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Transformative realism: reflections of reality in political avant-garde and contemporary fine art film - Spanish Labyrinth, south from Granada

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Transformative Realism: reflections of reality in political avant-garde and contemporary fine art film.

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Spanish Labyrinth, South from Granada

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Samuel Stevens

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2016

Abstract

Transformative Realism: reflections of reality in political avant-garde and contemporary fine art film.

A turn towards documentary modes of practice amongst contemporary fine art video and filmmakers towards the end of the 20th Century, led to moving image works that represent current social realities. This drew some comparisons of these forms of art to journalism and industrial documentary.

The practical research is embodied in a single screen film that responds to recent political and ecological realities in Spain. These include the mass demonstrations that led to the occupation of Madrid's Plaza del Sol and Spain's in 2011 and largest recorded forest fires that spread through Andalusia in August of the following year. The film, titled *Spanish Labyrinth, South from Granada*, is a response to these events and also relates to political avant-garde film of the 1930's by re-tracing a journey undertaken by three revolutionary filmmakers, Yves Allegret, René Naville and Eli Lotar, in 1931.

The theoretical research for this project establishes an historical root of artists' film that responds to current social realities, in contrast to news media, in the Soviet and European avant-garde movements of the 1920s and 1930s. The main aim of this method is to argue the status of the works that I identify, both avant-garde and contemporary, as a form of art that preceded a Griersonian definition of documentary film.

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START
/1917/

“Not like Pathé.
Not like Gaumont.
Not how they see,
Not as they want.
Be Newton
To see
an apple.

Give people eyes
To see a dog
With
Pavlov’s
Eye.
Is cinema CINEMA?
We blow up cinema,
For
CINEMA
To be seen”.

Dziga Vertov, date unknown
Published in Tsivian, Yuri, *Lines of Resistance, Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*,
p. 35

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Author's Declaration:

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Transformative Realism: reflections of reality in political avant-garde and contemporary fine art film.

Introduction

A significant number of artists, over the past decade, have begun to depict, through their practices, political and social realities. This ‘documentary turn’ and subsequent ‘journalistic turn’ as it has been referred to (Cramerotti, 2009 p. 84), has been widely considered within fine art theory. These practices have been prominently defined by the work of curators and theorists such as Okwui Enwezor, with his curation of the biennial, *Documenta11*. Held between 2001 and 2002, this fomented the use of documentary modes within art that is discussed in his subsequently published texts, such as, *Documentary/Verité: bio-politics, human rights, and the figure of "truth" in contemporary art*, (2008). Julian Stallabrass, with his curation of the Brighton Photo Biennial, *Memory of Fire: The War of Images and Images of War*, 2008, promoted debate on the depiction of current events, specifically with reference to war, by photographers and artists in relation to practices such as photojournalism and news media. Stallabrass' recent publication, *Documentary*, (2013), sheds further light on the relationship between documentary film and art in an edited collection of theoretical texts spanning the 20th Century. Alfredo Cramerotti also theorises the use of documentary forms by artists to respond to current events concurrently depicted in the media. In his publication, *Aesthetic Journalism*, (2009), Cramerotti proposes a form of art that is hybridised with journalism and presented examples in his curation of the exhibition, *All That Fits: The Aesthetic Of Journalism*, held in 2011.

Where the range of mediums of contemporary forms of practice considered within this documentary/journalistic definition is broad, including photography, installation, painting, etc. I wish to consider specifically moving image works by contemporary artists, which I collectively refer to as film. To specify these further I consider only works that reflect or have an indexical origin in an explicitly *current* social reality i.e. a situation that is concurrent with the time of production and exhibition of the work, as opposed to reflecting historical or speculative events or situations. A further requisite the works must fulfil is that they maintain a political status, i.e. the works

depict political or social situations, whether they express a political position explicitly or not.

As much of the existing discourse around contemporary examples of such works considers the boundary between art and other disciplines, such as documentary, journalism, independent film, activism etc. I wish to distinguish the works I consider as art against these other disciplines. Formally I identify this status according to a Shklovskian definition of art that recognises that the ‘perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest,’ (Shklovsky, [1925] 1991 p. 8). As is the case with many of the works, in that they depict the act of depiction of current political and social realities, the examples that I consider are aware of the perceptual process that they engage the viewer in. They maintain a purpose that forms of depiction such as documentary, news media and journalism do not. They depict the act of depiction of the news, for example, and in doing so draw the viewer’s attention to the processes of perception they are engaged in. This defines the works that I consider within all historical moments *as* art over the cultural definitions of the context of their display, for example contemporary fine art. The exhibition of the contemporary works that I consider within the context of contemporary fine art does not necessarily, therefore, contribute to their status *as* forms of art. To do so would restrict them to this context where it is by their very nature, in being transformative, that they are often exhibited outside of this context.

The adoption of the documentary mode by fine artists, around the turn of the century, followed a period of distinct decline in production, interest and development of the documentary film form over the previous two and a half decades. Bill Nichols notes a severe lull, of a decade and a half, in the publication of single-author books on documentary film in his preface to, *Representing Reality*, (1991). Margaret Dickinson attributes this to a paradigm shift in global politics, in her book, *Rogue Reels*, (1999). Here Dickinson brilliantly charts the relationship between ‘the advance of the new right,’ (1999 p. 62), and the ensuing struggle within independent filmmaking of the left, the naturalised headspring of documentary, during the period that preceded Nichols' publication. The earlier successes of the documentary film movement, having its ideological roots in early Soviet film, were diminished by the paradigmatic

shifts in global politics that climaxed in events in Europe in 1989, symbolised in the fall of the Berlin wall, and in 1991 with the end of Soviet Communism.

The withdrawal of support for independent film and in particular documentary saw many such filmmakers turn to a fine art context for both funding and exhibition and distribution platforms. This led to not only the regeneration of film and documentary practices in art, but also their redefinition. In the book, *Truth or Dare: Art and Documentary*, (Pearce et al., 2007). As recognised by Michael Renov recognises that through innovation in the use and investigation of documentary forms, works within the context of fine art began ‘reworking the syntax of documentary film-making and reconfiguring its boundaries’ consequently ‘bringing the documentary world in ever-closer contact with the realm of contemporary art,’ (2007 p. 15).

It is through such examples of innovation that the forms of fine art film that I wish to study here came to be described as emergent forms of practice adoptive of a documentary mode. This new form of art is therefore widely considered to follow a Griersonian definition of documentary as coined by John Grierson’s phrase ‘the creative treatment of actuality,’ (1933 p. 8). Despite these claims, all three of the main theoretical considerations of art’s relationship to documentary and journalism, listed above, also recognise a connection to Modernist avant-garde art and theory, rooted in the art of the early Soviet Union due, to the combination of an experimentation in form, an indexical link to reality in the use of photo-realist imagery, and a political status in the ideological interpretation of reality through its reflection in art. From this beginning political avant-garde film continued to develop in Europe throughout the 1930s where it acquired an oppositional characteristic by contesting forms of film that were endorsed by the state, or commerce, i.e. capitalism, such as newsreel, social documentary,¹ ethnographic film and the travelogue. These I collectively refer to as ‘consensual forms’ of media throughout my thesis, as they are recognised as consenting to and sustaining a political status quo.

¹ Term used by Jean Vigo to distinguish his film, *À propos de Nice*, (1930). I shall use the label to describe the Griersonian form of documentary specifically following Joris Ivens’ distinction, (1969 p. 88 footnote) of *The Misery in Borinage*, (1933b), against the film, *Housing Problems*, (Anstey, 1935),

The origin of these experimental forms was established within Russian Formalism, particularly with the work of Viktor Shklovsky whose writing on semiotics paved the way for montage techniques developed in Soviet film and the theory of estrangement as developed by Bertolt Brecht in Epic theatre. What is apparent in all of these works is a strong reference to a set of initially Marxist aesthetic principles. Theoretically a debate around an authentically Marxist form of realism, conducted textually between writers such as Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno and Georg Lukács established and developed these principles.

If we examine this link between the so called emergent form of contemporary practice and the Modernist avant-garde more closely it is possible to see that documentary forms of practice within contemporary art do not follow a Griersonian definition of documentary but actually preceded this definition. We also find that within the European avant-garde context artists contested and appropriated consensual forms of realism to produce politically oppositional works of art. This thesis, therefore, seeks to understand contemporary artists' film that respond to current events, not as experimental or creative forms of documentary or journalism that have recently emerged, despite the noted migration of independent and documentary film modes and practices to a fine art context. Instead this thesis asserts that these works, as filmic responses in art to a current social reality, constitute a form of realism that was first established in avant-garde art and that should be considered as distinct, both as a form of realism, in contrast to consensual forms, news media in particular, and within the context of art itself. This I shall term '*Transformative Realism*' following Brecht's use of the word in coining the phrase 'umfunktionierung,' ([1932] 1959), translated as *functional transformation*,² which is observed by Walter Benjamin as being used to 'describe the transformation of forms and instruments of production,' (Benjamin, [1934] 1973 p. 93). The term Transformative Realism functions as a means to lift the contemporary films by artists out of the context of contemporary fine art as I does political avant-garde film from other examples found within the same context of the avant-garde.

² I shall refer to the translation of Benjamin's use and consideration of the work in, *Author as Producer*, ([1934] 1973 p. 93), as no complete English translation of the original source text has been published. The phrase is also widely referred to with the word re-functioning.

Realism, as a reflection of reality, contains knowledge of that reality that is ideologically structured. Therefore it reflects not only the current social situation (the political) but also a perspective on how that situation ought to be organised (politics). Forms of realism either affirm the pervasive perspective of politics, as consensual forms of realism, or draw our attention to there being a perspective at all and with it a possible alternative.

In depicting current social realities both the contemporary works and those of the avant-garde period are political in nature. As Chantal Mouffe recognises in *On the Political*, there is considerable disagreement about what constitutes the political and how it is defined against politics, (2005b). I shall follow her definition of the terms, politics and the political, that include a description of the term social, as I contextualise the contemporary works that I consider within her description of the current 'post political' situation, (2005a p. 8). Mouffe here states that:

'by 'the political' I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing coexistence in the context of conflictuality [sic] provided by the political,' (2005a p. 9).

The term social reality, as I use it, following this definition, arises out of the political as a set of political relations (organised coexistence) that are antagonistic. While applicable to a contemporary understanding, and indeed situation, this definition, I believe, is also compatible with the definition of social reality adhered to within the European avant-garde context that I refer to. This is despite it being based in Marxist political and economic theory, as this thesis attempts to retain if not reinforce an origin in Marx's writing that is contrary to Mouffe's approach, (1985).

Brecht states that for any form of realism to be truly Marxist, its form must change to suit content. Where the content of art is reality, the *current* historical reality, Brecht argues that the form of artistic production must be configured to suit, *that* historically specific context, which it seeks to reflect (Brecht, [1938] 2003a, Brecht, [1938] 2003b). The contemporary form of *transformative realism* that I consider, therefore, does not simply provide a refuge for or constitute a remnant of the avant-garde form that went before it. Contemporary transformative realism is not predominantly

characterised by its reference to avant-garde experimentation, but by the current social reality to which it is a response and that forms its content.

Further consideration of Brecht's conception of the relationship between form and content, the form of work in relation to social reality, leads us away from a notion of art as developmental, chronologically progressive or formally evolutionary. Instead art, in particular the form of realism that this thesis aims to describe and understand as *transformative*, emerges as a response to particular historical conditions, that have been termed 'world revolutions,' (Wallerstein, 2002), but to which I will refer as historical contingencies. These are moments of paradigm shift within the ruling political power that have a global impact, the uncertainty of which allow forms of transformation to occur both within politics and art.

Avant-garde transformative realism, as it is described here, is a response to a historical contingency triggered by the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917. Avant-garde transformative realism is considered as transformative realism's first stage owing to the relevantly recent introduction of the new media of film to art. By the nature of the historical condition to which transformative realism responds, a moment of flux or transition between one configuration of power and the next, avant-garde transformative realism ended with the consolidation of artistic forms with the state such as Griersonian documentary in Britain or Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union and the turn to militancy within avant-garde film that followed the coverage of the Spanish Civil War. The moment of historical contingency that the contemporary artists' films that I consider are situated in, including my own film submitted as practice-based research, I believe is yet to be consolidated and perhaps never will, despite the historical trends. I consider this to have begun with the attacks on the 11th September 2001 of the World Trade Centre, New York and subsequent British and North American led conflict in the Middle East that continues today. This moment of paradigm flux, that fomented neo-liberal politics, was perpetuated and countered by political revolutions across North Africa in 2011.

Other moments of historical contingency between the Bolshevik revolution and the contemporary situation, that initiated a response in film, do of course occur throughout the 20th Century. These prominently include the political unrest in France

in 1968 and the anti-war movement that accompanied the final years of the American War in Vietnam, (1955-1975). Responses to this period included those by the filmmakers Jean Luc-Goddard and Jean-Piere Gorin, collectively known as the Dziga Vertov Group, the SLON (Service de lancement des oeuvres nouvelles) collective and Medvedkin Group, of which Chris Marker was a founding member. The films of this period could also be considered as forms of transformative realism that, as indicated by their choice of namesakes, 'evoked for many the experiments and debates of the early Soviet period,' (Taylor et al., 1994 p. 12). The primary formal characteristic of this period of transformative realism was collective practice that could be seen to be rooted in the influence of Bolshevik journalism as seen in Sergei Tretyakov's Operative Art, (Papazian, 2008). However, this thesis is not a chronological survey of forms of transformative realism over the 20th Century and into the 21st, but rather an attempt to consider its contemporary form.

As I consider this form of realism to be historically responsive rather than historically progressive, I return to the avant-garde period as an origin to consider a form of practice that has re-emerged over the last decade and a half, rather than it constituting a next stage following the former. The artists' film practices of the avant-garde period established and were characterised by two dominant realist devices, the visualisation of social relations and estrangement, which were developed theoretically from Marxist theory within the realist debate referred to above.

These realist devices are discernable in contemporary works as references to the avant-garde period. One aim of this thesis is to define transformative realism in its contemporary incarnation. However, following Brecht's insistence that the form of realism must be specific to the historical moment I do not, indeed cannot, aim to define contemporary artists' film as an authentic form of transformative realism as displayed in avant-garde film.³ Transformative realism is therefore distinct according to the historical contingency to which it responds. Avant-garde transformative realism relates to the social realities then and contemporary transformative realism to social realities now. The formal devices as employed by contemporary artists do not dictate the form of the work, but are reconfigured in their contemporary (re)deployment. This

³ This was in itself Brecht's main criticism of Lukács' Authentic Realism that proposed a rigid unchanging form that eventually coincided with the strictures of Socialist-Realism.

thesis asks, therefore, how these realist devices, embody, are informed by, and reconfigured by the politics and theory of their time?

Due to this reconfiguration, my research method is not to simply indicate the similarities between these formal devices, as they are respectively deployed within avant-garde and contemporary practices. My methodology is not to compare transformative realism now with transformative realism then. Instead I shall look for differences in the configuration of these devices, between the two epochs, as they are deployed in depicting the social realities of their time; the differences between avant-garde transformative realism, as it was then, in its depiction of social realities then and contemporary transformative reality, as it is now, in its depiction of social reality now.

These devices, in avant-garde film practices at least, are theoretically informed by dialectical materialism. This ideological structuring of a conception of reality in turn configures the formal devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement. It is therefore within this historically differences in form that a central question may be placed i.e. how do changes in the configuration of the formal devices, of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement, indicate contemporary transformative realism's ideological structure and political status? Secondly, as contemporary transformative realism is a reflection of the current social reality, we may place within these differences the further question: what knowledge does contemporary transformative realism produce of the current social reality?

In *Chapter 2 Avant-Garde Transformative Realism* I will describe the development of an early form of transformative realism in an experimental form of newsreel film in the work of Dziga Vertov. This section of the thesis contributes an original form of knowledge to Vertov studies, as I further the understanding of his work as a foundation for European avant-garde filmmakers, where traditionally the work of Sergei Eisenstein has been considered as prominent in this role as a connection between the Soviet and European avant-garde movements.

