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HOW REAL IS THE REALITY IN DOCUMENTARY FILM?

JILL GODMILOW, IN CONVERSATION WITH ANN-LOUISE SHAPIRO¹

ABSTRACT

Documentary film, in the words of Bill Nichols, is one of the “discourses of sobriety” that include science, economics, politics, and history—discourses that claim to describe the “real,” to tell the truth. Yet documentary film, in more obvious ways than does history, straddles the categories of fact and fiction, art and document, entertainment and knowledge. And the visual languages with which it operates have quite different effects than does the written text. In the following interview conducted during the winter of 1997, historian Ann-Louise Shapiro raises questions about genre—the relationship of form to content and meaning—with documentary filmmaker Jill Godmilow.

In order to explore the possibilities and constraints of non-fiction film as a medium for representing history, Godmilow was asked: What are the strategies and techniques by which documentary films make meaning? In representing historical events, how does a non-fiction filmmaker think about accuracy? authenticity? invention? What are the criteria you have in mind when you call a film like *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* “dishonest”? How does the tension between making art and making history affect documentary filmmaking? Should documentary filmmakers think of themselves, in the phrase of Ken Burns, as “tribal storytellers”? What kind of historical consciousness is produced by documentary film?

We have been speaking about documentary film. I want to start with a question about the word documentary. How comfortable are you using that label?

I do use it, for convenience, but I hate it. Why? Because everybody *thinks* they know what the term means, because everybody has seen some television programs labeled documentary—either televisual “white papers,” that is, so-called objective journalistic presentations of social problems, or history programs that chronicle certain social movements, or portraits of famous artists or historical figures and the like. Unconsciously embedded in these forms called

1. Jill Godmilow is a producer/director of documentary films that include: a 1984 non-fiction feature, *Far from Poland*, about the rise of the Polish Solidarity movement; *Waiting for the Moon* (1987), a feminist/modernist “fiction” about the lives of the literary couple Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein; *Roy Cohn/Jack Smith* (1995), a cinematic translation of a theater piece by performance artist Ron Vawter; and, most recently, *What Farocki Taught*, a replica and interrogation of a 1969 non-fiction film by German filmmaker Harun Farocki about the production of napalm during the Vietnam war. Godmilow has been teaching film production and critical studies in the Department of Communication and Theatre at the University of Notre Dame since 1992.

documentary is the conceit of “the real,” which substantiates the truth claims made by these films. These general notions about documentary film produce a fairly limited understanding of what non-fiction cinema can be and do. They certainly don’t encompass any of my recent work. I should say at the start that I am way out on the fringe of documentary filmmaking; you’re not talking to someone who is in a central or mainstream position.

I have actually spent a lot of time trying to figure out what to call the kind of work I do. I’ve been looking for a label to replace “documentary” that would include, besides the kind of films I produce, all the films that make some kind of claim to represent a real (not fictional) world, and that do not contain performances by professional actors (but by social actors)—that is, everything but scripted drama. So we’re talking about a category that could include propaganda films the CIA produces for export abroad, television’s *Hard Copy* and *CBS Reports*, Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*, Luis Bunuel’s *Land Without Bread*, Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s *Reassemblage*, Ken Burns’s eighteen-hour baseball series, Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, Fred Weisman’s *Hospital*, the films of the contemporary German filmmaker Harun Farocki, Su Friedrich’s feminist films, Raoul Ruiz’s early non-fiction work, George Franju’s *Blood of the Beasts*, Barbara Kopple’s feature-length, Academy Award-winning labor dramas, and the work of certain American avant-garde filmmakers, such as Bruce Connors—just for example. How can they all be in one class? I think they all exhibit a common defining trait: inherent in their stance toward their audiences is the claim not so much to educate, but to edify. So I like to call this huge class of films “films of edification,” or “edifiers.” At least this label avoids the classic truth claims of documentary and acknowledges the intention to persuade and to elevate—to raise up the audience to a more sophisticated or refined notion of what *is*. How else could Barbara Kopple’s *Made in America*, a totally narrativized documentary that dramatizes the closing of a Hormel meat-packing plant in Minnesota into a tearful epic tragedy, sit in the same category as Ken Burns’s *Civil War*, a nostalgic compilation film fashioned out of re-performed actual artifacts (period music, period photos, period letters home from the front) and on-camera expert speculations by American historians? When I teach documentary film, I actually insist that we use my new name—in fact I play a game with my students: when they slip and say “documentary” in class, they have to bring the beer to the next screening. It’s just a consciousness training game to keep us from making unconscious assumptions about the form.

Better than documentary is the label “non-fiction,” but it’s tainted too. It’s a term built on a concept of something *not* being something else, implying that because it’s not fiction, it’s true. When I made my film *Far from Poland* in 1984, I anticipated that I was going to have trouble getting it into documentary film festivals, and I did. *Far from Poland* is a feature-length “non-fiction” film about the Polish Solidarity Movement, shot entirely in the United States, containing a total of five minutes of “actuality” footage supplied by the Solidarity Press Agency. It combines re-enactments of certain texts, soap-opera-like interven-

tions, interviews, speculations, formal devices, and some clearly marked imaginary history. In the press release I called the film a “drama-tary” to indicate that it was not what’s considered a classic documentary, but not a fiction film either. I was trying to skirt the odious word “docudrama,” which it decidedly wasn’t, and to call up a certain awkward, two humped beast, for imagery.

Did it show in festivals in the category of “documentary film”?

It was rejected by some documentary festivals, like the one in Mannheim, Germany, because it wasn’t “pure” documentary, and from some Eastern European ones, because of its complex yet somewhat celebratory treatment of the Solidarity movement in Poland.

That’s interesting . . . it makes me think of Art Spiegelman’s Maus, the autobiographical/biographical story of an Auschwitz survivor told by his son in comic book form. It was initially listed in the New York Times Book Review under fiction. Spiegelman apparently called up and insisted on a non-fiction category. I think that when it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, they had to find a category that was neither fiction nor non-fiction—to invent a new category.

It would be interesting to know what they finally called it because so many of the best documentary films fall into the same ambiguity: they’re clearly non-fiction, yet ignore classic documentary “bottom-lines,” and thus refuse the “purist” orthodoxies that pedigree the film as truthful or historical. That’s one good reason to get rid of the term, but it is very hard to undo.

Shall we use it then, for convenience?

Why not?

