manifold approaches nevertheless share traits. A reader is encouraged to watch the films under discussion and thereafter to see how the essays transform a reading of those films (and invite comparison with still others, made and yet to come); in this way, examples and experiments with those examples should enrich our shared endeavor to speak meaningfully about documentary film now and into the future.

As we turn to the fascinating and fecund offerings to come in this collection, there is reason to consider the line-up of terms in its subtitle—Image, Sound, Fiction, Truth. Are we to believe that these four hallmark traits of film are also hallmark traits of *documentary* film? Perhaps a reader will allow easy and quick assent to image and sound, but how so with (both?) fiction and truth? The cover image for this book, from *Medium Cool*, can serve as a synecdoche for a meditation on "image, sound, fiction, truth"—especially in the frame's full form, reproduced in the front matter—for it reminds us how a documentary film, in many instances, engages all four attributes. We see it. We hear it. We are aware of the distortions inherent in the translation through media that deny it objectivity and render it, to varying degrees, a work of fiction (at last a mimetic work, a simulacrum of the world, that demands interpretation). And yet, from that same aggregation of image and sound that we call a documentary film, we also glean insight and respond emotionally, and suspect we have, on many occasions, perceived something true. Despite its controversial, unsettled status, documentary film restlessly conjures the disclosure of truth by encoding events, experiences, and expressions that we recognize as corresponding to the world (or worlds) we inhabit, both privately and publically. Through these instances of representation, documentary film simultaneously complicates our habituated sense of reality and contributes to the coherence of what we think about as the habitable world.

NOTES

1. Bill Nichols, *Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 25. See also, Bill Nichols, *Speaking Truths with Film: Evidence, Ethics, Politics in Documentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

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Berg's 2006 documentary about him aired on Dutch television. Parishioners recognized O'Grady in the film and reported him to the local authorities. O'Grady, who had applied for Dutch citizenship, then fled back to Dublin, but left his laptop on the plane. Police found that it contained videos and stills of child pornography, and soon arrested him. He was sentenced to three more years in prison." Carolyn Kormann/David LaRocca personal correspondence (March 20, 2015).

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Part I

THE MEDIUM, MORALS, AND METAPHYSICS OF DOCUMENTARY FILM