I also consider Vertov's work as a response to the political and social transformation of its time and its emergence in contrast to conventional newsreel. Though this has

been considered, I develop this approach to Vertov's work further by establishing a break from newsreel in his departure from the use of titles, treatment of time and ideological structuring. This has been possible only due to the recent publication of writing by and relating to Vertov. From this foundation I will expand on and develop an understanding of the two devices, of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement, specifically in relation to their use by European avant-garde filmmakers. This grouping and definition of European avant-garde film constitutes a further contribution to knowledge by considering the question of how a political form of avant-garde film can be defined formally as art and against consensual forms of media of the time?

These works have already been widely considered theoretically. However, this has been mainly within the context of political film, propaganda studies and social studies. In this thesis I consider them specifically as creative works with reference to the connection between aesthetics and politics. Most of the avant-garde artists' that I reference also created films that do not demonstrate an indexical link to a specific social reality concurrent with their time of production or that explored the relationship between aesthetics and politics. Most prominently these include films such as, *Un Chien Andalou*, by Luis Buñuel, (1928), and, *Regen*, (1929), by Joris Ivens. This thesis therefore aims to re-establish the many political avant-garde films that I do consider here as *creative* works, despite their political content and sense of social responsibility, which is how I believe their authors originally perceived them.

With Vertov's work as a foundation for European avant-garde film Chapter 2 continues to define the devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement in relation to avant-garde film. The aim of this definition is to establish political avant-garde film, or avant-garde transformative realism as I define it, as a foundation for contemporary artists' film practices that precedes the Griersonian definition. Theoretical work that has discussed these devices to date, particularly the device of estrangement, have done so within a context other than film, such as theatre or photography. My definition and analysis of their use within the medium of film therefore constitutes a further original contribution to knowledge.

In Chapter 3, I consider the device of the visualisation of social relations within two recent works by Ursula Biemann, *Deep Weather*, (2013a), and *Egyptian Chemistry*, (2012). In Chapter 4, I consider the device of estrangement in the film *Enjoy Poverty*, (2009), by Renzo Martens. Further to the aims and research questions identified above, both of these chapters consider the question, how do these works reflect and are informed by recent philosophical discourse that has reconsidered and proposed new definitions of reality and materialism?

Chapter 1, Contemporary and Historical Contexts

Introduction

This chapter begins by identifying the work of the two contemporary artists that this thesis will focus on in Chapter 3, Ursula Biemann and Chapter 4, Renzo Martens, within the context of contemporary fine art practice. I shall then identify the main themes that have been raised by these works within the discursive field of fine art theory. I shall also attempt to establish here how these works can be seen in contrast to consensual forms of media, as they have been termed in my opening introduction. As previously noted, the consideration of contemporary fine art film and video practices that respond to current events has led to comparisons of such works within this discursive field to other disciplines, such as journalism and documentary. Following my review of these works and specific responses, I shall consider this wider theoretical context that attempts to theorise the employment of journalistic and documentary modes within fine art. Here I shall focus on three main curatorial themes that have been developed by the theorists and curators Alfredo Cramerotti, Okwui Enwezor and Julian Stallabrass.

These three definitions of a type of practice within fine art also contain references to avant-garde art practice or theory. Here I attempt to identify key films that exemplify a distinct form of engagement with the social reality of the period that I define, (1922-1937). This form of filmmaking practice within the avant-garde movement I shall refer to as political avant-garde film or avant-garde transformative realism. The films identified here, therefore function as a foundation for considering the contemporary works that I have singled out. They too sat within the wider context of fine art and at points other works by the same artists could not be included within the definition of the term political avant-garde film due to their lack of a connection to a current social reality. The purpose of this review is to describe defining attributes that the films displayed in their response to their particular historical moment.

Debate around filmmaking of the avant-garde period has increased significantly in the last decade. This is due to newly translated and published examples of classical film theory being made available. Central to this revival of classical film theory has been

the film and theory of Dziga Vertov. I will expand upon this newly enlivened context here as I describe the work of Vertov as being central to my definition of political avant-garde film due to his experimental form, commitment to the depiction of current social realities and early connection to newsreel film. Vertov's work sat within the newly Soviet historical context of political revolution that engendered the artistic experimentation that characterises political avant-garde film. Within Europe the relationship between politics and new forms of art continued to be explored and discussed within a debate that focused on the question of an authentically Marxist form of realism. Here I shall introduce some of the key contributors to this realist debate and ideas circulated behind the production of avant-garde films.

Like the political avant-garde film movement, contemporary fine art film and video that responds to current events also has a theoretical backdrop that is unfolding within philosophical discourse. Like the realist debate of the 1930s this arena too has its distinct and often oppositional camps. The final part of this chapter will, therefore, relate to a contemporary debate around realism and materialism – aesthetics and politics. Over the period of the contemporary works that I will consider, beginning with responses to the destruction of the World Trade Centre, New York, in 2001 to the present day, this philosophical field has gone through several redefinitions. Central to my consideration of contemporary practice is a divide between ethics and politics that has been initiated by continental philosophers such as Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière. A further field that has become central to my study of contemporary works has been a reconsideration of materialism, seen prominently in the latest works by Slavoj Žižek that describe a subjectively based materialist reality.

Contemporary Fine Art Film

Examples of contemporary artists' film that could be considered here are varied and wide-ranging in terms of form and subject matter. Individual examples could be used to illustrate specific characteristics of what I have termed transformative realism. For example Phil Collins' video, *How to Make a Refugee*, (1999), could be used to illustrate how transformative realism reveals the process of production of images of reality that is conversely hidden in the display of consensual forms of media. Here Collins depicts journalists photographing refugees, and by revealing this process of

the news images' construction, acknowledges too that his work is the result of a constructive process.

Omer Fast's, *CNN Concatenated*, (2002), also demonstrates an intervention in the process of the production of the news to reveal its constructive nature and transform its meaning. Here Fast re-edits the presentation of the TV news broadcasts to construct a narrative from snippets of speech that address the viewer directly with existential concerns. Fast also locates his work in political realities through testimony in his videos, *The Casting*, (2007), and, *Five Thousand Feet is Best*, (2011). Both video installations dramatize events described in interviews with an army sergeant, who was deployed on duty in Iraq in 2003 and with a drone pilot who operates drones from where he is stationed in Los Vegas, respectively. *Nine Scripts from a Nation at War*, (2008), by the artists David Thorne, Katya Sander, Ashley Hunt, Sharon Hayes and Andrea Geyer is also located in the reality of the conflict in Iraq through testimony. This collection of videos, however reveals multiple perspectives and experiences of various protagonists, such as the citizen, the blogger, the correspondent etc., who have been directly engaged in the conflict or who consider their relationship to it as non-combatants.

A further example of the transformation of a journalistic source through appropriation can be seen in Aernout Mik's *Raw Footage*, (2006a), which displays un-broadcast documentary footage taken by ITN during the war in former Yugoslavia. Here the long pauses between newsworthy shots create a suspended sense of time and urgency that is in stark contrast to the convention of the TV news bulletin. Mik also creates this sense of suspension of the news event in his dramatized works. Here the artist conflates situations frequently depicted in the news media, such as war zones, hostage situations and United Nations council meetings, in video installations such as, *Training Ground*, (2006c), *Scape Goats*, (2006b), and *Vacuum Room*, (2005). Though none of these latter three works originate in a specific situation they each reflect the realities that are the familiar staple of the news media and draw into question our knowledge and understanding of these realities as it is constructed by the news media.

I could continue, as the list of examples of contemporary artists' film produced over the last decade and a half that respond to current social and political realities is vast.

These works transform, both politically and perceptually, our understanding of these realities and their depiction by consensual forms of media. I therefore select the work of two artists, Ursula Biemann and Renzo Martens as specific case studies.

Ursula Biemann is well known for the use of investigative methods in creating her video essays and installations. She makes references to journalistic or ethnographic practices in describing herself as an artist working ‘in the field,’ (Biemann et al., 2008). Biemann’s works expose blank spots within the field of news media. Her working practice employs investigative methods similarly used by journalists to present documentary fragments that build narratives contrary to those that articulate similar subjects found in news media.

The content of Biemann’s work has consistently featured the cross-national migration of humans or ‘geobodies,’ (2002), as she generally terms them, as demonstrated in the works, *Performing the Border*, (1999), *Remote Sensing*, (2003a), *Europlex*, (2003a), and *Sahara Chronicle*, (2009). Biemann’s work has therefore developed out of a sense of social and geographical space defined by human networks and the action of ‘bringing into representation the concrete embodiment of abstract economic relations mostly through the experience of migration,’ (Biemann, 2006 p. 46). Biemann’s theoretical and formal approach avoids a reduction of these human relationships and experiences to images as their reified form, or as she states, her work ‘doesn’t aim primarily at documenting realities but at organizing complexities,’ (2003b p. 10).

In doing so, Biemann’s work offers a form of resistance to the reductionist form of knowledge generated by the consensual media by its own methods. Commenting within the context of her work on migration in the Maghreb, Biemann critiques news media directly for ‘surrender[ing] to every temptation of reducing reality and condensing it into a symbol, thrusting the whole issue [of migration] into discursive disrepair,’ (2006 p. 45). This reduction to the symbolic is expressed as a form of reification of social relations into single televisual shots where, as Biemann states, ‘the real is no-longer represented but targeted’, (2006 p. 45). The objective of Biemann’s alternative form of depiction, in contrast to consensual forms of media, is iterated by T. J. Demos when he states ‘the Real is not presented as fact or viewed as

an already existing system that simply lacks representation—which would risk the reification of borders,’ (2013 p. 220).

Despite this opposition to the representational form of news media, Biemann acknowledges a lack of political commitment to her work when she states that ‘it’s certainly not my prime concern to refute the validity of arguments on either side [debate on migration],’ (2006, p. 45). However Biemann does recognise a political bias in the news media in the lack of documentation of successful migrant passages, on one hand, and the disproportionate level of reporting on successful police efforts, (2006 p. 49). Here she asserts that news media representation of migrants in particular does ‘display sub-Saharan migration as a criminal invasion, as some ill-organized, external force intruding on a passive Europe,’ (2006 p. 49).

This critique of representational forms employed by news media is not specific to the depiction of migration but is extended to the representation of oil by the oil industry in Biemann’s work, *Black Sea Files*, (2005). *Black Sea Files* is recognised as challenging a ‘conception of oil [that] is usually oriented by this wide-angle image of the silently running oil refinery or platform,’ (Pendakis, 2012) by identifying the objects of oil as a series of interlinked economic, ecological, and social networks. This is for Biemann oppositional to the representation of the oil industry by itself that is a ‘level of abstraction in the representation of oil as yet another way to keep it firmly in the hands of market dynamics,’ (Pendakis, 2012).

Here Biemann expresses a concern for what is not depicted in consensual forms of media, namely the social and cultural impact of the oil industry, and sets up an antagonistic position in relation to consensual forms of depiction by visualising the people, processes and power relations that the consensual media seeks to exclude. The form of the display of her work in installation also resists the reduction to a linearly singular or symbolic form of knowledge.

Renzo Martens employs a much more recognisable documentary form by placing himself at the centre of actual zones of conflict in his films, *Episode I*, (2003), and, *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty*, (2009). In, *Episode I*, Martens travels to Chechnya where he asks the subjects that he interviews questions about himself such as how he feels or

if they think he is handsome, in contrast to the usual line of enquiry followed by news correspondents. This centring of both himself, as a stand-in for the Western television audience, and his personal feelings reveals the intention of news media to appeal to the feelings of the viewer through images of war, in contrast to their stated purpose of the delivery of factually objective information.

Martens' later film, *Enjoy Poverty*, is set in the Democratic Republic of Congo where Martens depicts the poverty of the country that is attributed to war and the exploitation of the country's natural resources by foreign interests. *Enjoy Poverty* is considered by Anthony Downey in his article, *An Ethics of Engagement: Collaborative Art Practices and the Return of the Ethnographer*, (Downey, 2009), in relation to ethnographic film with Martens as the centralized self-styled ethnographer. Downey recognises that *Enjoy Poverty* is not a straightforward form of pastiche but that what distinguishes the film from ethnographic filmmaking traditions is its ethical treatment of its subjects and its ability to actively engage the audience through an act of Brechtian defamiliarisation. This leads, for Downey, to the question of 'how do we formulate an ethics of engagement in relation to collaborative, quasi-ethnographic artworks that tend to float – for a variety of reasons – the very notion of ethical compliance?', (2009 pp. 601-602).

Pieter von Bogaert's suggestion in, *On the Outside: Exteriority as Condition for Resistance*, (2010), is that Martens' presence in the Congo, like that of the photojournalists and aid workers that are depicted in his film, should be understood and recognised as jointly contributing to an effacement of the boundary of the social reality of the West and the reality of poverty in the Congo to which it is economically tied. For Bogaert this effacement undermines the appeals of the Congolese, to the consumers of their images in the West, for the application of their humanitarian rights. It is precisely the presence of the media and the NGOs that undermines the urgency of the Congolese citizens' potential demand to be accepted in Europe as refugees and as 'intervening in the image [of the Congo] and literally taking control of its production displaces the exterior and thereby effaces it, replicating the situation already enforced in places such as the Congo by the presence of the media and relief workers,' (Bogaert, 2010 p. 127). The distinction that remains, for Bogaert as for Downey, between, *Enjoy Poverty*, and the consensual forms of depiction is that of

reflexivity. As this active process of the film raised questions of ethics for Downey, Bogaert too places Martens in an ethical position between the Congolese subject and the audience by transforming him into ‘the ultimate and complete witness,’ (2010 p. 129).

Despite this insistence on ethics Martens makes clear that *Enjoy Poverty*’s main concern is that of politics or at least a pretence to politics. Martens also wishes to reflexively challenge the inconsequentiality of fine art’s political gesturing and performance that ultimately leads to little more consequence than its consensual adversary. Martens explains that for this reason, *Enjoy Poverty*, employs ‘a similar, political sign language, [to other examples of political fine art] but what sets it apart is that it embraces the fact that it is only there for its own sake. So, if the film is one thing for me, it is an attempt to problematize the inconsequentiality of the political in contemporary art,’ (Demos et al., 2012 p. 17). It is the consideration of these politics, over ethics, which distinguishes my own study of his film from those above.

Contemporary Curatorial Conceptions

The consideration and innovation of the documentary form in art came to occupy a focused foreground with the biennial, *Documenta11*. Held as a series of conferences and debates in various locations from March 15th 2001, the project culminated in an exhibition of film and video work in Kassel ending September 15, 2002. The wider focus of the project presented ‘debates on democracy, justice, cultural and religious difference and new spatial arrangements’ that aimed ‘to illuminate the epistemological texture and complexity of the present political and cultural climate,’ (Enwezor, 2002b p. 10). The exhibition itself was noted for its heavy emphasis on and inclusion of works using the documentary form, (Nochlin, 2002, Mcevilley, 2002), and urgency of philosophical and political debate following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centre that heightened the focus of *Documenta11*’s aims.

These aims included a wider tendency towards issues originating in socio-political realities, traditionally a defining aspect of independent and political documentary film of the 20th Century. This link to 20th Century political and independent documentary filmmakers was reinforced in *Documenta11* by the screening of such films. These

included, *First Name Viet Given Name Nam*, (1989), by Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Handsworth Songs*, (1986), by John Akomfrah and, *From the Other Side*, (2002), by Chantal Akerman. The screening of these films reflected a theoretical inclusion of such names into the fine art documentary film canon in Enwezor's own essays, *The Black Box*, (2002a), *Documentary*, "The Reality Effect," (2005), and, *Documentary/Verité: bio-politics, human rights, and the figure of "truth" in contemporary art*, (2008).

The link between documentary film and independent filmmaking and art is theoretically considered in the book, *Documentary*, (Stallabrass, 2013), that combines texts by both artists and filmmakers from throughout the past century. In his introduction to the book Stallabrass considers the recent shift towards the documentary mode, and its proliferation within fine art, as a shift in attitude as much as in implementation. This is observed as being due to economic, technological and political change. According to Stallabrass, this change has occurred economically due to the globalized growth of the art market through the international biennial scene, technologically due to the accessibility and economy of new digital photography and video formats, and politically due to the precedence of politics and its representation following the events of 11th September, 2001, and the conflicts that have followed. Stallabrass locates the origin of the categorization of documentary practice in film in John Grierson's definitions of the 1930s and references the hope, expressed by Grierson, that his definition of documentary need not create tensions with art. Due to Griersonian documentary's links to state power and commerce, its relationship to art, however, 'was unsurprisingly looked on with skepticism and mistrust by many in the art world,' (Stallabrass, 2013 p. 13).