As you were talking, I was thinking of Bill Nichols’s discussion of documentary film. He talks about “discourses of sobriety” in the same way that you are talking about edification films, and he links documentary to other discourses of sobriety, including science, economics, politics, and history. He talks about them as instrumental—not just edifying, but instrumental—that is, seeking to wield power in the world for particular ends. What do you think about that usage: to change the world, to exercise power?

Yes, I do agree with Nichols. I use his term “instrumental” when I teach. To change peoples’ minds or ways of seeing is always there at the basis of all non-fiction. But the notion of “exercising power” sounds a bit heavy for most documentaries, unless we can agree that we mean that these films exercise power by changing consciousness, by their deliberate attempt to alter their viewers’ relationship to a subject by recontextualizing it in the proffered time, space, and intellectual field of the film.

If we think of documentary films as above all instrumental, what specifically do you think they should do?

I want them to do two things: first, acknowledge their interpretive intentions (their instrumentality), that is, cease insisting on their innocence as pure de-

scription; and second, put their materials and techniques in the service of ideas—not in the service of sentiment or compassion-producing identification. Sad to say, the practices of most non-fiction filmmakers have continued unchanged since the 1970s. The essential claim that traditional documentary films make is that there's unmediated truth here because this was not scripted—because the materials are “found in nature”—thus, the text built out of them is truthful as well. That truth claim is still at the center of most documentary work. I hope it's not too presumptuous to say that I'm really interested in ideas and in the critique of culture. If a documentary filmmaker takes up historical materials, it shouldn't be to produce and/or claim to have produced a comprehensive description of the movement of events, but rather to engage the audience, somehow (and there are many, many ways), in a discussion about ideological constructions buried in representations of history—constructions as simple as the oppositions good/evil, desirable/undesirable, normal/abnormal, and the big one, us/them.

What's essential to me, also, is to produce an audience of individuals (not a “community”) who become active intellectual participants in a discussion of the social conditions and relationships represented. I want to produce an audience of individuals who can learn some conceptual tools with which to articulate a critique—a critique applicable to all kinds of social and historical situations, not just to the materials at hand. That involves breaking up the comfortable and classic contract arrangements that the documentary film usually proffers its audience. Structured into most traditional documentaries is an unspoken promise to audiences that they can have a particular feeling about themselves. The audience is invited to believe: “I learn from this film because I care about the issues and people involved and want to understand them better; therefore, I am a compassionate member of society, not part of the problem described, but part of the solution.” The documentary film knits us into a community of “we”—a special community by dint of our new knowledge and compassion.

The real contract, the more hidden one, enables the viewer to feel: “thank God that's not me.” Thank God that's not me, saddled with two Downs syndrome children and on welfare, or dying of AIDS, or downsized out of a job, and, in the historical film, thank God that's not me who had to send all three sons from our struggling Illinois family farm to fight to their death on the battlefield of Gettysburg. The disappointing thing is that these are still current models of documentary success: in the field of history, for example, the kinds of films produced by Ken Burns, the first American, household-name documentarian in this country maybe since Robert Flaherty. He's the house organ of the NEH, the filmmaker laureate of PBS, and I don't trust him for a minute. His work is frightening, but it has become the model of the high-minded documentary—as opposed to low-minded reality TV, which takes up “actuality” for its own, somewhat different purposes.

Why is he frightening?

Because he uses documentary as a kind of national therapy, producing a kind of mourning moment, a nostalgia for the past, in which one can find no useful questions or analyses that we could employ in today's realities. And there's no active audience produced—just a sort of dreamy, passive audience that gains a sweet, sad knowingness about the Civil War, but not a knowledge that provides insight into the economic, social, and racial structures that produced so many dead bodies, such waste of property, and such difficult political problems for the future.

Your criticism, then, is not about the accuracy of Burns's representation of the Civil War, but rather, you seem to be arguing that he has produced a closed story, one that is finished when the viewer has finished seeing the film—that the film provides a kind of closure that's inappropriate to the topic.

Absolutely. That has been a big problem with documentary. Burns didn't invent that problem. From the beginning (if it wasn't straight newsreel, with a clearly stated information function), the documentary film has been perceived as a kind of poor step-sister to the fiction cinema of entertainment—rated as somehow inadequate, as a lesser form (maybe a feminine form) to the bigger brother of drama. To survive, to take public space and attention, it has had to borrow all kinds of structural and strategic devices from fiction in order to achieve what I would call “satisfying form,” that is, to send the audience out of the theater (and/or off to bed) feeling complete, whole, and untroubled. One of those borrowed devices is narrative—which entails sentiment and closure. General audiences seek and expect closure, even from documentary films.

And for the filmmaker, it's a difficult thing to deny an audience. Even expository films, structured as arguments (not as stories) and based on documentary evidence, typically conclude in a pretty emotional way. Often they point us toward an imaginary future where the problems are likely to be resolved. I'm thinking, for example, of the 1968 CBS Report called *Hunger in America*. At the start of the film, the on-camera anchorman, a young Charles Kuralt, insists emphatically that hunger in America is one thing, but starving babies are too much (presumably un-American). After fifty minutes of footage of limp, lethargic, undersize babies from four poor communities (Navajos on a reservation, Latinos in San Antonio, black sharecroppers in Alabama, and poor whites from Maryland), babies with their skin literally hanging off their bones (and one even dying on camera), and many demonstrations of local health care workers and hospitals doing their level best, but failing, to keep the babies alive, we learn that the problem is that “we” are feeding these people only from surplus food supplies—that is with starches and lard, but with no proteins, fresh fruits, or vegetables. The hopeful epilogue of the program suggests that once we correct this problem, there will no be more starving babies in America. Now that we know what we know, and have wept together for these tiny creatures and their humble, docile parents, we feel that somehow the situation is in the process of being corrected. What actually produces the starvation of babies

in the richest country in the world—that is, underemployment, unfair labor practices, historical land-holding arrangements, lack of education, racial problems—never come under discussion.