Previously, through the curation of the 2008 Brighton Photo Biennial, *Memory of Fire: the War of Images and Images of War*, Stallabrass set images of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and following conflict within the context of images of conflict from throughout the 20th Century. The exhibition presented not just a reflection on images of war, but also formed a critique of images of war as propaganda, journalism and news media within the context of art. Despite the focus of the biennial being photography, the exhibitions rigorously questioned the construction of the journalistic

image and art's ability and obligation to question the construction of such images across a wider context.

Stallabrass' analysis of images from the conflict in Iraq was made through the lens of images of the war in Vietnam in the 1960s, a strategy rooted in his earlier text, *Not in Our Name*, (2006a). Here Stallabrass expresses a clear desire to associate with previous moments in history where artists engaged directly with socio-political realities through their practice.

J. A. Tang explores the title of the biennial by citing Naomi Klein's contention that memory serves as the antidote to its annihilation by the Debordian spectacle of news media, (Klein, 2007). This production of images of spectacle for distribution in the news media displaces the role of the artist as author, (Žižek et al., 2003, Grimonprez et al., 2003). Referring to this recent shift in authorship, Boris Groys reminds us of the historical need for artists to depict spectacular events and the question of their role today, (Groys, 2008). Like Tang's understanding of memory, Groys sees historical comparison as the only form of critique of representation that, disallowed from news media, can only occur in the context of contemporary art.

The writing collective Retort, in their book, *Afflicted Powers*, (2005), also consider images of the destruction of the World Trade Centre as an inversion of Debord's definition of spectacle as 'capital accumulated to the point where it becomes an image,' (Debord, [1967] 1994 p. 24). Retort observe that both the invasion of Iraq and the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre were partly forms of symbolic action intended to create images for the 'symbolic economy called 'spectacle,' ' (Retort, 2005 p. 25), of the news media. This observation opens the question of the specific political force of such forms of spectacle and how this force may be countered, which is considered by Stallabrass in his review of the book, (2006b).

Here Stallabrass considers how *we*, the spectators of such images, on the political Left, (2006b), and within the context of cultural production, (2006a), must situate ourselves in relation to news media representation of current events of a political nature or acts of militant and military violence alike. Central to the question of the political force of spectacle Stallabrass identifies a lack of democracy that extends to

all levels of life. An important tool in the struggle to resist this lack are ‘[d]igital technologies, precisely because they are capable of countering the broadcast mode of spectacle,’ (2006b p. 105). Stallabrass reinforces this oppositional stance with the view that the solution to the problem of argument, against the political force of spectacle, and the social and political realities that images of spectacle originate in, lies in an alternate form of representation and distribution. This is expressed when, in opposition to the war in Iraq, he insisted that ‘We should make, search for, circulate and reactivate images (as many artists did in opposition to Vietnam), producing a counter-memory and counter-currency of images to the salving novelties of the BBC, Sky and Fox News,’ (2006a p. 4).

In the book, *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform Without Informing*, (2009), Cramerotti describes a very different relationship between art and journalism to the oppositional stance suggested by Stallabrass. Here Cramerotti defines not a position art takes in relation to journalism but a hybridization of the two that forms an ‘emergent mode of journalism through art,’ (2009 p. 83), through the practice of ‘investigating (and reporting) the social and the political via aesthetics,’ (2009 p. 40). Cramerotti recognises an ideological structure to these practices when he describes ‘a shift in the production of truth from news media to art,’ (2009 p. 69). However, Cramerotti’s theory of aesthetic journalism, by definition, appears to aspire to a mutual dependency with news media, lacking opposition in practice.

Meave Connolly in her review, *Aesthetic Journalism in Practice*, (2010), considers Cramerotti’s later curatorial involvement in the biennial *Manifesta 8*, as a development of the critique posed by his book. Connolly notes that, despite a commitment to the cultural practices that place socio-political dialogues within the public realm, ‘nostalgia,’ (2010 p. 39), can be felt for a traditional model of the public sphere. This idea that ‘we need printed journalism and broadcasts to help us make sense of the world around us’ that is stated in the *Manifesta 8* catalogue, (Manifesta, 2010 p. 133), is at the heart of Cramerotti’s theory, making art practices a regulatory mechanism of the press rather than an a truly independent form of information distribution and knowledge generation.

Political Avant-Garde Film

Cramerotti, Enwezor and Stallabrass all reference the art of the Modernist avant-garde as the possible origin of the more recent drive to depict current realities, seen in contemporary artists' film. Cramerotti refers to the formal experimentation in film that occurred within an early Soviet context following the Bolshevik revolution in the 1920's, which sought to produce a form of film that 'did not simply mirror the world but actively produced an understanding of it,' (2009 p. 55). This origin Cramerotti follows through into the work of European theorists such as Walter Benjamin, György Lukács, and Bertolt Brecht. Enwezor also insists that ideas developed during the avant-garde movement of 1930s Europe remain crucial to understanding the resurgence of politically invested and activist art practices of the 21st Century, (2004).

Stallabrass recognises the influence of this early forming of definitions of documentary and its contentious relationship to art as referenced above, (2013). Stallabrass also observes that 'in eras of political radicalism, activists look to their predecessors for ideas and images. So 60s leftists looked to the 30s, reviving interest, for example, in the forgotten Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographs of the Depression era,' (2006a p. 2), an observation that informs my own method here.

This could be said also for the artists and theorists that have produced works relating to current political and social realities since the events of the 11th September that triggered a polarisation in politics as well as the politics of art. The Brechtian reference in the title given to the 11th Istanbul Biennial, for example, *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*,⁴ indicates one such return or reference to the avant-garde period that is considered in contrast to 'an arguably regressive return to art for art's sake inherent in a relativism over artistic pluralism advocated by Robert Storr in his directorship of the 2007 Venice Biennale entitled 'Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind,' ' (Malik, 2010 p. 495).

In considering contemporary fine art film and video that depicts current social and political realities I shall relate this apparently emergent contemporary form to avant-

⁴ Taken from the song of the same name that closes the second act of Brecht's play, *Threepenny Opera*, 1928.

garde practices of the 1920s and 30s. Where it has been suggested that these contemporary practices represent a 'journalistic turn' that expanded and preceded the idea of 'documentary turn,' (Cramerotti, 2009 p. 84), I shall establish a stronger link between these contemporary practices and their root in political avant-garde film.

To do so I shall draw upon characteristics in form, political ideology and oppositionality relative to consensual forms of media that the works of both periods share. For this to be possible I first need to define, more specifically, political avant-garde film as a genre or mode of practice in its own right that is firmly situated within the modernist avant-garde art movement, which preceded the Griersonian definition of documentary film that became the founding definition of documentary film over the course of the 20th Century. Rather than a 'turn' to either journalism or documentary, therefore, the contemporary works that form the study of this thesis are understood as a re-emergent form of art practice that preceded the Griersonian definition of documentary and news media in its early form of newsreel.

In his essay, *Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde*, published in the same year as the 11th September attacks on the twin towers, Bill Nichols debunks the myth that the documentary potential inherent in the indexical quality of film, that allows it to function as document of actuality, 'does not lead directly to a documentary film practice,' (Nichols, 2001 p. 589). Instead Nicholls asserts that the documentary genre was theoretically constructed by leading establishment film theorists such as Paul Rotha and John Grierson to appear to have evolved out of its characteristics as a medium. Nicholls instead observes that the Griersonian definition of documentary film actually 'involves the combination of three pre-existing elements - photographic realism, narrative structure, and modernist fragmentation,' (2001 p. 582).

These elements came not from documentary as a burgeoning form of film but widely from the modernist avant-garde movement. It is significant that the filmmakers that formed the core of this avant-garde movement, in Europe at least, did not consider themselves documentary filmmakers and did not use the word documentary to describe their films or themselves. Rather they described themselves as artists conceiving film as a new form of art continuing in a tradition of artistic practice

following painting and literature. Joris Ivens when asked if he used the word documentary in the 1930's by Jean Rouch, in the film *Cinémafia*, (Rouch, 1980), replied: 'No, there was just film, as Henri [Storck] already said. In the avant-garde you had film, architecture, painting music etc. All that was one big movement – the avant-garde of the 1930s,' (Ten Brink, 2007 p. 223). I will refer to these filmmakers therefore as artists and their films as works of art, which is consistently how I have referred to the work of contemporary artists' film.

Nichols here describes a particular mode of practice within Modernist avant-garde film that puts 'stress on social impact' rather than form, (Nichols, 2001 p. 591). This political wing of avant-garde film is distinctive from other modernist avant-garde films that stressed formal experimentation, regardless of the fact that they too were also based in actuality through the indexical link provided by photorealism. My description, political avant-garde film therefore refers to films that not only reflect simply an objective material reality through the indexical properties of photorealism, but also a social or political condition, a social reality.

In Nichols' terms this is defined by its radical potential to 'contest the state and its law, as well as affirm it,' (2001 p. 583). The films that I include in my definition of political avant-garde film display both this power of affirmation, as demonstrated in the films of Dziga Vertov, and contestation, as in all of the works of European origin, which I explore more fully in the following chapter. What is important to my study is that these films originate in and depict social realities concurrent with the time of their making, a prerequisite that also defines my contemporary examples.

Nichols' aim is to describe the origin and construction of the Griersonian definition of documentary film, and the conversion of this constructed notion to myth. This he identifies as occurring at the historical point whereby a political form of film realism coincided with the active efforts of the state to build a national identity, whereby it became defined by the term documentary film following a Griersonian definition. According to Nichols this consolidation of film and the politics of the state occurred not only in Britain under Grierson's stewardship, but also in the United States of America under Pare Lorentz, in Germany under Joseph Goebbels and in the Soviet Union under Anatoly Lunacharsky and Alexander Zhadanov, (2001 p. 583).

Brian Winston describes political avant-garde film as ‘a line of biting social satire [that was] killed-off,’ (1995 p. 255) by this Griersonian form of documentary. The Griersonian tradition has certainly prevented alternative definitions of political avant-garde film until a recent renaissance in classical film theory that has seen the translation and publication of many previously unstudied texts, (Turvey, 2014). This domination of the Griersonian tradition is also the reason for the misperception of contemporary artists’ film and video that depicts current social realities as having emerged from documentary film that is again being challenged within the context of art by texts such as, *Documentary*, (Stallabrass, 2013).

To further free political avant-garde film from the dominance of the Griersonian tradition I intend to define it here as a form of Transformative Realism and identify the end of the period of production not as the state endorsement of documentary film but as a conscious determination on the part of the artists themselves. This is largely attributable to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 that led to artists relinquishing the experimental aspect of film to ensure the delivery of a political message more widely popular in appeal and more clearly discerning in rhetoric. For example, *Las Hurdes*, (1933), by Luis Buñuel, was originally intended to attack the Spanish bourgeoisie for the political neglect of the kind that had created the situation in Los Hurdanos Altos and that persisted under the new Republican government.

This political directive was given by the Communist International (Comintern) through the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists (AEAR), in which Buñuel was active, (Gubern et al., 2012 p 83 & 175). However, following the outbreak of Spanish Civil War the film needed a wider, international reach and a re-directed anti-fascist political message according to the directives of the Comintern. The transcript for the voiceover was amended and recorded in French and English and the film re-titled, *Terre sans pain (Land Without Bread)*, (Buñuel, 1936), which resonated with the titles of various revolutionary texts at the time. The film also acquired a textual epilogue that made the anti-fascist political message absolutely certain. The following year, *España 1936*, (1936), directed by Jean Paul Le Chanois and produced, edited and written by Buñuel, confirmed a move towards more militant filmmaking.

Joris Ivens was another artist who responded to the Comintern's position on the war in Spain and the redirection of artistic efforts by the popular front. Ivens travelled to Spain to cover the war which resulted in the film, *The Spanish Earth*, (1937), that showed support for the Spanish Republicans in contrast to the officially neutral positions of the USA in relation to the war at the time. Waugh remarks that Ivens was 'following the general Popular Front strategy of streamlining and popularizing the earlier achievements of the avant-garde' and reminds us that '*The Spanish Earth*'s positive exemplary hero and its utopian, virtually allegorical images of the social transformations, not to mention its populist audience strategy, are reminders that Ivens was in the Soviet Union at the time when socialist realism was being consolidated as the official aesthetic of Soviet arts,' (2011 p. 60).

Perhaps the most conclusive examples indicating the close of the era of political avant-garde film is the institutional incorporation of its key attributes, methods and artists. These were displayed in two films commissioned by the British Ministry of Information as anti-Nazi propaganda, Len Lye's, *Lambeth Walk*, (1940), and Dylan Thomas,' *These are the Men*, (1943).

Where political avant-garde finds its end in the Spanish Civil War, I situate its beginning in a newly Soviet Russia with Dziga Vertov's, *Kino-Pravda I*, (1922). In order to further consider and explore political avant-garde film I will use, not only Vertov's, *Kino-Pravda*, (1922-1925), as the practical basis for the movement, but also the filmmaker's writings as the theoretical base. This is not least because of Vertov's ties to newsreel in the origin of his practice with the production of the newsreel *Kinonedelia*, which began, shortly following the Bolshevik revolution, in 1918. This position early in Vertov's adult life, cemented his commitment to a film practice committed to the depiction of the current social reality, which is a fundamental defining characteristic of the political avant-garde films that I consider.

The influence of Vertov's work on avant-garde film in Europe is recorded as being weak prior to 1930 due to the emergence of opposing definitions of documentary such as Grierson's, as described above. However, the influence of Vertov on political avant-garde film in Europe is evident. These influences are clearly visible in the work

of Henri Storck such as in, *The History of the Unknown Soldier*, (1932) which is compiled of newsreel footage and displays a similar satirical yet poetic edge to that seen in Vertov's work. *À Propos de Nice*, (1930), by Jean Vigo, has a direct link to Vertov in that it was filmed by his younger brother Boris Kaufman and the images of the holiday makers 'caught unawares,' ([1926] 1984 p. 57), pay homage to Vertov's filming methods.

The theoretical basis in Vertov's work could be seen standing in contrast to the understanding of avant-garde film through the theory of Sergei Eisenstein whose works were more openly dramatically based and historically located in terms of subject matter. Though the film theory of Eisenstein has been accessible for some time more extensive examples of Vertov's theoretical writing have only been available more recently. There has, however, been a recent resurgence of interest in Vertov, following the centenary of his birth in 1996, which has revealed new theoretical works that will aid my reading of this period. This included many historical articles on Vertov's work that were translated from Russian, which led to a new wave of interest in Vertov in Europe.

Of the English language publications, Graham Roberts,' *Forward Soviet*, (1999), placed Vertov at the foundation of non-fiction films role in defining the historical soviet image. In the same year he published a companion to, *Man with a Movie Camera*, (Vertov, 1929, Roberts, 2000), that was situated between various re-releases of the film.⁵ Yuri Tsivian's *Lines of Resistance*, (2004), released to coincide with the Vertov retrospective at the Podenone film festival, was the first significant publication of Vertov's writings since, *Kino-Eye*, (Vertov et al., 1984).

Here Vertov's texts are re-contextualised within a commentary by Vertov scholar Aleksandr Deriabin, who like Tsivian, had brought much from the Vertov archive in Russian to the public domain throughout the 1990's. In 2006 Thomas Tode and Barbara Wurm presented the Austrian Museum's collection of Vertov materials,

⁵The first re-release of, *Man with a Movie Camera*, was made by Kino Video in 1996. This DVD included a commentary track by Yuri Tsivian and a score based on Vertov's "musical scenario" for the film by the Alloy Orchestra. Following releases featured scores by Michael Nyman, Ivan Smagghe, In the Nursery, and the Cinematic Orchestra.