*You are suggesting that it is important to make the audience uncomfortable, unsettled. This perspective sounds quite different from that expressed by Burns who has criticized historians for “having abandoned their role as tribal storytellers who craft tales about the past in which the nation can find its identity.”*²

Well, I think that classic feature films—certainly those with historical subjects—more than adequately fulfill the task of tribal storytelling. However, it does make sense to me that historians would prefer documentarians to do that job, because feature films (like Spielberg’s, for example) so unabashedly use the assertion of a real historical subject to satisfy box office demands, and those box-office demands often generate films that are either ahistorical, unexamined, and ideological, or heroic/tragic dramas, like *Schindler’s List*. However, Ken Burns’s plea to use actual artifacts, texts, and recordings from history to support the production of national mythologies is anathema to me. It seems to me that if you’re addressed, and if you agree to be addressed, as a member of a tribe, then any action of your tribe, taken in the interests of tribal survival, can be rationalized—as Hitler knew. Or, as in the Old Testament, which addresses its readers as Jews (members of a very special tribe—God’s chosen), the reader is asked to celebrate the destruction of another indigenous tribe, the Canaanites. I guess you have drawn me out far enough to say that I have no use for any history written without a critical stance and a political purpose or for one that addresses a national community. For me, Hans Jurgen Syberberg’s expressionist film, *Hitler, A Film from Germany*, is a much better use of history, especially for Germans, than any straight historical documentary on the rise of Nazism, partly because it makes no claim to represent history in the classic sense of “sticking to the facts.” It’s a nine-and-a-half hour film and very difficult to characterize, but we could say that it attempts to raise to consciousness the psychic investment the German people made in the figure of Hitler, and to point to its remnants in contemporary German culture, using a combination of Brechtian theatrical strategies, artifactual film from the Nazi period, gender inversions and the like. Susan Sontag says that “he invokes a kind of Hitler substance that outlives Hitler, a phantom presence in modern culture. . . .”

So, how do you characterize what you consider to be valuable documentary films?

The documentary films that I most respect don’t come to closure and don’t produce audiences of compassionate spectators of the dilemmas of others. They don’t produce identification with heroics or sympathy for victims, both of which are dominant strains in the American documentary tradition. The welfare

2. Thomas Cripps, “Historical Truth: An Interview with Ken Burns,” *American Historical Review* 100 (1995), 741ff.

mother, the native American, and the family with the Downs syndrome child—these are the typical subjects of films that produce caring audiences, audiences who feel they're somehow part of the solution, because they've watched and cared. The filmmakers I admire, who might approach those same subjects, would be doing so in order to deconstruct the subject, to take apart that exact relationship with the audience. They would have a much more complex set of intentions and would resist closure.

Most of the filmmakers I'm thinking of here, including myself, owe a huge debt to Bunuel's 1932 film, *Land Without Bread*. Bunuel was an anarchist and so it makes sense to me that he's the guy who wrenched open all the important questions about the conceits of the documentary form and its contract with the audience.

Can you say more specifically how he broke the contract, so to speak?

Land Without Bread takes up one of the most abject peoples in the world, the Hurdanos, who live on land that is literally uncultivable in a mountainous region of central Spain near Salamanca (where, Bunuel cynically notes, one of the oldest universities in the world is located). Bunuel's film treats these people and their condition in brutally ironic terms—using references to cultural anthropology and to travel films to point out their “folkloric displays,” which validates our prurient interest in “bizarre peoples” and their curious customs. There is no escape from the ethnocentricity of the viewing position. The audience has to struggle with their pornographic desires for the real (in this case, real debasement) and their discomfort with the documentary form that delivers it to them—which Bunuel insists they be cognizant of.

Your description of the persistence of comforting, tightly organized stories—the failure of Bunuel's more self-reflexive model to become dominant—seems somewhat ironic to me, because in fact the possibilities for the disruption of linearity, or the rejection of coherence, seem much greater in film than in writing. In discussing the effects of post-structuralism, Nancy Partner has recently observed that “for all the sophistication of the theory-saturated part of the profession, scholars in all the relevant disciplines that contribute to or depend on historical information carry on in all essential ways as though nothing had changed since Ranke, or Gibbon for that matter. . . .”³ It seems as if in writing history, it's very hard not to produce a single, linear narrative that comes to closure. In film one would think that the medium allows for a kind of flexibility and the tools for disruption that should make possible a very different kind of story. And yet you're saying that there is a pronounced disinclination to depart from the traditional form.

Yes, other than to add a certain kind of (once new, but already worn out) glitzy “look,” now that special digital effects are both acceptable in documen-

3. Nancy F. Partner, “Historicity in an Age of Reality-Fictions,” in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (Chicago, 1995), 22.

tary forms and are cheap and thus available to everyone. Documentary filmmakers are the most un-self-conscious artists in the world—maybe because they see themselves as heroic truth-tellers with a mission to make a powerful “humanizing” statement in any way that works. Most don’t examine their techniques in theoretical or methodological terms. Certainly, the commercial producers of documentaries (the networks and cable companies) have absolutely no interest in such considerations. For independent filmmakers, production is long, arduous, and usually underfunded. Simply finishing the work and getting it to the public is unbelievably difficult. The “sexier” the film, the more likely one is to find distribution opportunities, which are few and far between.

Today, you can’t get a feature documentary about the cartoonist, R. Crumb, distributed if it simply examines Crumb’s art. You have to psychologize the artist and visit with the bizarrely distorted members of his family “to understand” what his art is all about . . . that’s what makes *Crumb* sexy, and a minor box-office hit. In moments like the present when everybody is quite fearful of social disorder, it is sensational stories about deranged parents who keep their children tied to a chair in a basement for seven years that are consumable. Or films where the filmmaker performs a heroic task simply by making the film—in the case of *The Thin Blue Line* for example, a film that claims to have saved an innocent man from the electric chair through the filmmaking process itself. Or films like *Hoop Dreams*, an odyssey of working-class black kids and their dreams of escape from poverty. What most of these films provide is an opportunity for the audience to sit there and say “isn’t that awful,” or “isn’t it tragic what happened to the dust bowl farmers, or to the Russian kulaks,” or “aren’t those Chinese kids in Tiananmen Square courageous,” or, in the case of *Hoop Dreams*, “I’m really hoping that Jamal will somehow get at least a B⁻ in history so he can go to a big basketball college and make a lot of money.” On the surface there is the conscious “Isn’t it awful that the Polish workers are suffering so,” and underneath, the repressed “thank God I’m not the wife of a Polish coal miner, standing in line two hours for a pound of sugar.” What I’m saying is that the traditional documentary enables viewers to have the coherence, manageability, and often the moral order of their lives reaffirmed, while simultaneously allowing them to feel that they’re interested in other classes, other peoples’ tragedies, other countries’ crises. By producing their subjects as heroic and allowing us to be glad for their victories, or by producing them as tragic and allowing us to weep, the audience experiences itself as not implicated, exempt from the responsibility either to act or even to consider the structures of their own situation.

What enabled you to produce the innovations that emerge in Far from Poland—innovations that critics have described as “an expansion of the vocabulary of filmmaking,” “film criticism and social criticism at the same time”?

When I started that film, I had no intention of “expanding vocabulary” or any such thing. I had to learn how to make that film by making it and trying to

solve the paradoxical documentary issues it presented. Today I would say I was lucky: I was in the right country in the right historical moment, and at the right moment of my own development as an artist, with the right friends around me.⁴ I happened to be in Poland making a film about Jerzy Grotowski, the innovative Polish theater director, when the strike started in the Gdansk shipyard. As a child of the sixties, raised and educated entirely within the sinister symmetry of the Cold War, I felt that I was present at the most amazing historical moment. I was, perhaps, about to witness, in person, the defeat (for the best of reasons and in the best possible way) of moribund state socialism in Eastern Europe, just when, in the West, a socialist, François Mitterand, had been elected President of France. I remember thinking: here is the end of the Cold War, the end of thousands of missiles armed with nuclear warheads set to spring on every large city in the First and Second World. I wanted to make a film about the Solidarity Movement in Poland but had in my repertoire only the conventional documentary techniques and forms to represent it. I did have some ideas about what I wouldn't do: I wouldn't hang around Warsaw waiting for an opportunity to interview Lech Walesa. I wanted to see the extraordinary Solidarity union organizers in operation, to listen to an educated working class—one whose entire experience had been in a totally censored society where the language of social justice had been much abused—speak openly about what it wanted, for the first time. That was it: to record the process wherein the old socialist language would have to be reinvented; where people would have to learn to organize themselves into horizontal structures and make decisions by democratic processes; where people would have a chance to remake the social order after their experience of state socialism. I got back to the US and quickly raised some funding, intending to return immediately to Poland and start shooting. Then the blow came; I couldn't get back into Poland. At that moment, there were hundreds of foreign journalists in Warsaw and the Polish Government was freaking out. They had decided to refuse any more visas to professional journalists, especially those with cameras.

This produced for me a kind of psychological/artistic trauma. I had the money (normally not easy to find, but for once I had found it easily), tremendous desire, ideas, contacts, and yet I couldn't make a film. I could not speak about Poland at all in the film genre I knew and practiced because I could not shoot footage in Poland. I remember thinking: there's something wrong here. Why should I accept this tradition that said I couldn't speak about events without either archival or actuality footage? A close and generous friend suffered through a long, difficult night with me before he finally convinced me not to accept these terms. He urged me to start collecting materials about Solidarity,

4. I had three wonderful and important collaborators on the film: Mark Magill who helped me with a lot of the writing; Andrzej Tymowski, who did all the gathering and translating of Polish texts and helped on the production; and Susan Delson, who was my assistant director and editor throughout the three-year project.

of any sort, in any medium, and then to wait and see what could be made of these and what would happen.

That's actually how I began to address the limits of the genre, and to understand what the presence of that validating, authenticating footage was all about. I began to understand that the claim to, and reliance on, "the real" strangled ideas, originality, and truth in documentary filmmaking. If you couldn't get your own interview with Lech, he couldn't be a figure in your film, and you couldn't make a film about Solidarity without him, or something equally authentic. If you didn't have the money, or the access, or the historical good luck to be there when it happened, you couldn't speak about it in film, right? I began to see the classic documentary as a very limited kind of text. This very big realization was the great gift to me from the Polish Government. They forced me into an open text. Once I had accepted a new form, the idea of including the problems of making a film, and the various dilemmas—including both moral ones and the contradictions involved in representing events, people, ideas, and language—were all there for my use. And, once this open kind of film text started to develop, there was no way I would "close" it. I wanted a film that was incomplete, multivalent, heteroglossic . . . and all those great concepts that academics have given filmmakers in order to understand and talk about our work.

. . . and the ethical dilemmas and the political dilemmas are all on the surface of the film?

I hope so. . . . For example, my worries—"who am I to speak about Poland? . . . just Jill—not a political scientist, not a historian, not a Pole"; or, "am I exploiting the Poles for my own career?"; or, "if you care about the Polish workers, why not spend the film funds on food and send that to Poland?"—could all go into the text of the film in one way or another. I could include the questions about whether my film text could be exploited by one side or the other, about whether I was endangering people by asking them to speak in my film, as well as the personal and professional frustrations when "my movement" (read this the way anthropologists talk about "their people") failed.

But most importantly, I did not want to fall into the trap of telling, as the *New York Times* did day after day, a simple anti-Soviet story about the Polish workers, when I was getting other kinds of fascinating information through my own sources about what was actually going on in Poland. The speaking and writing was, I thought, the central thing—what people were saying out loud, and in print, for the first time. But once I had collected these texts, how could they become cinema? That's the beginning of my decision to do reenactments. There are three big ones in the film: an interview with Anna Walentynowicz, the crane operator whose firing started the strikes in the Gdansk shipyards; an interview with a government censor, K-62, published in Solidarity's own weekly newspaper; and a conversation with a miner based on transcripts from a meeting of miners who had to decide whether and on what terms to go back

to work, voluntarily, on Saturdays (Solidarity had just won the battle for a 5-day work week) because winter was coming and there was no coal in Poland.

I think the reenactments are fascinating. Not only are they riveting moments in the film, but they raise provocative questions about the ways we think about authenticity. The performance of an interview (a real interview that actually appeared in print) by an actress playing the worker, Anna Walentynowicz, goes on for perhaps twenty minutes in the film, while the real Anna, a somewhat less magnetic personality, shows up only briefly, somewhat later. What are you doing here with the problem of authenticity? How did you think about reenactment as a strategy in the film? It seemed both a means to make texts visible, and more than that.

Finally, it was the best way—maybe the only way—for me to make this movie, especially because I was most interested in the Polish worker’s consciousness as expressed in verbal and printed texts. And films, after all, need to offer presence—active time and space wherein events can occur and be observed. So the re-enactments were for me (and, I propose, could work in the same ways for other filmmakers) a perfect method to do three things at once: present the text itself, as text; embody it in speaking, historical, “social actors” and thus locate the moment of speaking in place and time; and raise the question of “authenticity” by announcing the performance as just that—an interpretation, performed by various actors. With this kind of announcement, and other extra-textual footnoting, I could also make the audience conscious of its own desires toward the material—the desire for belonging (for being “inside” the Polish community), for heroism, for solutions.