(Tode et al., 2006), in a bi-lingual publication. The following year various essays were edited together in, *Vertov from Z to A*, (Ahwesh et al.), and the summer edition of the journal *October* collected a series of essays in an issue dedicated to ‘New Vertov Studies,’ (Mackay, Sarkisova, Simon, Tsivian, Turvey). Elizabeth Papazian in *Manufacturing Consent*, (2008), focuses heavily on Vertov’s role in defining an early Soviet documentary aesthetic.

Also central to my use of Vertov is the influence that the Bolshevik model of journalism had on revolutionary artistic practices. Brooks describes Bolshevik journalism as being distinct from Western journalism as, rather than being based on a principle of ‘objectively’ informing the public of the world’s events, it sought ‘to spark discussion, collect information, stimulate public criticism of selected malfeasance and [only] to a limited extent, satisfy readers’ demands for information,’ (1999 p. 6). The vision for the Bolshevik newspaper of Lenin himself was as a ‘propagandist, agitator and organiser,’ (Lenin, 1975 p. 22) and these qualities are apparent in political avant-garde film in varying degrees. Jeremy Hicks, in his book *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Form*, also explores how Bolshevik journalism influenced Vertov, in his development of, *Kino-Pravda*, ‘to subordinate the evidential power of newsreel to its discursive force,’ (2007b p. 9). This form of authorship, based on the Bolshevik journalistic model, was seen to influence many artist and theorists of this period.

The Realist Debate

Vertov’s writings on film were set within a theoretical context, provided by the Left Front of the Arts (LEF) group members such as Sergei Tretyakov and Viktor Shklovsky. This theoretical discourse was carried into Europe where it informed cultural debate throughout the 1930s. This following debate, situated mostly around a Berlin scene, and played out primarily between the pages of the Moscow journal, *Das Wort*, provided the theoretical backdrop for the European political avant-garde film movement. The debate was lead by a series of essays on realism and formalism by the leading Marxist philosopher and critic György Lukács, (1980). Through these texts Lukács developed the dominant conception of realism in this period. This is described

as authentic realism,⁶ as Lukács states that to be authentically Marxist, literature and art must depict the totality of reality, i.e. the reality of the individual within the wider social context, ([1938] 2010).

Brecht's notion of realism, that was nurtured within the development of his theory of epic theatre, shared much with Lukács' and began with a critique of the New Objectivity movement in art in his 1931 essay, *The Three Penny Lawsuit*, (Giles, 1997). Brecht is recorded as agreeing with Lukács' description of an authentic form of realism in this section of a text unpublished at the time:

'Even writers who are conscious of the fact that capitalism impoverishes, dehumanizes, mechanizes human beings, and who fight against it, seem to be part of the same process of impoverishment: for they too, in their writing, appear to be less concerned with elevating man, they rush him through events, treat his inner life as a *quantité négligeable* and so on. They too rationalize, as it were. They fall into line with the 'progress' of physics. They abandon strict causality and switch to statistical causality, by abandoning the individual man as a causal nexus and making statements only about large groups. [...] One can follow Lukács in all these observations and subscribe to his protests,' ([1938] 2010 p. 70-71).

Lukács' attack on Expressionism was rooted in the earlier Russian critique of modernism as formalist and his concept of realism proposed a fixed form. Brecht was forced to defend experimental forms present in his own work although he is also at times critical of modernist techniques, such as abstraction, as ends in themselves. It is over this point that Brecht's notion of authentic realism breaks with Lukács'. In his texts, *The Breadth and Variety of the Realist Mode of Writing*, ([1938] 2003a), and, *The Expressionism Debate*, ([1938] 2003b), Brecht contends that, if the Marxist adage that authenticity depends on form suiting content is upheld, then form must change if it is to suitably represent changing social realities.

Walter Benjamin was also essential to this debate. Benjamin could be seen to be directly influenced by Tretyakov's form of art termed Operativism in his essay, *Author as Producer*, ([1934] 1973). He also links the work of Vertov and Ivens in

⁶ The term authentic realism is not used by Lukács himself but he states that if 'a writer strives to represent reality as it truly is, [...] he is an authentic realist,' in describing a form of realism in, *Realism in the Balance*, ([1938] 2010).

relation to newsreel film in his essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ([1936] 1969), that discussed Brecht's epic theatre. Echoes of Lukács' and Brecht's definitions of realism can be heard in both of these essays as they can in Benjamin's text, *Critique of the New Objectivity*, (1996 p. 417). The discourse on aesthetics between Lukács, Brecht and Benjamin is extended to include Ernst Bloch's defence of Expressionism and Theodor Adorno's objection to Brecht's influence on Benjamin in, *Art and Politics*, (Jameson, 2010).

Further contribution to the description of realism can be found in the writings on film by an acquaintance of Lukács, Béla Balázs, (2010). In these writings Balázs is heavily critical of the political bias and superficiality of newsreel, ([1930] 2010a). This reflects a sentiment similarly voiced by the labour movement and worker's movement across Europe at the time, (Benn, [1929] 1980). Balázs' realism is not fully described in these early writings but they do share similar concerns later developed by Lukács and Brecht when he asserts that although '[e]conomic and political forces have no visible form and thus cannot simply be photographed for a newsreel. They can, however, be rendered visible,' ([1930] 2010b p. 154).

The Contemporary Debate

As it was for political avant-garde film, contemporary artists' film is produced to a backdrop of theoretical debate that centres on politics and aesthetics. As indicated earlier in this chapter when considering curatorial conceptions of contemporary artists' film these subjects were pushed to the fore following the events of 11th September, 2001. Like the realist debate this arena is fractious and varied in its camps. In his essay, *Documentary/Verité: bio-politics, human rights, and the figure of "truth" in contemporary art*, Enwezor observes a turn from former political ideologies, based in class struggle, to Ethics, within contemporary forms of 'political realism in artistic practices often associated with social reality,' (2008 p. 64).

Enwezor's main observation is that Human Rights has replaced a commitment to class struggle in defining the relationships within the political and cultural arena. Contemporary artists' interest in Ethics, according to Enwezor, functions as the uniting factor between the disparate sites of artistic engagement in socio-political

realities, once driven by the emancipatory political ideals of the 20th Century. The use and discourse of ethics within contemporary art is also understood as ‘a corrective to the excesses of the artistic absolute and disasters of visions of political utopia [of the past] - a set of norms that submit politics and art to the validity of their principles and the consequences of their practices,’ (Corcoran, 2010 p. 21), that conversely leads to the collapse of the political in art due to this submission.

The substitution of Ethics for Politics follows the paradigm shift in global politics and economics that occurred following the fall the Soviet Union that was accompanied by the rise of Neoliberal politics and free market economic globalism. Mouffe wryly describes this as a post-political vision where:

‘the ‘free world’ has triumphed over communism and, with the weakening of collective identities, a world ‘without enemies’ is now possible. Partisan conflicts are a thing of the past and consensus can now be obtained through dialogue. Thanks to globalisation and the universalization of liberal democracy, we can expect a cosmopolitan future bringing peace, prosperity and the implementation of human rights worldwide,’ (2005b p. 1).

In identifying the implementation of human rights worldwide Mouffe refers to a substitution of politics with a form of governance based in Ethics she describes as politics that is played out within a moral register:

‘In other words, it still consists in a we/they discrimination, but the we/they, instead of being defined with political categories, is now established in moral terms. In place of a struggle between ‘right and left’ we are faced with a struggle between ‘right and wrong,’ (2005b p. 5).

The work of three philosophers is central to a body of work that is critical of the post-political condition, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek. It is therefore the ideas of these three theorists that are central to my consideration contemporary artists’ film and video. Their reflections on political reality and its depiction, since the subject became pertinent with the events of 11th September, 2001, echoes the reflections of those engaged in the realist debate of the 1930s in the face of the rise of Fascism in the lead up to the Second World War. This is possible as both groups share a basis in Marxist theory to a greater or lesser extent. The contemporary theorists all

also mark a departure from post-structuralist thought that is accompanied by a materialist underpinning.

This ethical contingent is challenged within the contemporary examples considered in chapters 3 and 4. In these chapters I refer to Badiou's, *Ethics: an essay on the understanding of evil*, (Badiou, 2001), to consider the sublimation of political ideology to an ideology of Ethics. This process is also shown to be reversible through what Badiou describes as 'the real process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity produces in the situation,' (2001p. 42) i.e. the commitment to truth. Rancière also describes the effect of the process of ethical sublimation as an inversion of emancipatory politics, that once central to political art, now 'no longer links art's specificity to a future emancipation, but instead to an immemorial and never-ending catastrophe,' (2010 p. 200).

The reconsideration of materialism made by Žižek in his two most recent books, *The Parallax View*, (2006), and, *Absolute Recoil, towards a new foundation of dialectical materialism*, (Žižek, 2014a), are also central to my study of contemporary artists' film and video. In the former, Žižek revisits Marxist dialecticism reasserting the political potential of the subject within social reality as a form of consciousness that follows Lukács' description in, *History and class consciousness*, (Lukács et al., 1971). In the latter, Žižek extends this notion of consciousness towards a theory of materialist subjectivity, (2014a). Both of these materialist theories of reality are made in contrast to an emergent definition of materialism generally referred to as New Materialism.

New materialism is defined by a reconsideration of the materialist definition of reality as a distinction of subject versus object by challenging the conception of the material world as inert. The work of Bruno Latour, in particular, *Actor Network Theory*, (2005), that he developed with Michel Callon, shifts the ability to create social ties through the meaningful actions that shape reality from exclusively human endeavours to include the effects of non-human objects.

This is not only an expansion of what we can consider as creating the social ties that form reality, but also dispels inequalities between human and non-human actants, as 'any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor - or if

it has no figuration yet an actant,' (Latour, 2005 p. 71). A central characteristic or effect of Latour's theory, therefore, is that it de-centres the human subject and equalises the human within the wider network of relationships between things. This conception of reality, in its application in practice by contemporary artists, therefore constitutes a form of realism that contains aspects of authentic realism but that raises questions about its adjustment of one of its central concerns; the centralisation 'individual man as a causal nexus,' ([1938] 2010 p. 70-71).

Conclusion

This chapter begins by identifying a form of film practice within contemporary fine art that I collectively describe as contemporary transformative realism. From within this wide-ranging field of practice I have identified the work of Ursula Biemann and Renzo Martens as two artists that will form case studies for chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, respectively. Like all of the contemporary works that I have identified here, Biemann's video work originates in social realities, predominantly centred around the themes of migration and geographical borders. Biemann's films depict these current social realities as a network of relations or organised complexities. Though Biemann's work is not politically committed to a particular course of action, as is recognised by her, it does challenge the form of representation used by the news media in particular. Biemann's works, by presenting alternative forms of depiction of the same social realities depicted by the news media, therefore constitute a form of critique, that resists reducing reality to single images.

The second artist that I focus on, Martens, masquerades in his film as a journalist or documentary filmmaker in the field, but constructs his work along very different ethical codes to the journalists that he accompanies. Martens' work exposes the process of the construction of news and the relationship between the Western viewer and the subject of poverty in the Congo through journalism, aid and economics. The work does not articulate a specific political position in itself but in demonstrating that aid and journalistic intervention does not change the social reality of the Congolese does make a political gesture.

The work of these two artists is shown to reside within the context of art that is understood to have recently adopted documentary modes. This documentary turn within art was accompanied by a resurgence in subjects that originate in political and social realities following the attacks on the World Trade Centre on the 9th September, 2001, such as conflict, poverty and migration. The depiction of such realities has prominently included the critique within fine art practice, discourse and exhibition of the news media and photojournalistic practices. Theoretical reflection on the subject of the depiction of these realities within the news media has invoked Guy Debord's theory of the, *Society of the Spectacle*, ([1967] 1994), and the questions of a politically oppositional function or potential within art. The engagement of fine art in the depiction of social realities that are concurrently reported on in the news media, and fine arts engagement with the process of journalism through its critique, has also led to the consideration of art's journalistic function. This has been considered as a form of engagement with the process of reporting itself that is integral to the definition of journalism as well as fine art.

In this discourse around the relationship between fine art and consensual forms of media, such as news media and documentary film, it is recognised that this contentious relationship between the two dates back to the European modernist avant-garde movement of the 1930s. Closer examination of this relationship during this period reveals a very well established film practice within the Modernist avant-garde movement that opposed consensual forms of media, specifically newsreel and Greorsonian documentary. These can be traced back to an origin in Soviet avant-garde film through the work of Dziga Vertov. This is possible due to the recent publication of previously un-translated theoretical works by and relating to Vertov and the subsequent theoretical discourse that this produced.

This political form of avant-garde film practice was situated against a theoretical debate that discussed the relationship between politics and aesthetics and sought to devise an authentically Marxist form of realism. From this discursive field two main formal devices emerged, that of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement.

The contemporary works that I identify can also be seen to be situated against a theoretical backdrop that bears many similarities to the realist debate of the 1930s.

These include the discussion of art's political status and potential to engage with society. This has included redefinitions and reconsiderations of materialism and objective reality, that has also seen a resurgence in the use and reference to Marxist based theories in the consideration of reality (Žižek, 2014a) and its reflection in art (Ranciére, 2009a).

Chapter 2, Avant-Garde Transformative Realism

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I located the formal root of contemporary transformative realism in the avant-garde art movement, more specifically as reflections of current social realities in film, which I ground in the work of Dziga Vertov. Here, in chapter 2, I shall reinforce this grounding by defining characteristics of transformative realism as it is established and developed within Vertov's film practice and subsequently by European avant-garde filmmakers.

First I will consider how the event of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and subsequent development of Bolshevik Journalism propagated three defining characteristics of transformative realism. These can be seen in Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* films as a grounding in current reality, a commitment to fact and an ideological underpinning constructed through the depiction of reality as an ideologically structured form of knowledge. As an experimental form of newsreel, Vertov's, *Kino-Pravda*, films situate the origin of Vertov's work in the current social reality of the time in which they were produced. However, as these were developed into feature length films Vertov is shown to break away from a literal presentation of fact through the coupling of photo-realist documentation with a location in date, time and place that defines consensual forms of media.

Where consensual forms of media such as newsreel presented reality as a historically chronological sequence of events qualified by a date-time-place location, they claimed a form of objectivity that dismissed or denied politically ideological structuring (as they still tenaciously do). In contrast, Vertov develops a connection to the current political reality through the treatment of time in his work that is coupled with an ideologically persuasive structure fomented in, *Kino-Pravda*, and that runs through political avant-garde film.

The second half of this chapter looks specifically at works of transformative realism that followed Vertov's within European political avant-garde film. Here I identify, describe and develop in specific relation to their deployment in film, the two most

prominent formal devices that characterize this form: the visualisation of social relations or ‘social forces’ as it was referred to by Béla Balázs ([1930] 2010a p. 154) and estrangement. These provide a formal link to contemporary practice and the basis for the following chapters where I consider the visualisation of social relations in Biemann’s work in Chapter 3 and estrangement in Martens’ work in Chapter 4.

The device of the visualisation of social relations is shown to have been developed from Marx’s theory of ‘alienation [Entäußerung],’ ([1932] 1959 p. 29), and seeks to visualise social relations that constitute reality as a totality. Here I look specifically at the work of Henri Storck and Joris Ivens within the context of the leading theoretical discussion of this formal device in the writing of Gyorgy Lukács and Bertolt Brecht.

The formal device of estrangement is observed primarily in Luis Buñuel’s film, *Terre sans pain (Land Without Bread)*, (1936), as a formally reflexive device. The film itself, in its construction, appears actively aware of its own form but also propagates a consciousness within the viewer. This effect of ‘estrangement’ follows the definition made by Viktor Shklovsky in his book, *Theory of Prose*, ([1925] 1991 p.6). Brecht, following his introduction to Shklovsky’s idea by Sergei Tretyakov, (Robinson, 2008 p. 170-171), develops this definition into an active form of social consciousness within the viewer.

1917, Art Responds to a Historical Contingency

The redefinition of art in the USSR following the Bolshevik revolution, of October 1917, required that art reflect the new society of the revolutionary project. In line with the ideological force that was shaping the new Soviet avant-garde, artists adopted the Marxist-Leninist vision of historical reality as a form of objective truth that arose from historical materialist thought.

Bolshevik journalism was a crucial model of practice that was taken as a prompt by Soviet artists in their task of closing the gap between art and life i.e. the current historical reality. An article in the primary Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*, (1912-1991), written by Lenin himself suggested that journalists discuss less politics (presumably as matters of such had been decided by the revolution itself), included less intellectual

debate and be ‘Closer to life. [with] More attention to how the masses of workers and peasants *in fact* build something new in their everyday work. More *documentation* of just how *communist* this new is[...],’ (Lenin, 1918 cited in, Kenez, 1985 p. 49, original italics). These final sentences of Lenin’s article summarise qualities that are embodied in political avant-garde film as well as much of the Soviet avant-garde art movements: a connection to social reality (closer to life) a commitment to fact (in fact) and the reflection of a new, ideologically structured form of objective truth (*documentation* of just how *communist* this new is).

Lukács, in his essay, *Art and Objective Truth*, ([1954] 1970), couples a Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialist conception of being in relation to the material world, i.e. a theory of reality, with his conception of art as a form of realism. Here Lukács states that ‘[a]ny apprehension of the external world is nothing more than a reflection in consciousness of the world that exists independently of consciousness. This basic fact of the relationship of consciousness to being also serves, of course, for the artistic reflection of reality,’ ([1954] 1970 p. 25). According this definition, ideology as a projection of consciousness determines the form of objectivity and so the structure of knowledge, (Lukács et al., [1923] 1971, Lukács, [1954] 1970).

In a similar way, in striving for objectivity, early Soviet art became inexorably tied to the current social reality, of the revolution, through its task of the reflection of *that* historical reality as an ideologically structured form of knowledge, or *objective truth*. Vertov’s form of realism, in following this directive, strove to reflect the current historical moment as an ideologically structured form of knowledge that corresponded with the vision of the newly Soviet reality.

However, Vertov’s ambition to capture and reflect reality stemmed from before the revolution and led him to begin his career in newsreel film. Thomas Waugh recounts an interview with Alexander Lemberg where Lemberg states:

‘Vertov had been experimenting with the recording of sound. Using a Pathéphone he had attempted to record and edit street and factory noises. Meeting Lemberg at a “poet’s café” Vertov discovered that his ambition of capturing and editing reality could be better achieved through cinema. Lemberg,

a newsreel cameraman, agreed to teach Vertov the basics of the medium,' (Lemberg, 1965 cited in, Waugh, 1984 p. 6).

After a period of training and military service, Vertov moved into filmmaking through his employment with the first Soviet newsreel *Kino-Nedelia*, (1918-19). By Vertov's own admission *Kino-Nedelia*, 'was no different from other newsreels apart from the fact that the titles were Soviet,' ([1924] 1988 p. 112). This introduction to film through newsreel established the subject of Vertov's film practice as current events in the present tense and a commitment to depict the current historical reality as *objective truth*. This ambition to not only capture reality but also *edit* it stayed with him throughout his career.

What followed in the form of, *Kino-Pravda*, was much removed from conventional newsreel. Seth Feldman goes as far as to say that 'Kino-Pravda existed as a purely experimental venture in the cinematic interpretation of current event. The Cinema-Eye⁷ was given a free hand in constructing and reconstructing those images which news produced,' (1984 p. 16). Vertov was able to draw on journalistic resources for his creative endeavours as he also produced another more conventional newsreel series concurrently to *Kino-Pravda*, named *Gosknoklendar*.

In a speech to his Kinoks, the name given to the film workers that collaboratively produce the raw film material for *Kino-Pravda*, Vertov himself stated that *Kino-Pravda*, was on the one hand connected to the old newsreel yet on the other provided 'a contemporary mouthpiece of the Cine-Eyes,' ([1924] 1988 p. 112), indicating a much greater ambition for this new form than the conventions of newsreel to date.

Vertov's form of realism was based in the indexical potential of film to indicate fact. As Vertov states, by shooting every instant 'of life, shot un-staged, every individual frame shot *just as it is* in life with a hidden camera, "caught unawares," or by some other analogous technique – represents a fact recorded on film or a *film-fact* as we call

⁷ Vertov's name for his film form that followed, *Kino-Pravda*, and his network of film workers that capture the footage he used in his films. This is also referred to as Kino-Eye. The Cinema-Eye, according to Vertov, augmented human perception of the world with the mechanical eye, or camera, and the technique of film montage. These augmented powers of film were brought together to produce an heightened sense realism, a truer vision of life than was possible with the naked eye alone.

it,' ([1926] 1984 p. 57). Vertov's approach to fact represents a contradiction in all forms of realism i.e. that they are all based in mimesis. The requirement that early Soviet art forms be closer to life and represent the world *objectively* posed the problem that this always constituted a form of truth as opposed to fact. Vertov's filming techniques are an attempt to overcome this unresolvable schism.

A field manual that was written by Vertov, ([1924] 1988), and distributed to all 'Kinoks,' gives instructions for invisible camera techniques including instructions for hidden and open observation points, the natural and artificial diversion of a subject's attention and filming from a distance, in motion and from above. From the film-facts that were subsequently captured Vertov constructed what he termed 'film-objects,' ([1926] 1984 p. 57). For Vertov these film-facts were like building blocks, pieces of reality itself, and from these fragments *Kino-Pravda* was 'made from material just as a house is made from bricks. With bricks one can assemble an oven, a Kremlin wall, and many other things. From the filmed material one can build different film-things,' (Vertov, [1924] 1988 p. 113). However, the reflection of reality that Vertov constructed, like all forms of realism, was ideologically structured, persuasive in effect and therefore very different to the fact that he aspired to.

Jeremy Hicks attributes a politically persuasive effect of Vertov's early, *Kino-Pravda*, films to the influence of Bolshevik Journalism, (2007a pp. 8-9). Here he observes how a political argument is constructed in, *Kino-Pravda I*, (1922), that is achieved through a montage of film facts. In this film a causal link between two subjects, starving orphans and the wealth of the church, is fabricated through montage.

For Hicks there is a lack of continuity between these film facts throughout the episode: 'the children fed may not be the children starving, the confiscation of Church property may not have funded the soup kitchen,' (2007b p. 7). The fact that Vertov can get away without attributing to the independent subjects literally causal relationships could testify to the strength of belief in photography's indexical property as an indicator of actuality. However, the priority here for Vertov is clearly not to represent a causal and 'literal' chain of events. Vertov structures the film facts ideologically as a reflection in art of the world, as an objective truth. Hick's analysis is in terms of the evidential quality of the film. However, what Vertov reflects in film

is not a singular current event, as we may conventionally expect a newsreel to do, but a social reality; a state or status quo that the film also argues must not persist, thus justifying its own revolutionary solution.

Vertov's method would be for Lukács 'a correct theory of objectivity and of the reflection in consciousness of a reality existing independent of consciousness, a materialist, dialectic theory,' ([1954] 1970 p. 25). If we treat the montage as such, i.e. dialectically, we see we are presented with two film facts. The first is that there are children starving, the second that there are riches in the church. Through juxtaposition the suggestion is that the wealth be taken from the church to feed children, whether they are the same children or not, indicating a synthesis of the thesis (inequality through hunger) and antithesis (exclusivity of wealth).

The pearls of the church do not literally feed the children in the proceeding image but the synthesis of the two images create an ideologically based reflection of reality i.e. hunger is born out of exclusive wealth and the proposed action is that the starving children should be fed from the confiscation of such wealth. That *Kino-Pravda 1*, is not constructed of literally related subjects and that it does not relate to specific individuals (the starving children are un-accounted for) or event (both famine and dissolution of the Church are presented as general) the film's sense of argument is placed outside of any moral instruction.

Film Fact

In 1925, the Faktoviki (factualist), members of LEF, promoted the hybridization of the newspaper with literature to produce a 'literature of fact (literatura fakta) in response to a Communist Party Resolution on Literature published in the official Bolshevik newspaper, Pravda, that year, 'balancing tolerance for all literary groupings 'that can and will join the proletariat,' ' (Dickerman, 2006 pp. 136-37, cited in Papazian, 2008 p. 38). This response attempted to bring *art closer to life* (the life of the proletariat) by fixing on the present and avoiding past and future tenses, which required authorship and therefore the distortion of fact, which in doing so removed its objective potential.

Vertov also fulfilled this requirement, within art, that was bent towards the objective documentation of a current reality by party resolution. Vertov aspired to create a film-newspaper comprised of footage produced at a ‘lightning-fast turnover [...] a survey of the world every few hours,’ (Vertov, [1923] 1984a p. 33). This ideal aspired to overcome the problem of retaining a connection to the present by reflecting the present reality before it slipped into past tense, which was described as ‘newsreelness (khronikal’nost),’ (Papazian, 2008 p.75) . However, *Kino-Pravda*, was far from timely,⁸ mainly due to problems of resources, but also because of a lack of infrastructure and so another formal method of achieving newsreelness developed in *Kino-Pravda*.

In order to maintain newsreelness, Vertov worked around themes as opposed to events and avoided fictional structures and narrative. *Kino-Pravda*, was, according to Vertov, based in his ‘first experiments in collecting incidental frames into more or less ‘harmonious’ montage groups [one which was so successful he] began to doubt the need for a literary link between individual visual elements,’ (Vertov, [1924] 1988 p. 112). *Kino-Pravda*, relied heavily on inter-titles but as his works grew into ‘film-objects,’ (Vertov, [1926] 1984 p. 57), of feature length they became less reliant on literary links and to some of his peers consequently less connected *in fact* to any current reality. This echoed an earlier desire to create a form of film that was ‘Not the Pathé or Gaumont film newsreel (a newsreel chronicle) and not even *Kino-Pravda* (a political newsreel), but a real *Kinoks* [film-workers] newsreel – a headlong survey of visual events deciphered by the movie camera, pieces of real energy (not theatrical energy) reduced at intervals to an accumulator whole by the great mastery of Montage,’ (Vertov, [1923] 2004 p. 84). It was this desire to manipulate reality by decoupling film-facts from a literary base that drew criticism to the form of filmmaking that followed *Kino-Pravda*.

Viktor Shklovsky’s critique of Vertov’s first feature-length film to be produced following *Kino-Pravda*, *Shagai, Soviet! (Stride Soviet)*, (1926), a campaign film for the Moscow city council, recognises a break from newsreel’s claim of factual

⁸ Jay Leyda cites Talbot to note that the same problem was pervasive with early newsreels in Europe. These early newsreel were named Topicals but ‘[t]here was no attempt to serve up pictures to the public in ‘red hot’ condition,’ (Talbot, 1912 cited in, Leyda, 1964 p. 277).

objectivity in the discarding of literary links between shots that clashed with the LEF group's literature of fact. For Shklovsky, the meaning of newsreel in its indexical link to reality as factual document, 'lies in the date, the time, and the place. Newsreel without that is a card catalogue in the gutter,' ([1926] 2004 p. 170).

Vertov resists the accusations when he writes around the same time as Shklovsky's critique to say that 'The allegation is false that a fact taken from life, when recorded by the camera loses the right to be called a fact if its name, date, place, and number are not inscribed on the film,' ([1926] 1984 p. 57). Vertov conversely insists that it is his formal technique of photographing reality that authentically maintains a factual status, as life ' "caught unawares," or by some other analogous technique – represents a fact recorded on film-film, a film fact as we call it,' ([1926] 1984 p. 57). Instead, for Vertov, the recording of the date-time-place location functions, not as an indicator or authentication of the factual status of the document, but that this information 'represents cover documents, as it were, for the editor, a kind of guide to the correct "editing route," ' ([1926] 1984 p. 57).

Films of the Kino-Eye period, that followed *Kino-Pravda*, such as *Stride Soviet*, *The Eleventh Year*, (1928), *Man with Movie Camera*, (1929), and *Enthusiasm*, (1931), continued to develop a sense of realism without the 'narrativising tools of newsreel,' (Mackay, 2007 p. 51) and literal indexical link to reality provided by inter-titles. Instead of a sense of *this happened here* and *that happened there* the viewer experiences a sense of a constantly unfolding present, a connection to and constant invocation of the present moment. Emma Widdis puts this down to a replacement of a 'temporal axis with a spatialized axis [...] time [in Vertov's films] was removed from an historical narrative of past-present-future and placed in the present' (2003 p. 75).

Enthusiasm, when compared to, *Kino-Pravda I*, demonstrates the temporal-spatial shift that Widdis describes. Both begin with the subject of the dissolution of the church and the re-distribution of its wealth. Instead of being contrasted with starving children, images of the church are instead cut with footage of apparently destitute, drunken men. Instead of the static compilation of subjects in, *Kino-Pravda I*, *Enthusiasm*, is rich with movement, the church and all its embellishments imploding in a kaleidoscopic superimposition of shots.

Women with shrouded and shrunken faces kiss the feet of a statue of Christ repeatedly and in stark contrast a young female radio operator relays news of the events across the land.⁹ Her youth and style, a stark contrast to the aged and infirm drunks and pious old women, is representative of a new social reality. The worshipers' actions seem odd, archaic against this clean modern image of the young operator at the helm of a technological communication hub. As unbalanced images of drunks ranting and brawling are brought in, so too the devotions of the worshipers seem like drunken ravings. The form of realism constructed here is much changed from, *Kino-Pravda I*, which presents documents of reality to the viewer *in-fact*. *Enthusiasm*, by contrast, situates the viewer within a dynamically unfolding and very present reality.

In, *Enthusiasm*, there is no indicator of time, or date, instead a strong feeling of simultaneity is constructed visually. Church scenes are followed by people marching, which are then intercut with the radio operator listening in, suggesting that this is a live event unfolding as we watch. We see a giant carnivalesque effigy of a priest and it is revealed that the people are marching on the church. The energy of the film gives a sense of these events taking place at *this* very moment rather than one recently past. In contrast to the composed shots of civil servants pricing individual assets to be bureaucratically redistributed in, *Kino-Pravda I*, we see the entire church disassembled. The cross atop the building is torn down and a red star jumps in its place in a reverse shot of the facade. The revolutionary solution that is merely argued in, *Kino-Pravda I*, is delivered directly in, *Enthusiasm*, in front of the audience's eyes.

Enthusiasm, combines the essential qualities of Vertov's approach to the depiction of a current reality. Film facts are combined into an ideologically structured form of realism, simultaneously constructing an argument for this new reality. Together these form a *currency* that is central to political avant-garde film in both senses of the word, in its connection to the present through, not merely documentation but, the dynamic invocation of a present reality and as political collateral.

⁹ The radio operator indicates the second stage of Cine-Eye that Vertov termed Radio-Eye, (Tsivian, 2004 p. 340).

Visualisation of Social Relations

For Lukács the conception of reality was summed up in one question:

‘does the ‘closed integration’, the totality of the of the capitalist system, of bourgeois society, with its unity of economics and ideology, really form an objective whole, independent of consciousness?,’ ([1938] 2010 p.31).

For a truly orthodox form of Marxist aesthetics the answer must be yes, as Marx says ‘The relations of production of every society form a whole,’ (Marx, [1847] 1955 cited in, Lukács, [1938] 2010 p. 31). For Lukács reality consisted both of an extensive totality, everything in the material universe as the relations between them and an intensive reality, everything that made up human reality and the relations that determined their placement within it, a ‘closed integration,’ ([1938] 2010 p.31), that constituted society, (Pascal, 1970).

Lukács’ proposal for the correct reflection of reality, that followed his earlier development of Marx’s theory of reification, ([1923] 1971), therefore, determined that art formally depict the relations that make up society rather than their *reified* form:

‘If literature is a particular form by means of which objective reality is reflected, then it becomes of crucial importance for it to grasp that reality as it truly is, and not merely to confine itself to reproducing whatever manifests itself immediately on the surface,’ (Lukács, [1938] 2010 p. 33).

The film critic, Béla Balázs, acquainted and undoubtedly influenced by Lukács, observed the converse approach to realism in newsreels that ‘present reality in its unconstructed, impersonal form. This is, in other words, neither lyrical promenade nor private fate, but reportage. Yet what we are shown is not simply unvarnished reality,’ ([1930] 2010a p. 154). The suspicion in Balázs’ final statement here betrays his knowledge of the fact that despite the appearance this form of film, it *was* ideologically structured and politically motivated:

‘A diary of the age, then? What will historians learn about decisive events from this medley of images sporting activities, parades and catastrophes? *Social forces have no visible form,*’ ([1930] 2010a p. 154 my italics).