The tale Anna tells in her interview is primarily a heroic workers’ strike story, inside of which are major clues to the nature and development of socialism in Eastern Europe. But because of the tendency toward sentimentalism generated by a story like Anna’s, I wanted to further complicate the tale: I had heard that she was a pain in the neck during the martial-law period. She had been arrested and jailed along with other women in the movement. In prison, she decided to protest martial law by starting a personal hunger strike. Though the other women prisoners thought the hunger strike was pointless (as no publicity could be commanded for this action), the entire population of the prison eventually agreed to join her (and keep her from starving herself to death) by rotating the strike throughout the prison. When I heard that story I put it in the film, in order to expose the contradictions of the historical self-styled heroine, and again, to make us aware of our desire to discover Anna-types who will always do the right thing for us and save our asses in various historical situations. Similarly, in the original interview, Anna talks about her praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary to help her find a job. I, for one, am no fan of the institution of the Catholic Church in its role in Polish history. I would have preferred a pure worker, a socialist revolutionary. But of course I left those lines in the film, because to understand what Solidarity was about, you have to understand the

absolutely integral role the Catholic Church played in its formation. The details that make history more contradictory and the film experience less seamless are actually what make the whole telling more provocative and useful.

Somewhere in the body of the Anna performance, I did include about thirty seconds of footage of the real Anna Walentynowicz—a shot I borrowed from *Solidarnosc*, the first film to come out of Poland about Solidarity's negotiations with the government over the 21 Accords. Why? I did it primarily as a kind of reality check, that is to remind the audience of the interpretive nature of the performance they'd been watching, but also as a moment of insistence on the actuality of the events. Here you can see that the real Anna has a thin, annoying voice and a ferocious authoritarian style. My actress, Ruth Maleczek, used a low voice and a seductive speaking style. The difference between the two Annas served the film well, I think. If I'd been able to go to Poland and interview the real Anna on film myself, I think my dependence on the actual would have eliminated (by making unimaginable) some of the most productive moments of *Far from Poland*. The real Anna wouldn't have been able to tell us, I think, what a pain in the ass she was in prison. But I could tell that in my open form, and put it up against her extraordinary courage.

We are not just talking about authenticity, then, but about the uses of invention and its implications in the telling of a "true story." It makes me think of Pat Barker's recent highly regarded trilogy of World War I novels in which she mixes real and invented characters, using Sigfried Sassoon and the psychiatrist treating him for war neurosis, William Rivers, along with others who are pure invention; it is only in a brief afterword that Barker documents this difference and writes about her sources, leaving the uninitiated reader to negotiate the boundary between history and fiction, between the invented and the real.

Similarly, the photographer Jeff Wall was the subject of a recent article that raised the question of the "reality" of his staged photographs—photographs that draw attention to their staging.⁵ The argument that the reviewer is making in the end is that, by arranging his subjects, Wall is able to produce something that is truer than the spontaneous photograph, than actuality, than real life in the way we see it. He argues that in producing photographs, one can go beyond the boundaries of what we can see and know; the staged photographs are not "authentic," but they don't lie because they are telling something that's truer than reality. Because they skitter along the thin edge between real life and theater, they are able to uncover the secret story—the mythic constructions and uncertainties that constitute our lives. So, this critic is attributing to Wall's photographs a kind of metaphysical truth. You are playing with that same boundary, that thin edge between real life and theater, with your film. How do you decide about the limits of invention in trying to tell a "true" story? Do you operate more in the realm of Pat Barker and Jeff Wall—intentionally blurring the distinctions between what

5. Vicki Goldberg, "Photos that Lie—and Tell the Truth," *New York Times* (March 16, 1997), section 2, p. 1.

is invented and what is real—in the search for an invisible or deeper truth—or more in the world of historians whose protocols of practice reject conscious invention?

Well, without having seen those photos or read Pat Barker's books, my guess is that what useful meanings emerge from these techniques are produced by the opposition, or juxtaposition, of two representational systems: in Barker's novels, placing known historical figures in the same represented time and space as fictional ones; in Wall's photographs, presenting to the camera (a recording apparatus understood as a sober, scientific, signifying system for capturing actuality) patently posed but actuality-referenced materials, so that the camera simultaneously insists on and refuses the verifiability of its truth claims. I believe that *Far from Poland* was doing something similar to what both these artists have accomplished, not by "blurring the distinctions between what is invented and what is real," but by insisting on the difference and exploiting it.

But first, shouldn't we talk about what we mean by truth? Is telling the truth to tell everything? Is it simply not to lie? Or to not get something wrong? Or is it to find a form that (forgive the old-fashioned word) illuminates the material, making possible a clearer or entirely new understanding, by use of analysis, or paradigmatic shape, or through a self-reflexive presentation? Typically, documentary films are totally unscrutinized in the public sphere unless they make some kind of informational error, get a date wrong, or some such thing. In my experience, there are few critics in this country who can do better than describe the content and give their opinion as to whether the film held their interest or not. Because of the naturalized building blocks of documentary film, and the truth claims those building blocks make, their meaning-making systems are almost never questioned. But context and arrangement is all: putting Sigfried Sassoon in the same context as fictional characters and events certainly allows speculations about Sassoon himself and his place in history, but also about history writing in general.

What do you mean, specifically, about history writing in general?

Even in the first scrap of motion picture film ever shot—Lumière's *Workers Leaving the Factory*, a forty-five-second "documentary" shot of about 100 workers leaving his family plant in 1895—you can see clearly that Lumière had his workers collect just inside the factory gates and wait there until he got his camera rolling. It's also pretty clear that he had instructed the workers not to acknowledge the camera, to just keep walking past it as if it wasn't there. But when we see that "historical" shot today (and I'm sure when people looked at the shot in 1895), we read "actuality." We don't see the mediation. The German filmmaker Harun Farocki writes about that shot: "Even in the very first film, the foundations are laid for the main stylistics of film: it does not create signs, it seems to find them in reality . . . as if the world spoke for itself." Well, straightforward, unadulterated, historical storytelling seems to say the same thing about itself—that it produces "actuality," that "it gets the world to (seemingly)

speak for itself,” just as the documentary camera does. So, the historical figure, Sassoon, can accurately represent (can be a sign for, or stand in for) a certain artistic/political consciousness during World War I in England. By adding in the “imaginary” relationship between Sassoon and his psychiatrist and other characters, I think Barker contradicts that one-to-one equation—proposing something different, something critical, about history’s ability to represent the “actual.” Her fictionalized text would be speaking this contradiction structurally, whether or not she is insisting on it in her book or in interviews.