His final line here indicates an oppositional function of political avant-garde film. To depict ‘social forces’, as Balázs refers to them, where they are hidden in the construction of newsreel, is not only to contrast newsreel’s technique but also to stand ideologically against who and what they represent.

The parades and catastrophes of newsreel of the time, that Balázs questions, were usurped by Henri Storck’s film, *The History of the Unknown Soldier*, (1932), that compiled these images of actuality into a medley with a very different tone. The opening title, in a knowing qualification of fact, declared that:

‘This film is a montage of actualités (actuality films) of 1928, the year of the Briand-Kellog¹⁰ pact that declared war un-lawful,’ (Storck, 1932).

Storck’s prophetic vision gives visible form to the social relations that would lead to the outbreak of war, not apparent in the newsreels that it originated in.

To visualise social forces the film employs montage to deftly draw the viewer, through association, into a post First World War reality. Storck’s use of newsreel footage is reminiscent of Vertov’s montages in compiling film facts without priority for a time-date-place location.

The History of the Unknown Soldier, presents the viewer with men digging holes in a field, which in the following shot are trench shaped. The film then cuts to armistice-day mourners and when it returns to the trenches skeletons are being exhumed. The spectator is now in no doubt that they are the unknown soldiers to which the title of the film refers. Though the montage is simply executed the suggestion is not crude, or unconvincing. Like, *Kino-Pravda I*, there are no assurances as to the real connection of the content of the images as what is important is the semiotic construction of meaning.

The meaning is re-asserted with the image of a vicar throwing holly water followed again by a crowd. Skeletons are followed by flowers, flowers are followed by

¹⁰ The Briand-Kellog pact was a treaty signed by Germany France and the United States on August 27, 1928, and by most other nations soon after, in a promise not to use war to resolve international disputes.

mourners and again a skeleton. The meaning once constructed becomes set. The juxtapositions become bolder in their inference: a flag/a cannon/a battlefield/a cannon/a mille frank note/a boar is despatched/a funeral parade. The message: that nationalism leads to armament and war. The reason given: arms make money. The suggested outcome: the slaughter of men is returned with the pomp and posthumous splendour of public parades.

The History of the Unknown Soldier, is not staid in its affront. It invokes dynamistic movement characteristic of Vertov's treatment of space and time. This is achieved with archival footage, not only through rapid cuts, but also through the use of combinations of images that is often absurd despite the frank realism of the actuality footage. For example amongst the skeletons of the war dead is placed the grotesque grimace of an old woman that invokes the faces, distorted by poverty of the drunks, and old women who kiss the statue of Christ, in, *Enthusiasm*. Between the political speeches, and street celebrations a Chihuahua snaps, a cow bolts, a man is baptised and another man sleeps in the road. This absurd and surreal lucidity is pervasive from the start of the film which begins with an image of water shown from a boat, a couple by the sea, rocks and a volcanic crater covered in snow. The audience are transported from actuality to a parallel, 1928, as it is *in reality*.

The montage continues with the beneficiaries of war. The statesmen, generals, politicians, clergy, are all indicted as such through self-congratulation. A frenetic jubilation escalates between shots of street celebrations, military marches, clergy in full regalia, cannons being fired and politicians making speeches. Momentarily as if to symbolise that the war machine has been dismantled and the order restored we see now policemen where there were soldiers, men are rounded up in a city square and a factory chimney falls. The sense of peace, however, does not last long. The shot is reversed, the tower goes back up and the ultimate meaning is confirmed; that the pact is building armament, not abating its tragic and horrific outcome, war. We see Benito Mussolini gesticulate from a balcony and the Briand-Kellog pact is signed by applauding men amongst a public jubilation full of military swagger, and fated hypocrisy.

The last three shots sum up Storck's opinion of the subject most profoundly: an image of a public parade where men are trudging along in torrential rain is followed by a carnival parade of giant grotesque effigies of politicians, and finally a ceremonial deity urinates on a crowd from a classical stone altar.

The History of the Unknown Soldier, does rely on the investment of the audience in the shots being of a particular time, 1928, but it undermines a notion of fact and instead presents the viewer with an ideologically structured notion of reality that echoes Vertov's use of montage in, *Enthusiasm*. However, Storck's film is different in its acknowledgement of the irony of the Briand-Kellogg pact. It functions as a form of satire that disrupts the consensual basis of the newsreel of the day and contests its apparent origin in fact as well as its own. The film both constructs its own meaning and exposes the constructive nature of its opposite i.e. newsreel. *The History of the Unknown Soldier*, may be thought of as visualising what Balázs described as economic and political forces in his short text, *Views with Views*:

'[e]conomic and political forces have no visible form and thus cannot simply be photographed for a newsreel. They can, however, be rendered visible. In the montage of a documentary of true reality these forces make their appearance in the objects they move, just as the wind becomes visible in the swaying of the trees,' ([1930] 2010b p. 154).

The History of the Unknown Soldier, visualises social relations. It shows through montage the connection between, political speeches, nationalism and militarisation. The viewer is shown, not only that one leads to another, but society as a political reality, a network of relations that not only culminate in war but that enforce social hierarchy, poverty and ultimately the death of 9 million soldiers and 7 million civilians as was experienced in World War I.

The History of the Unknown Soldier, can therefore be seen not simply as an argument against war constructed from newsreel footage of 1928, or as only a satire ridiculing the Briand-Kellogg pact. By making-visible the social relations between isolated events of newsreel film, Storck's film constructed a form of realism that embodied a political subjectivity.

Newsreel in Europe relied on the documentary potential of photo-realism as fact authenticated by a date-time-place location to suggest political objectivity. In Europe, unlike the persuasive construction of political argument that is found in, *Kino-Pravda*, the construction of truth in newsreel occurred by the omission of fact.¹¹ To contest and even expose and oppose a consensual politics inherent in this form, political avant-garde film in Europe had to employ a different technique. This it did by visualising social relations through montage, and by doing so it revealed its Marxist origin.

The sense of *currency* in Vertov's work is at the core of European political avant-garde film. As Nichols observes, political realism has power to contest or affirm state, Vertov's work affirmed the State up to a point. However, the political economy of Europe provided a very different context. Vertov's films outside of the USSR were not affirmative of the state ideology, as they were in the Soviet Union. Whereas in the Dictatorship of the USSR Vertov's films reflected reality as a form of 'objective truth,' in the polarized and complex political reality of Europe such determinations could only be described as subjectivities. Vertov's films encountered harsh critique and state censorship in Europe as did the many other soviet films of the time.

This antagonistic tone within political avant-garde film could be understood in contrast to films endorsed by the dominant political force such as newsreel, ethnographic films and travelogues or those that affirmed the role of the State in public life, such as social documentary. This was confused by the fact that many of the political avant-garde filmmakers were members of the AEAR or Communist Party, and even under their subscription such as Joris Ivens.¹² Therefore, where political avant-garde filmmakers employed formal methods in opposition to newsreel as a form of consensual media, their films were also ideologically oppositional to the prevalent political ideology of the Western European states within which they practiced.

¹¹ See James Cameron speaking on the construction of truth by the omission of fact in the film, *Before Hindsight*, (Lewis, 1977).

¹² As documented in, *Living Dangerously: A Biography of Joris Ivens*, (Schoots, 2000 pp. 188-190).

Joris Ivens describes actively constructing this form of opposition out of newsreel film:

‘On Friday nights we would borrow a number of commercial newsreels. On Saturday we would study the material in the newsreels in relation to the international and national situation of the week, re-edit them,’ (1969 p. 96).

Ivens here explicitly acknowledges that the purpose of re-editing the newsreels was to give ‘them a clear political significance [by] showing relationships between events which newsreel companies never thought of, and which would certainly have shocked them if they had had ever seen our uses of their “innocent” material,’ (1969 p. 96).

In Ivens’ recollection we see an example of a spontaneous re-construction of newsreel footage to reflect the very current reality of that moment. A *lightening-fast* reflection of reality, as Vertov aspired to, that reconfigured the relationship between current events, from the arbitrary assortment of the newsreel companies to a persuasive form of argument tailored to that specific audience:

‘For Example, we could relate the injustice of American lynching with the aggression in Manchuria, making a general statement about injustice which we would then level with a current event in our own country,’ (Ivens, 1969 pp. 96-97).

Of course, due to the reassembly of the original newsreels following the screening of these films, according to Ivens,¹³ these montages no longer exist. We can see however a perfect example in the introduction to the film, *Misère au Borinage (Misery in Borinage)*, (1933b), that was collaboratively directed by Ivens and Storck.

Storck’s film and Ivens’ actions, by revealing an alternative reality, undermined newsreel’s sense of realism as a form of truth based in the indexical link to actuality provided by the photo-realist film image. As a form of truth rather than fact, newsreel

¹³ McLeod and Kuenzil in, *Cutting Across Media*, (2011 p. 109), and Böker in, *Facing Reality*, (1981 p. 22), both draw attention to the fact that Ivens’ account may not be entirely true according to the essay, *Workers Newsreels in the Netherlands (1930-1931)*, by Bert Hogenkamp, (1983). They attribute the action of re-editing newsreels to Ivens’ time at the Dutch association for popular Culture (VVVC) but not that newsreels were taken apart after every screening. As is noted this ‘mutes the transgressive romance created in the intensity of the production turnaround time but does not detract significantly from the oppositional nature of the practice,’ (McLeod et al., 2011 p. 109).

could therefore be understood as being ideologically structured. The opposition this posed between filmmakers such as Ivens and Storck to consensual forms of film such as newsreel was also pervasive within art theory. Brecht wrote at the time that:

‘The situation [in art and cinema] has become so complicated because the simple ‘reproduction of reality’ says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG¹⁴ reveals almost nothing about these institutions,’ ([1932] 2000 p. 164).

Like Lukács’ description of art as a reflection of ‘reality as it truly is, and not merely to confine itself to reproducing whatever manifests itself immediately on the surface,’ ([1938] 2010 p. 33), Brecht also recognised that art must visualise what was below the surface of reality when he said that ‘[t]he reification of human relations’ captured in an image of a factory ‘no longer discloses those relations,’ ([1932] 2000 pp. 164-65). Here Brecht suggests that art must not just acknowledge the constructive nature of consensual forms but formally oppose them with an alternative form of reflection when he states that ‘there is indeed ‘something to construct’, something ‘artificial’, ‘invented’ and hence there is in fact a need for art,’ ([1932] 2000 p. 165). Conversely the need for art here comes from the fact that any form of realism, including newsreel, is an abstraction of reality itself, it is a construction. This is connected to a political objective in, *The popular and the Realistic*, where Brecht states that ‘ ‘realist’ means: laying bare society’s causal network /showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators,’ (Brecht, [1938] 1964 p. 109).

Within art, expressionism and the newly objective style that followed stood in stark contrast to an authentically Marxist form of realism as described by Lukács and Brecht. Ivens’ earlier work displayed this pleasurable style that emphasised light, contrast and symmetry in films such as, *Die Brücke*, (1928), *Regen*, (1929), and, *Phillips Radio*, (1931). As if to illustrate Brecht’s comments, Ivens in his recollection of the filming of, *Phillips Radio*, states that when he attempted to interview the employees outside of their positions on the production line so as to set them within a wider social context he was prevented by the Philips Company:

¹⁴ Brecht refers here to the Krupp munitions works and the General Electric Company or Allgemeine Elektrizität-Gesellschaft (AEG), the two largest companies in Germany at the time of his writing.

‘When I felt that it would be useful to visit the home of the glass blower, or some other workman in the plant, to show his personal life and what he did with his salary, I was told that it could not be part of the film. The gates of the plant were the boundaries,’ (Ivens, 1969 p. 62).

The effect of this limitation placed on Ivens was that he reverted to his earlier style that focused not on the social content but on the technical potential of film to aesthetically enhance, as Lukács puts it ‘whatever manifests itself immediately on the surface,’ ([1938] 2010 p. 33):

‘Almost as a reaction to the restrictions placed upon the film’s social content by the Phillips Company – understandable from their point of view – I concentrated on achieving the highest technical perfection, polishing the camera work and exploiting every nuance of texture in the glass and metal surfaces of the factory,’ (Ivens, 1969 p. 63).

Ivens’ later collaboration with Storck, *Misery in Borinage*, took a very different approach to depicting the wage cuts, strikes, layoffs, and strategies for survival of the Borin miners. Ivens describes consciously avoiding the ‘danger of esthetic [sic] pleasure, lights and shadows, symmetry or balanced composition that would undermine,’ (1969 p. 88), the purpose of the film. Ivens actively avoided the picturesque, particularly in shooting the living quarters of the miners so that the images looked appalling rather than appealing, to the audience. Ivens here goes as far as to accuse some consensual forms of documentary of exoticising dirt, citing E. H. Anstey’s, *Housing Problems*, (1935), as an example (1969 p. 88 footnote). For Ivens, the filmmaker must be moved by the subject so that he or she may find a method of depiction that would invoke the same indignation in the audience. In contrast to the consensual form of documentary film, *Misery in Borinage*, Ivens ‘wanted the spectators of the finished film to want to do more than send these workers money. This film required a fighting point of view. It became a weapon, not just an interesting story about something that had happened,’ (Ivens, 1969 p. 89).

Ivens’ approach to filming poverty was not unique. A similar, grittier and indignant form of photo-realism can be seen in George Lacombe’s film, *La Zone*, (1928), that depicted the squalor that the Parisian rag-pickers worked amongst. Similarities

between *Misery in Borinage* and *Las Hurdes* are also noted in Eli Lotar's photographic depiction of 'prematurely aged faces, pauperized children, the contrast between the impoverished masses and the church, and so forth,' (Gubern et al., 2012 p. 172)¹⁵. Ivens' film was consequently openly criticised as being propagandist even by some of his peers. However, the control Ivens exerts over the photo-realist aesthetic, demonstrates a consciousness of its connection to a political perspective in relation to its subject.

In Ivens' and Storck's film then, we see exhaustive attempts to evade providing the spectator with the aesthetic pleasures of looking. Instead of an art of experience in the depiction of the surface of things we see a depiction of reality as a totality consisting of social relations that prioritizes political agency over claims of objectivity.

Estrangement

The second formal device that I have identified as being central to political avant-garde film is that of estrangement. This is first described by Shklovsky with the use of the word as *ostranenie*, meaning making strange when he states that by '“estranging” objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and “laborious.” The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest,' (Shklovsky, [1925] 1991 p. 8).

Historically, Brecht's definition of estrangement, referred to by him with the word *verfremdung* and initially translated by John Willetts as 'alienation effect,' (1964), has been considered as being developed separately from Shklovskian estrangement. As Douglas Robinson notes this has often been for ideological reasons where 'Brecht's *Verfremdung* is generally traced 'back to Shklovskyan *ostranenie* in the capitalist West and Hegelian and Marxist *Entfremdung*¹⁶ in the socialist East, specifically Hegel's dialectic of alienation as read by Marx,' (Robinson, 2008 p. 178).

¹⁵ Eli Lotar who acted as photographer for Buñuel on *Las Hurdes* was also well known independently as a photographer for his gruesome photographs published as *Abattoir (Slaughterhouse)*, in the Surrealist magazine *Documents*, (Bataille, 1929), that epitomized the anti-aesthetic of early Surrealism.

¹⁶ Marx's use of the word 'estrangement [*Entfremdung*],' can be found in, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ([1932] 1959 p. 29).

Shklovsky's theory has also been recorded as being introduced to Brecht with the word *verfremdung* by Sergei Tretyakov in a conversation held in the flat of the theatre director Bernhard Reich in Berlin.¹⁷ This suggests that Brecht was certainly aware of Shklovsky's theory whilst developing his own. However, as Stanley Mitchell describes, Brecht developed his estrangement device beyond the merely perceptual limits of Shklovsky's description:

'while Shklovsky's *ostranenie* was a purely aesthetic concept, concerned with renewal of perception, Brecht's *Verfremdung* had a social aim: if the world could be shown differently, i.e., as having different possibilities, could it not be differently made? Brecht wished to strike not merely at the perceptions, but at the consciousness of his spectators,' (Mitchell, 1974 p. 75).