The same kind of thing happens in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*. He represents Jews in Nazi Germany as mice, Germans as cats, the camp kapos as dogs. Certainly he is saying something about character and power among the three groups by making those particular choices, but he is also talking about the inadequacies of traditional historical representation—perhaps its inability to represent the actual obscenities of the Holocaust by using realism as a code. He also both reports and problematizes the memories of his father’s concentration camp experience, creating another kind of critical statement about historical sources. So I think *Maus* gives me a more “real” access to the experience of the Holocaust than a hundred *Schindler’s Lists* could, for all of that film’s accurately reproduced, black and white “veracity.” Out of all that veracity, Spielberg produces only a “pornography of the real.” We’re offered a kind of pleasure in identification with the hugely attractive and masterful Schindler persona, and a pornographic interest in his Jewish “children.” Spiegelman refuses that pornographic opportunity, and in doing so, makes “the real” much more “actual” for me. It’s hard to say how, but as a reader, I can “try on” his relationship with his father partly because it’s plausible, familiar, and sometimes mundane, and partly because he and his father are both represented as Polish/Jewish mice—therefore not “those poor people, somewhere else, back then,” but here, now.

Although historians have been influenced by critical theories that emphasize the indeterminacy of a text, it is still the case that most historical writing remains largely unchanged. Professional standards seem to set limits on acceptable levels of experimentation with form or with the relation between form and content. There are some exceptions, of course. . . . I’m thinking of a recent history of the Chinese Boxer Rebellion by Paul Cohen in which he writes three parallel histories: the event as recounted by historians, as experienced in the moment, as part of shifting political/cultural mythologies.⁶ This departure from a single, fairly linear narrative is relatively rare, however, and marks a clear difference between the kind of story that historians tell and the stories that are possible in film. In what ways do the techniques available to you as a filmmaker enable or enhance your ability to represent history, to tell an accurate story?

6. Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York, 1997).

If I may, let me first quibble a bit with the notion that I try to tell “accurate stories” in my films. In fact, I now avoid that claim at all costs, and use different strategies in each film to do so. Take for instance *Waiting for the Moon*, a 35mm feature I made about the historical figures Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas and their life together in Paris. The action of the film is entirely fictional, and announced as such by the presence of Gertrude and Alice’s baby in the first scene. Though the action of the film is structured narratively, it is interrupted periodically by short sequences from a secondary narrative which, in terms of time, takes place after, and as a result of, the primary action. Narrativity itself is a subject of the film, on many different levels, as it was in much of Stein’s writing. The film does make truth claims about the quality and spirit of Alice and Gertrude’s life together, not on the basis of inclusiveness or accuracy of detail, but on insight arrived at by certain dislocations and improvisations.

But let’s go back to your question about techniques. If you can see film as a transport medium, as well as an original creative medium, I think you can begin to get at least one answer to that question. Of great use in this regard is film’s capacity to transport texts from other sources (from other times and places and other contexts and uses) and introduce them as objects which can re-perform themselves inside the stream of time that the “mother film” (let’s say) has set in motion. As a somewhat crude example, when you put old black-and-white stock footage into a color film, it is recognizable as stock footage—if only because it’s scratched, or perhaps shot with a wind-up camera that can only shoot five-second takes. So foreign texts can offer information, but also—because they won’t sit invisibly in the mother film’s text even as they continue the mother text’s progressive motion in time—they can be exploited, experientially, in many other ways. That’s very hard to do with writing on a page. Although you have italics and footnotes, these are somewhat clumsy tools with which to characterize text. It’s hard to see foreign texts perform themselves (as different) in the body of another text. You can indent, or quote, or italicize and thus indicate irony or introduce a specific source, and I guess probably some historians somewhere have even played with the position of text on the page, as some poetry does . . . but still it won’t perform that particular function as well as film can. Filmmakers also can imply attitude and critical stance in choosing where to put the cameras and who they cast. We have so many ways to intervene in the text simply because it’s being re-performed. And I would say those are the advantages (rarely exploited) that make film a good medium for speaking in a complicated and analytic way about history.

Where film seems more limited than written history is its inability to deal with a lot of complicated ideas at once. Because it happens “in time” (that is, pace and rhythm are part of the film’s meaning-making system), there’s no *time* for stopping and reading/watching something again. And, there are no footnotes, so specific sourcing, additional information, other peoples’ ideas on the subject, and contradictory readings are usually unaccounted for—simply left out. (Although, in *Far from Poland*, because it’s structured more like a

book or essay, I did add two verbal footnotes in the beginning of the Anna sequence—footnotes I made time for by having the performer simply stop and wait, while an off-camera voice filled in some background details.)

Once you give up narrative and the claim to unmediated reality in film, there's tremendous freedom, simply because there's a whole set of expectations about what a documentary, about Solidarity for instance, is supposed to look and feel like. So there's something to resist, and to refuse, and to refer to. In that moment in *Far from Poland* where I show four "actuality" shots of Lech Walesa up on top of a tank just after the settlement of the strike, you can actually feel your own desire for the real in that particular moment—a yearning to be with, and one of, the Polish working people, thus to celebrate "our" victory. I cut those shots into my film so I could make conscious the yearning for the documentary moment of victory. And all that "feeling" (because of the angle of the shots, their duration, and so on) is already there in the recording of that original piece of material.

Even as you refuse the heroic story, you can have it in some way.

And exploit it on more than one level.

Right.

The German filmmaker, Harun Farocki, is a master of these techniques. He made a film called *Videogramme of a Revolution* about the first three days of the Romanian revolution—the downfall of Ceausescu and the struggle for power in the void that followed. He did it using only pre-existing footage that he collected from four sources: footage made by the party hacks of Romanian television who were doing the official broadcast of Ceausescu's speech when he got distracted by a disturbance in the crowd and stopped talking for a moment, just enough time to crack his own code of authority; amateur camcorder footage of that speech and the disturbance that followed (including Ceausescu's flight off the roof of a building in a helicopter); "news" footage made by the same party hacks in the "democratic" days that followed, as they broadcast themselves on TV, jockeying for position in forming the new and "open" government of Romania; and camcorder footage made by the revolutionaries themselves as they set out to round up and arrest Ceausescu family members and other corrupt government and state officials (generals, police chiefs, and thugs). It seems that everyone in Romania was trying to record and broadcast everything they themselves did so that later there would be evidence, or proof, of where they stood and what side they were on—on the side of democracy and freedom, of course. Farocki's genius was to arrange these materials in a way that tells, beat by beat, the events of those three days, but also in a way that forces the recordings to comment on themselves and their original intentions. He has made a film that shows exactly how (and I don't mean this metaphorically) "history"—political choices, events, personalities—is now fashioned, designed, and enacted to play well on TV and to produce a useful political record.

Yes, Farocki's film seems to capture at once the conscious and the unconscious feelings of the revolutionaries in a way that would be difficult to convey in a book. Those new revolutionaries are shown reinventing themselves in the moment—that is, they are both terribly self-conscious about their strategies and goals, and absolutely unconscious of the ironies in their words and actions that are so available in the film. To what extent, then, does the particular truth of documentary depend on the visual aspect of the medium—the aspect that is most notably unavailable to the historian?

It's hard to talk about just "the visual" in film because, as I understand it, the visual is just one element or contributory part of a signifying system called cinema. My own practice doesn't start with visual ideas, but with notions of producing a certain kind of experience in a motion picture medium. This is how I see the visual: people arrive at the theater ready to see/hear and experience something that happens in projected (really virtual) time and space. The visual is responsible for doing about half of that job—of producing the diegetic plane of the action. But for me, the visual always serves a second master: it is always in the service of the ideas. OK then, how to think about how the visual can do both those two jobs at once? Out of this dual role, decisions are made about, for instance, how seductive that visual world should be, or about whether the diegetic plane should be an illusionary system or not. How omniscient is the audience? Does it get tangled up emotionally with characters (as the classic American shot-counter-shot system affords), or does the audience sit in a separate space and observe the actions and speech of those others who act? There's a wonderful French word, "*découpage*," that's used to talk about how the time and space of a scene is constructed and where the audience is in all this. From "*couper*," to cut, the word is used to describe how the time and space experience is cut up and then sutured together into a specific (continuous or perhaps non-continuous) experience. Is it a single, continuous take? Or are the time and space (and relationships among actors) constructed using a variety of closer and longer shots, cut together with a certain rhythm? Where is the audience positioned? Is the viewer to be thrown into the dilemma of being emotionally on both sides of trouble, or not? How and when is key information to be delivered? Is it to be "noticed" by the audience before it's acknowledged by the film, or the reverse? For me everything comes from those kinds of choices and not from a visual system that exists outside of those choices.

We seem to be opening a question about the relation between making art and making history. Do you feel that your work occurs in the midst of tensions between making art, making an argument, making history? How do you negotiate these different aspects of your project? Do you feel torn between artistic/aesthetic choices and the requirements of historical accuracy?

I'd say it's always important for me to be making art, but what does that mean? The philosopher Susanne Langer defines art as "the education of the senses." As a rather poor practitioner but enthusiastic student of the Buddhist

way, I consider the mind the sixth sense—parallel and equal to our other organs for smell, sounds, touch, etc. So to educate that sixth sense, the mind, you would take on the job of refining it—in the same way you would educate taste buds by serving up excellent dishes, in just the right order, made out of the best produce, presented attractively and in good proportion. In film, besides asking people to give you seven, five, or even three dollars for admission, you're asking them for the energy it takes to arrive at the cinema; you're asking them to sit in the dark for two hours while you show them something; and you're asking for their full attention (mind). Money, energy, attention, and time—all of these are in short supply in human life. If you ask for all that, I think you're obliged to make that time intense, productive, and pleasurable, in a very responsible way. So good filmmaking (responsible filmmaking) should always be good art, good education of the mind. It's got to have those same "eloquences" that all art depends on: an awareness of time, organicity, good composition, a reduction of means. Part of the job is to do it with as little as possible, so there aren't bogus or extraneous things in there for the wrong reasons, mucking it up—so that what's there feels as if it has to be there, and only that. All of these "eloquences" give your work an authority that you need when you're engaging someone through film. And it seems to me that historical accuracy, with all the paradoxes that the phrase contains, is an obligatory eloquence for both film and history.

Do you remember the repeated discussions in Ray Muller's documentary about Leni Riefenstahl (The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl) as to whether she could claim that she was merely making art, an art that had little to do with politics? What do you make of that?

Now there's a complex figure in the history of documentary filmmaking. I read her *Memoir* during a long stay in a hospital a few years back. On every page, subtly and often not very subtly, she is rewriting her life to prove that she never had any knowledge of, or intention of supporting the practices of the Nazi party with her filmmaking. Her primary defense of this preposterous and impossible ignorance is that she was always just trying to make art—rather, pure art—and that led her to techniques and strategies that critics later claimed to be fascist. The film, for the most part, just allows her to talk through her *Memoir*, in person, on camera, but near the end, there is an interesting moment (in what I would call the "recuperation" sequence—no more Nuremberg rallies for Leni—just dreamy fish movies) when she has her assistant go into the editing room to find her a certain shot from her underwater diving footage. The assistant pulls out a reel of close-ups of fish (hundreds of them) and starts playing through them on a Steenbeck, a film editing machine. It is at that moment that the viewer can understand something about her art practices: the way she has organized and catalogued her fish footage is the same way she understood, organized, and used her footage of athletes' bodies in her film *Olympiad*, her celebration of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. The reel shows only close-

up shots of fish. It doesn't matter which fish, or in what context that fish was shot, or what year it was shot, or whether it was in the Bahamas or in the Fiji Islands. They're all just close-ups of fish she has accumulated over years of shooting all over the world. Normally no filmmaker would do that, would put all those close-ups of fish together in one reel. The close-ups would stay with the other shots taken that same day—that is, they would stay in context, in the time and place of which they are a part. But as with the *Olympiad* diving sequences, where she cuts one diving body into another to make a “perfect dive,” Riefenstahl's objects become decontextualized: it's only a body, it's just a fish. Her images are drained of the time and space in which they were shot; they are just shots. In watching that sequence I understood more clearly “how” she was a fascist filmmaker—beyond the fact that her films were made for the Nazi party, with Nazi funding.