With the use of the word estrangement in the consideration of this formal device I refer to it with its origin in Shklovsky's theory but with the aim of awakening within the viewer a consciousness of their social position, and therefore the potential to change social reality that Brecht empowered it with.

Brecht's definition of estrangement, being developed for the theatre, may not be directly applicable to political avant-garde film because of medium specificity, but we may understand its use within both mediums as an interruption in the continuity of form. If we look to Benjamin's consideration of epic theatre we find a direct connection to film in the montage technique when Benjamin states that:

'with the principle of interruption - the epic theatre adopts a technique which has become familiar to you in recent years through film and radio, photography and the press. I speak of the technique of montage, for montage interrupts the context into which it is inserted,' (Benjamin, [1934] 1973 p. 99).

As well as this connection parallels can also be drawn between the disciplines of theatre and film as in 1933 the International Workers Theatre Olympiad in Moscow called for the development of workers' films and film groups by Workers' Theatre Movements across Europe and America, (Hogenkamp, 1986 p. 80). Consequently,

¹⁷ Reich's memoirs that record's the conversation between Brecht and Tretyakov are quoted in an article by Stanley Mitchell that further establishes the link between Brecht and Shklovsky's theories of estrangement, (Mitchell, 1974 p. 80).

Brecht's theories could have been adopted by avant-garde filmmakers through the workers theatre movement if not directly through exposure to his theatre and writing.

Both forms describe life as having the effect of reducing experience, of reality, to recognition, an unconscious act that arises from over familiarity. Both forms also seek to de-familiarise the viewer from this perception of reality. This too could be said for the experience of reality through its mediation, as film¹⁸. Consensual forms of media during the avant-garde period, such as newsreel, ethnographic and social documentaries, and travelogues had become a familiar form that the cinema audience had begun to *recognise* according to their formal attributes, which triggered subconsciously an anticipated form of realism. This can be discerned at least in the fact that they were parodied and one such form of parody can be seen in the film, *Land Without Bread*, by Buñuel.

Buñuel's film takes the ethnographic film genre and exploits the expectation of the spectator to disrupt its coherency as a conventional sense of realism. *Land Without Bread*, also complicates the spectator's reception of it by undermining their preconceived notions of the ethnographic documentary/travelogue form.

However, this is not a straightforward form of parody that is seen in some films from this period. *Land Without Bread*, is more than simply a pastiche that mocks the travelogue form that would have been so familiar to Buñuel.¹⁹ The film begins true to convention with a map, indicating the route of the journey of the filmmakers to the Las Hurdes region of Spain. The film introduces the viewer to a people whose culture and existence is antiquated to the point that they resemble the strange tribal customs of the African people, the typical subject of the documentary films that it imitates. The people of the Hurdanos Bajos are introduced in the film whilst conducting a festival whereby the heads of suspended chickens are ripped off by passing horsemen, the barbarism of which is presented as if a tribal custom.

¹⁸ It is suggested that Shklovsky's theory was a response to the medium of film, (Robinson, 2008).

¹⁹ Gubern and Hammond present a comprehensive list of travelogues, produced out of Africa, which include, *Voyage au Congo*, (1927), by Marc Allégret, brother of Yves Allégret from whom it is reported that Buñuel inherited the idea for *Land Without Bread* from along with the camera and photographer Eli Lotar who accompanied Yves Allégret on an aborted expedition to Las Hurdes, to make a film on the same subject, in 1930, (2012 pp. 156-7).

As viewers we are assured, by Buñuel's commentary, of the spectator's rightful position as it relates to the subjects, outside of the reality of those who are 'unknown to the rest of the world, even in Spain,' (1936). However, as the spectator continues to travel deeper into the region, to the Hurdanos Altos, this position becomes very uncomfortable as they are entangled within the reality that the Subjects of the film endure.

Within the notes to his play, *Die Mutter*, Brecht states that the play 'makes nothing like such a free use as does the Aristotelian [form of theatre] of the passive empathy of the spectator,' (Brecht, [1933] 1964 p. 57). *Land Without Bread*, in the same manner, denies a passive or received notion of engagement with the reality that it reflects. Brecht, in his rejection of the use of empathy (Einfühlung), also refers to a process where the audience is prevented from identifying with the character on stage. Buñuel disallows the audience from identifying with the Subjects in his film as Brecht would the individual characters on stage, yet does not abandon empathy instead he uses the willingness or expectation of empathy in the audience and defiles it.

For example, we are told that the famine of the children is provided for in the form of daily bread given by the local school. However, any relief that this act of charity may bring is dissolved when we discover that the bread is prone to be stolen from the children by their parents. Even when this is prevented the children dip it in the filthy stream that runs through the village before eating it, which leads to mortal illness.

The film continues to reveal that the impoverished state of the Hurdanos' lives is similarly self-inflicted. The villagers create farming plots on infertile land rather than establish plots on the land that the fertile soil is transported from. The able men of the village leave the villages in a futile search for wages to buy food. Whilst they are away the crops are neglected and the villagers starve, a clear critique of capitalist labour. The plots, being too close to the stream, are flooded in winter and the cycle of failure begins again. Another example of these people's self-inflicted misery is given to the spectator when, whilst collecting fertiliser, a man is bitten by a snake. A regular and harmless occurrence, we are told, were it not for the villagers' attempts to cure it that lead to death.

The narrative infuses the film with such contradictions to the point of absurdity and the audience's investment in the authenticity of the report is goaded. At certain moments in the film its believability is stretched to the limit, such as when the narrator describes a woman clearly in old age as 'only 32 years old,' (Buñuel, 1936). In the following scene the crew find a young girl who appears to have been abandoned. Although she is clearly suffering from malnutrition, which is apparent from her assessment undertaken in full view of the camera, when they ask the mayor after her 'he says that the child has not moved for three days is complaining and must be killed,' (Buñuel, 1936).

In practice Buñuel's method is very different to Brecht's but if we think of the subjects in, *Land Without Bread*, as characters, they have after all been turned into caricatures by the narrative, it is apparent that we the audience are prevented from empathising with them in any conventional form. Active engagement with the subject is not achieved by the depiction of disturbing images that invoke sympathy or outrage; this would only act as affirmation of an existing sentiment towards the subject of poverty. It is achieved instead by the complication of this convention.

Brecht states that epic theatre 'relates differently to certain psychological effects [in the spectator], such as catharsis,' (Brecht, [1933] 1964 p. 57). So too, *Land Without Bread*, denies the spectator the cathartic experience of absolution of their responsibility for the Subjects on screen. The narrator, in a twist of convention, places the reason for the Hurdanos' plight, not onto the lack of any natural or civilised resources, but back onto the Subjects themselves. This has the effect of disrupting the anticipated relationship of the spectator with the Subjects depicted in the film. The position of the spectator, one of patronage, whether moral, charitable or class based is not affirmed by the film, instead the affirmation of their position is interrupted.

Social Contact

Walter Benjamin observes similarities between film montage, as it was used by avant-garde filmmakers to interrupt the continuity of realism that 'always works against creating an illusion among the audience,' (Benjamin, [1934] 1973 p. 99). However,

Buñuel's treatment of the Subjects of the film, the absurdity of the voiceover that interrupts the documentary realism of his travelogue, does more than simply prevent persistence of illusion among the audience. As Benjamin also observes in Brecht's Epic form of theatre it 'has an organizing function. It brings the action to a standstill in mid-course and thereby compels the spectator to take up a position towards the action, and the actor to take up a position towards his part,' (Benjamin, [1934] 1973 p. 100).

In the case of, *Land Without Bread*, it is the position that the film takes towards its subject that compels the spectator to take a position towards the social reality that is reflected before them. *Land Without Bread*, in this sense is a film that is aware, like the Chinese actor was for Brecht, of being watched. Where Brecht observes that the actor 'expresses his awareness of being watched [he recognises that this] immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusions. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place,' ([1936] 1964 p. 92).

As it is for the spectator of epic theatre, so to the audience of, *Land Without Bread*, does not have the privilege of being the unseen spectator of this event, a state of extreme poverty that persisted within the same society of which the audiences at the time were a part.²⁰ Buñuel like Brecht, therefore, attempts 'to teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude, directed towards changing the world. It must begin by making him adopt in the theatre a quite different attitude from what he is used to,' (Brecht, [1933] 1964 p. 57).

Buñuel had by the time of the making of the film left the Surrealist movement because, although committed to the Communist cause, he felt it had become isolated from the world at large and 'considered the majority of mankind contemptible or stupid,' (Aranda et al., 1975 p. 88). This critique of his peers' behaviour may account

²⁰ The film was originally intended, by Buñuel, to be critical of the ruling classes of the newly elected Spanish Republic Government, that allowed the negligence and poverty of the region that occurred under the monarchy to persist: 'the original 1934 commentary is much more radical than the definitive one and so reflects the original intention of the film as an AEAR [French association of revolutionary artists] shock item to denounce the shiftlessness of the bourgeois governments-including republican ones-that had kept the region in such a miserable state,' (Gubern et al., 2012 p. 176).

for the contempt that the narrative of the film holds for its subject the Hurdanos people; a form of irony that would not be missed by the privileged classes whose true beliefs the narrative set out to reflect.

Through such a configuration, though not referenced explicitly in the film, these people are also not absent. Buñuel, in what would become a career-long attack on bourgeois society, here condemns those that are not present in the film but who will ultimately make up its audience. The film therefore not only attempts to make the audience actively see, as opposed to recognise, its own form, as illusory, so that the spectator is conscious of the process of reflecting reality that the work of art performs, it also aspires to affect a change in the audience, so that they do not merely recognise their position in relation to the Subjects on screen, but become conscious of their position in society and the potential to actively transform it.

The film was funded through an anarchist named Ramon Acin. Acin had given Buñuel 20000 pesetas towards the film following a lottery win.²¹ According to John Baxter this was an unlikely rouse on behalf of the anarchists who would have ‘had much to gain from a film which highlighted conditions among the rural poor, where most of their power lay,’ (1994 p. 147). In its earlier incarnation as, *Las Hurdes*, (1933), Buñuel’s film therefore also sought to address a different audience in a very different social position to that of the bourgeoisie, that of the rural poor of Spain.

For this reason the film is recorded as having at least two voiceover transcripts to suite two different audiences. One written by Acin for the rural poor of Southern Spain and one written by Pierre Unik and Buñuel (Gubern et al., 2012 P. 172). There is a long history of the use of film by anarchist and libertarian groups going back to Cinema du’ Peuple in France whereby film projections functioned as the backdrop to political speeches, (Marinone, 2009 pp. 18-22).

Both Acin and Buñuel would have been aware of such performance lectures and early presentations of *Las Hurdes* took this form. Due to an early ban on the film by the

²¹ In his autobiography, *My Last Breath*, Buñuel writes that on talking to Ramón Ancin about the idea for the documentary that ‘Ancin said. “If I win the lottery, I’ll put up the money!” Sure enough, two month later, he won-and kept his word,’ (Buñuel, 1982 p. 138).

Spanish Embassy in Paris, Buñuel is recorded to have shown the film to small select audiences giving the voiceover himself, usually comprising of the cultural and social elite, (Gubern et al., 2012 pp. 173-175). One such screening, however, is recorded as having included Las Hurdes villagers, and it is suggested that the film, as well as being used to confront the bourgeoisie with the reality of poverty that *they* allowed to continue, also had the intention of politically rallying the peasant classes that it depicted, (Gubern et al., 2012 p. 175).

Jean Vigo, who like Buñuel's backers, was also a committed anarchist,²² describes the intention of his film, *À Propos de Nice*, by showing 'the last twitchings of a society that neglects its own responsibilities to the point of giving you nausea and making you an accomplice in a revolutionary solution,' (Barnouw, 1974 p. 76). This intent of inducing physical unease in the spectator is similar to the affect of, *Land Without Bread*, in that it denies any sense of redemption for the audience that would be permitted by a pleasant scene of a holiday resort typical of the newsreels of the day. This is achieved formally through montage. The continuity of the pleasant image of Nice, represented in shots of tourists promenading along the sea front or dozing in the summer sun is interrupted by images of leprous children and workers that wash and cook in the backstreets that lay behind the city's facade.

Brecht intended epic theatre to intervene in the process of shaping society by introducing the idea of a potential social *function* within his theatre and therefore art that worked as a triad in contrast to form and content. According to Robert Leach this took Brecht's theory of estrangement beyond Lukács' duality of form and content which was replaced 'by a triad of *content* (better described in Brecht's case by the formalist term 'material'), *form* (again the formalist term 'technique' is more useful here) *function*,' (1994 p. 130). The device of estrangement, as an interruption of continuity, for Brecht therefore does not only make the spectator aware of her position in relation to the actor, the work, or the social reality that it reflects but activates the spectator socially, 'serving as a means not only of pointing up something which a socialist realist play would flow over, but pointing it up in such a way as to energise the spectator, to stimulate her or him into an awareness of the possibility of

²² Vigo's political commitment can be attributed the influence of his anarchist father who died in prison under 'suspicious circumstances,' (Grant et al., 2009 p. 9).

change,' (Leach, 1994 p. 131).

Social function, as Brecht defined it, was central to political avant-garde film that can be understood as more than simply an agitational form of propaganda. Through Brecht's definition we can understand the device of estrangement as a process of making the spectator actively aware, not only of reality but also their social position within it and the transformative potential that that embodies.

Vigo attests to the complicity of consensual forms such as newsreel and what he termed social documentaries, epitomised by the Griersonian form, in sustaining the grievous conditions that they depict, when he states:

'Moving towards the social documentary would be consenting to exploit a whole mine of subjects that the current situation would endlessly keep renewing...,' (Veronneau, 1984 pp. 418-19).

Here he also connects the political subjectivity of the artist with the social function that it aspires to when he asserts that his film, as all political avant-garde film, is distinct 'from the mere documentary and from the weekly newsreel by the point of view that the author openly defends in it. This documentary, forces you to take a stand, for it dots the "i's." If it doesn't engage an artist, it engages people even less. The latter requires the former,' (Veronneau, 1984 pp. 418-19).

Benjamin, in a further description of this *function* of art, as termed by Brecht, recognizes this process of usurping consensual forms of realism, such as the ethnographic film or social documentary that Buñuel and Vigo's films demonstrate, by turning them into instruments of emancipation and hence where the term *transformative realism* is derived:

'Brecht has coined the phrase 'functional transformation' (Umfunktionierung) to describe the transformation of forms and instruments of production by a progressive intelligentsia - an intelligentsia interested in liberating the means of production and hence active in the class struggle. He was the first to address to the intellectuals the far-reaching demand that they should not supply the production apparatus without, at the same time, within the limits of the possible, changing that apparatus in the direction of Socialism, ' (Benjamin, [1934] 1973

p. 93).

Conclusion

Following the Bolshevik revolution newly Soviet art became connected to the present in its reflection of the new social reality of the Communist project. Vertov's experimental newsreel, *Kino-Pravda*, like many other of the Soviet avant-garde experiments combined methods of documenting life as closely as possible, with a form of ideological structuring, under the influence of a Bolshevik model of journalism. This constituted an ideologically structured form of knowledge, a form of 'objective truth' that reflected a dialectical materialist conception of reality that also corresponded with the configuration of Soviet politics.

In the development of, *Kino-Pravda*, into films of longer duration Vertov breaks from the conventions of newsreels of the time by decoupling his images from time and place indexes. This not only indicates a formal distinction, a departure from newsreel, but also a move from the indexical link of photo-realism to reality as an indication of fact, supported by the record of time and place, to the acknowledgement of film as a constructed form of truth. Where Shklovsky insisted that the indexical connection of photo-realist film to reality be supported by time and place records, Vertov maintained a sense of a connection to the present formally through his treatment of time and an ideological structuring that reflected the current *social* reality, which was epitomized in the film *Enthusiasm*.