I am intensely critical of *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, mostly because of certain dishonesties its structure tries to hide. It is organized as a chronicle of her life, and she sort of tells her life story through the questions the filmmaker leads with. He waits almost to the very end of the film to throw her the big question: Was she (or was she not) a Nazi filmmaker? In fact, the filmmaker knows the answer to that question at the beginning of the film, (and he knows that his audience has been watching the film from the beginning with that question in mind). Moreover, you know he couldn't have made this film—would never have had her cooperation—without having discussed “the terms” and made certain, perhaps informal agreements wherein she was insured of film time to defend her art practice. But for over an hour we listen to her talk about her work as an actress and then film director as if her life had all happened in some historical void. So I feel there's an implicit kind of lie in his presentation of the material.

And the film ends with beautiful underwater diving sequences. . . .

Yes, and thereby she's redeemed. It's a corrupt document—a deal, wherein she had the right to take out anything that offended her. So the filmmaker is allowing us first to think our horrible thoughts about her, and then he totally renews her innocence. Now here is a classic case where oral history produces bad historical documentary, and where reenactment would have made a much more interesting and honest piece of history.

So the film about Riefenstahl is bad history?

Yes. . . . But it occurs to me that we don't exactly have a working definition of history. . . .

Perhaps we need to think about “history” as having several simultaneous meanings. I think of it, at the least, as referring to the past, to the narratives that attempt to represent the past, and to a discipline that seeks to interpret the past and define protocols for that process. It's very hard to hold all of the meanings together at once . . . it becomes quite slippery, which is part of the problem of talking about how to write/produce history.

But what about your needs with regard to history?

Needs?

Why would you, or any historian, take up a particular piece of history and tell it again? Why isn't that—your purpose or intention—part of your understanding? When Farocki takes up Romania and television (about which he is no expert), he knows precisely what potential there is in aligning those clips to articulate an idea that's going to be bigger than just what was happening to the Romanians . . . an idea about history-making and media. If you ask me what film I need to make, what I dream of making, it is a film that is larger than the historical materials that get told, however they're told, because they open up a window onto something important that both includes and exceeds the subject.

I like your addition to my sense of what history is, which acknowledges the motives and commitments of the author and opens the question of the uses (and abuses) of the past. It is less usual for historians to openly address their personal and professional investments than it is, I assume, for filmmakers to do so.

Filmmakers rarely do it either.

In what ways do you think about your audience when you're making a film?

It's particularly hard to think about audience today in this moment of the shutting down of many kinds of exhibition opportunities for independent filmmakers, both in theaters and on television. The only non-fiction cinema today that really circulates to general audiences is the so-called "feature-documentary," like *Crumb*, or *Thin Blue Line*—films that are at least ninety minutes long and now more than ever, include characters (often celebrities), drama, psychology, closure—and violence and sex, of course—all the things that are typical of commercial dramatic cinema. It's a bit odd. The kinds of films that I and others like me make are actually circulating on videotape, more as academic books do, through a kind of professionalized community. This seems odd because films have the potential for a much broader audience—an audience of 600 people at a time, in multiple venues, in hundreds of countries.

How do you account for the reduced audience for films that fall outside the model of the documentary as feature film?

Your question takes me back to Susanne Langer and the "education of the senses." When we stop funding experimental works—their production and exhibition—and when there are no critics who can write about documentary films as cultural texts, we stop educating the people who might otherwise get a taste for learning and thinking and desire better and more. When you have a public television system with only one documentary series, *POV* (and it is not broadcast nationally—each station in the country has the option to pick it up or not), and that series shows only ten independently made films a year, there simply is not enough education of the senses. The independent exhibition sites, all of which used to get some federal and state art funding (which has, since the

Reagan presidency, been almost entirely eliminated piece by piece) are under heavy pressure to show more “popular” films—films with big names in them, or with publicity campaigns to help with the word of mouth, or films with exotic subjects—just to stay alive.

If it had been made ten years ago, my 1995 documentary, *Roy Cohn/Jack Smith*, based on a performance piece by the late Ron Vawter, about two historical characters and the very different ways they performed themselves publicly as homosexuals, would have found a good home to open and run in for at least two weeks, maybe more, in a New York City theater. Instead, I had to four-wall it at the Anthology Film Archives, with no air-conditioning, in August, when there was almost no-one left in New York City who knew who Roy Cohn, Jack Smith, or Ron Vawter was.

In light of these considerations, how would you characterize the kinds of films that are being made?

At this moment, fundable film projects mostly include those that assert identity politics: the lesbian who takes a trip through the southwest and chats with other lesbians about their lifestyles, or the Asian-American filmmaker talking to his or her mother about being in the camps during World War II, and so on. . . . To me, these kinds of films are utterly wrongheaded, representing a very old and limited idea about what documentaries are for and a limited sense of what multiculturalism is all about. They could be interesting films—any subject could be the basis for a provocative film. But often they’re not, maybe because somehow they’re selling something. They’re sort of like many MTV films—full of new technologies, breaking all the old rules, but nothing comes of it, finally; they’re always only selling CDs. So for me, MTV films are almost never interesting as films. And neither are most of the new “multicultural” films that are funded and shown.

If the kinds of films that interest you are difficult to fund and without a readily identifiable audience, how do you decide to make a film?

Hard to say. As we speak I am locking up the final edit of a new film called *What Farocki Taught*, which is quite to the point. It’s an exact replica, or re-make, in color and in English, of a black-and-white film, called *Inextinguishable Fire*, made in Germany in 1969 by Farocki. It’s about the development and production of napalm during the Vietnam War. Why would I re-make this film? Among my many reasons, it’s brilliant in its techniques (totally refusing the classic documentary *cinéma vérité* forms that all the protest films against that war employed); its analysis—of why perfectly nice scientists, like those at Dow Chemical who worked so hard to make a napalm that stuck better to human skin and was inextinguishable, would agree to do such a thing—is profound, and it has never been shown in the United States. So my replica is, in some way, a second edition, a way to re-publish the original, and this time, to make sure it’s distributed and paid close attention. And at the same time, in its stub-

bornness and insistence on re-making a very old film, it is my gauntlet, thrown down to other American filmmakers to re-think their practice.

When I decide to work on a film, I have simultaneously to find a subject and an idea about a new film form for that subject that I like enough and think is productive enough to keep my energy up through the three, four, or five years it might take to get it made. That's a tall order but that's pretty much it. More and more, I think about my films going into an imaginary archive—university and public library tape collections—that'll somehow still be extant when the barbarians go back where they came from (this is really dreamy), and hope that some day, the right twenty-five-year-old (maybe a filmmaker) will find them and they'll be important to that person in some way. I decide that I'm going to try to make a fascinating film with all the intelligence I can muster, and that it will be there, keeping some ideas alive.

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