The dynamism displayed in Vertov's use of time in his films and the use of montage to construct ideological meaning is later displayed in political avant-garde film in Europe. Storck in his compilation, *The History of the Unknown Soldier*, for example, takes newsreel footage and reconstructs it in a manner more reminiscent of *Kino-Pravda* than its original source. Here Storck also reflects reality not as isolated events as they are organised by the conventions of newsreel of the time, but as a network of social relations. *The History of the Unknown Soldier*, also, in contrast to newsreel's conventions, does not rely on date time to suggest fact but constructs an ideologically structured form of knowledge of the world; a form of truth that was confirmed with the tragic failure of the Briand-Kellogg pact that the film satirized. As a form of

contestation of newsreels' claim to objectively reflect reality in fact and due to the ideological basis of the formal device that Storck deploys in Marxist theory, Storck's film constitutes a form of political subjectivity that is oppositional to the dominant political power that is characteristic of European political avant-garde film.

Visualisation of Social Forces

Here Storck's film expresses political avant-garde film's transformational potential. This is best illustrated by Ivens' recollection of re-editing newsreels to change the ideological meaning of them, as it is a form of transformation of the means of production, or the transformation of a medium that produces an ideologically structured form of knowledge of reality. In revealing social reality as a network of social relations the device of the visualisation of social relations also shows the viewer to be at the causal nexus of that network. This is a process, therefore, not of becoming conscious of social reality but also conscious of one's own potential to change the configuration of relations of which it is made.

The device of the visualisation of social relations in film also went beyond montage and extended to aesthetic considerations. This took the form of an anti-aesthetic that opposed the form of realism labelled new objectivity. The film that is used to demonstrate this, *Misery in Borinage*, for example visualised the social relations that constituted the reality of unemployment and hunger through the manipulation of the economy. However, the aesthetic of the images also avoided the accentuation of a surface reality that was identified by both Brecht and Lukács as preventing the viewer from perceiving a deeper reality inherent in the relationships that constituted society.

The use of montage, the restructuring of newsreel, and the connection of seemingly unrelated events and situations, showed the viewer of political avant-garde film social reality as a network of inter-related forces that were ideologically configured by the dominant political powers of the day.

Estrangement

Here I discussed how Buñuel's film, *Land Without Bread*, affects within the audience a sense of estrangement that follows Shklovsky's theory. The process of perception is interrupted and the spectator of the film becomes consciously aware that what they are perceiving is a mediated form of reality. The viewer sees the social reality that it depicts rather than simply recognising it as they would in consensual forms such as the ethnographic film or travelogue that, *Land Without Bread*, parodies. However, if we look to the film's backing, the conditions of the exhibition and consider the audience that it targeted it is possible to discern an aim that can be described according to Brecht's theory of estrangement as social function, which is also the affect in the viewer, of becoming conscious of their positions within the political reality that is being depicted.

In both of these devices, the visualisation of social relations and estrangement, the location of the individual as central to the network of social relation then is not a passive position. Both devices place the viewer at the centre of the social reality that they reflect, and makes them conscious of the potential that social positions holds in shaping society. In the case of both formal devices we also see examples of avant-garde filmmakers taking consensual forms of media and transforming them. In doing so the form of reality that is reflected by them is interrupted and their ideological structure, as a form of knowledge of that reality, is reconfigured. Avant-garde transformative realism therefore opposes the consensual media as it is a form of disruption, a doubling back, an active process of the liberation of the means of production of knowledge of reality that turns it on itself. It is also a form of realism that stands in opposition to consensual media as an independent form as it can be defined as characteristically art, following a Shklovskian definition.

Chapter 3, Biemann – The Visualisation of Social Relations

Introduction

In an apparent move away from the subject of migration, the two recent works that form the focus of this chapter, *Egyptian Chemistry*, (Biemann, 2012), and, *Deep Weather*, (Biemann, 2013a), focus on the materials water and oil. These forms of matter are placed within the context of politics and ecology through a connection to a changing social and environmental reality. Both films follow a similar methodological approach and a formally oppositional stance in relation to consensual forms of media in depicting current political, social and ecological situations. However, these works also display a different theoretical approach whereby Biemann seeks to redefine reality as the causal relations between material objects as well as the human relations that were central to her earlier works. This newly orientated and non-anthropocentric reflection of reality is shared by a group of theorists, scientists and artists in the context of a collaborative research project titled, *World of Matter*, within which the works have been exhibited, (Biemann, 2013b).²³

In this chapter I will look at, *Deep Weather*, and, *Egyptian Chemistry*, independently but the observations made in each case should be applicable to both works. I begin by considering, *Deep Weather*, as a reflection of a dialectically composed reality, as the avant-garde works that I consider in the previous chapter are theoretically informed by dialectical materialism. *Deep Weather*, suggests an elementary dialecticism by opposing the insoluble materials of oil and water and the geographical perspectives of East and West in its depiction of the extraction of natural resources and its effects in the form of climate change. I will question the conception of reality in respect of Biemann's stated intention of de-centring the human and try to understand the effects of this new approach on the ideological structure of the work. This leads to a further consideration of the work's relationship to the consensual forms that it sets out to critique.

²³ The *World of Matter* exhibition took place at Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund, Germany, between 1st March and 22nd June, 2014.

I continue this enquiry into my consideration of, *Egyptian Chemistry*. Here Biemann appears to attempt to objectively structure the work, which I question as it does not acknowledge the political effects of causal relations whether enacted by humans or material objects. How Biemann depicts water as an actor in constructing this reality, and the political status of the work, is tested in respect of Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) that Biemann identifies as being a central theoretical influence.

A World of Matter

Deep Weather, and, *Egyptian Chemistry*, were exhibited in 2014 alongside each other as part of the, *World of Matter*, exhibition at Hartware MedienKunstVerein. As the title of the exhibition suggests the wider, *World of Matter*, project was aimed at reflecting a predominantly material reality. The stated aim of this focus on materiality was to redefine forms of matter, otherwise described as resources, to place them outside of capitalist interests in response to an increase in their perceived significance in the face of climate change and increasing privatisation, (Bethônico, 2013). This process of redefinition also aspired to a conception of matter as an active participant in the definition of reality, that draws heavily on Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT), (2005).

Here Latour shifts the ability to create social relations, or ties as he refers to them, from exclusively human actors to include the influence of non-humans as actors.²⁴ This is not only an expansion of what we can consider as creating the social ties that form reality but also dispels inequalities between human and non-human actors, as 'any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor,' (Latour, 2005 p. 71).

This shift is echoed in the stated aim of both the, *World of Matter*, project and the theoretical basis of Biemann's work²⁵ that both seek to 'de-centre such

²⁴ For fuller definition see, *The type of actors at work should be increased*, and, *Making objects participants in the course of action in Reassembling the Social*, (Latour, 2005 pp. 64-74).

²⁵ Biemann comments on the theoretical influence that underpins *Egyptian Chemistry* stating: 'As my research on water systems entangled my thinking with the metaphysics of Bruno Latour and Graham Harman, the quantum physics of Karen Barad, and other chemical and ecological theories[...],' (Biemann, 2014 p. 50).

anthropocentric perspectives,' (Bethônico, 2013 p. 11). This is also expressed by Biemann as a 'the shift from a focus on subject-oriented (feminist) philosophy to geophilosophy with the question of how this decentred human figures in this new mix,' (See Appendix 1).

The social relations that Joris Ivens and Henry Storck visualised enforced hierarchies, inequalities and material distributions that structured society. The objective of the device of the visualisation of social relationships was to make visible the invisible, the visualisation of the process of reification of labour into objects as commodities being the beginning of this process. However, these objects were not thought to be inert in the definition made by Marx. Marx attributed these with a social force independent of the worker, whose labour in becoming an object is not only externalized but 'becomes a power on its own confronting him [the worker],' ([1932] 1959 p. 29). Lukács in his interpretation of Marx's text on alienation, describes a wider system of objects: 'a world of objects and relations between things [that] springs into being (the world of commodities and their movements on the market),' ([1923] 1971 p. 87).

The social reality that was depicted by political avant-garde film was a world of objects infused with social force. The film, *Prix et Profits (The Potato)*, (1932a), by Yves Allégret, for example, aptly depicts the forces enacted by one such object, the potato, its movement on the market and its power as a commodity over the human subjects of the film. Its passage is depicted, from being planted, harvested and sold by the farmer at such a low price it does not provide a living for his family, to being passed through the hands of various traders who increase its price to make a profit from its sale. The increased price of the potato finally impacts on a working family who subsequently cannot afford enough potatoes to feed themselves. At this point the father of the family becomes socially conscious, aware of the potential that his position within society holds, when he exclaims 'we must remove them,' (Allégret, 1932a) referring to the profiteering traders.

Latour asserts that modernist social sciences have nullified the forces of objects by abandoning them to the 'hard' scientists and engineers, (2005 p. 84). Society is defined instead only within the terms of a 'symbolic order,' (2005 p. 83). Latour's theory is not a simple return to Marxian materialism but Latour does clearly state a

political basis for the reversal of the stripping of material agency from sociological definitions of reality in that it ‘voids the appeals to power relations and social inequalities of any real significance,’ (Latour, 2005 p. 85).

For Latour therefore, matter remains ‘a highly politicized interpretation of causality,’ (2005 p. 76), a political stance that needs to be considered in the shift in Biemann’s work from a ‘subject-orientated’ to a ‘non-anthropocentric’ perspective. This move in Biemann’s work could be understood in similar terms to Latour’s stated intention, as a retort to the symbolic order, that in recognising the materiality of reality re-establishes a transformative agency, an ability to appeal to power relations and social inequalities that form the objective reality of society; an emancipatory potential that the work of the political avant-garde filmmakers possessed.

Deep Weather, Establishing a Dialectic Reality

In depicting the global effects of tar sands extraction, oceanic warming and environmental displacement Biemann presents the viewer with a dialectically composed image of reality in her video installation, *Deep Weather*. That is to say that Biemann does not only suggest that there are two sides to such an image, but that each side both opposes and completes the other. This is not a simple unity of polarities but is defined by a tension between the two sides, a gap that is designated by the word ‘parallax’ by Žižek, (2006 p. 7). The two parallax images of reality are irreconcilable and therefore lead towards an inevitable tipping point, a shift in the conditions of reality that has otherwise been described as an ‘event,’ (Badiou, 2005).

The opening sequence of, *Deep Weather*, presents the viewer satellite images that establish an extreme perspective of the Athabasca tar sands in Alberta, Canada. These images depict a landscape that is deeply scarred by the sparsely placed industrial machinery that populates it. The scale of the black waste that is opened up across the land to extract its tar exceeds the frame of the images despite their distanced viewpoint. It is clear, due to the scale of the organization and resources employed, that the extreme transformation of the landscape in these images is a human or unnatural event.

From this mechanised and industrialized landscape Biemann's film cuts to a seascape. Here, the land that meets the sea is populated by literally countless people. It is they, not the land that exceed the frame in these images. Where the surface of the land was removed to reveal the black open cast mines of Athabasca in the previous sequence of images, in Bangladesh, stark white earth filled sacks are dumped at the sea front to reclaim the land that has been lost to a rising sea level. These images are opposed as much by the conditions of their content as they are by their geographical distance. They present two realities, however, that are so entwined by their opposition that they are at a breaking point. The extraction and burning of oil produces the reality of ecological crisis yet this crisis is unsustainable. They are bound by an irreconcilable unity that must inevitably lead to a shift in the condition of reality through human determination or eventual ecological cataclysm. However, this breaking point does not come and the work does not lead to a course of action.

Despite the finitude of oil extraction and the unsustainability of the Bangladeshi's situation, Biemann describes the actions of the Bangladeshis' in the video through text that is accompanied by a voiceover, as 'self-organised humanitarian landscaping *in tune* with the melting Himalayan ice fields rising planetary sea levels and extreme weather events,' (Biemann, 2013a, my italics).

This suggested harmony grates against the reality of the desperate actions of the Bangladeshis, that environmental change has force them to take. This is a current situation the video further suggests will increase as more people are forced to live on water. The final lines of voiceover and text in the video do offer a conclusion to the continuing ecological crisis caused:

'These are the measures taken by populations who increasingly have to live on water when large parts of Bangla will be submerged and water is declared a territory of citizenship,' (Biemann, 2013a).

However, this indicates in effect a perpetuation of the same current situation. The change in the tense of the sentence, from present to future, infers a conflation of the current situation with the inevitability of its persistence. The sentence implies that 'this is the inevitable future now,' rather than stating 'this present situation cannot be

sustained' or 'a better reality is possible'. The unsustainability of the Bangladeshi reality, that is pushed ever closer to collapse by actions such as the mining of the tar sands in Canada, is apparent. Despite this Biemann depicts the reality of the situation as balanced or constant regardless of the parallax at the centre of this reality, a tension that both holds the two irreconcilable sides together and also acts as a gap forcing them apart.

Deep Weather, therefore, constitutes a naïve form of dialectical materialism, as it is a passive mirroring or reflecting of objective reality. Lukács states that any 'apprehension of the external [objective] world is nothing more than a reflection in consciousness of the world that exists independently of consciousness,' ([1954] 1970 p. 25). This serves also, according to Lukács, for the artistic reflection of reality. However, Lukács definition of 'consciousness' as it is described in, *History and Class Consciousness*, ([1923] 1971), as Žižek points out, is not simply defined as being conscious (of objective reality) but a process of 'becoming-conscious of one's concrete social position and its revolutionary potential,' (2006 p. 6) and is itself therefore transformative.

Within political avant-garde film the irreconcilable reality of society, which is revealed through the visualisation of social relations, must inevitably lead to a newly configured set of relations. This is the ideological underpinning that defines political avant-garde film's revolutionary potential. This does not occur within the film itself but in its affect in the viewer through the process of 'becoming conscious,' (Lukács et al., 1971). Political avant-garde film appeals to this transformative affect in the viewer, as in addressing the audience it is itself socially aware. It is aware of the social context that it originates in and appeals to the social conscience of the audience, seeking to transform them through a similar process of 'becoming-conscious' and in this new state of consciousness reconfigure society.

Such an appeal to a transformation in the viewer may be observed in the opening montage of Ivens and Storck's film, *Misery in Borinage*, that similarly to, *Deep Weather*, visualises a causal chain of social relations that lead to an irreconcilable social reality. These opening shots are accompanied by subtitles that describe their content in sequence:

‘Factories are closed, abandoned... and millions of the proletariat go hungry. Capitalists make nothing on coffee, wheat and milk so destroy foodstuffs, denied to millions of the unemployed. The present economic system is in a state of anarchy. Wisconsin USA: Coffee is thrown into the sea. Corn is being burned. Miners revolt, Ambridge Pennsylvania, 1933. Police dressed as civilians, armed with guns provoke a fight,’ (Ivens, 1933b).

These textual descriptions reflect the visual construction of causal links that are produced by human action such as unemployment, hunger, destruction of food, revolt and its suppression by undercover police. This montage presents a political reality in visualising the connection between hunger and the destruction of food to raise prices. These two opposing situations, the fact of widespread hunger and the wanton destruction of food, contrast each other yet are fatefully linked, just as the displacement of environmental migrants in Biemann’s video is linked to the mining of the Canadian landscape that contributes to that inevitability. The heterogeneously compelled sides of neither realities, Ivens and Storcks’ nor Biemann’s, can be reconciled and tip towards an inevitable response, yet in the work of the latter is not delivered. *Deep Weather*, despite transforming a consensual form of media, lacks this politically transformative potential in presenting the Bangladeshis as the tragic yet logical end of the chain of fossil fuel extraction.

Ethical Reality

The social relations that Ivens and Stork visualise such as unemployment, the manipulation of the food markets, etc., are structured according to a political ideology. The structure of the relations that make up society are organised by politics. Biemann’s film, in describing a non-anthropocentric reality, is based in material transformation, the transformation of the earth through oil extraction, the transformation of the atmosphere through the burning of fossil fuels. However, these transformations have a social impact, just as the burning of wheat does as it is depicted in the opening of *Misery in Borinage*. We must ask therefore how the relationships that Biemann depicts are structured, if we are to discern how her work is ideologically composed and ascertain its political potential as described above.

The Alberta tar sands are mined, oil is extracted and its consumption raises global temperatures. Extreme tropical weather and a swollen sea level consume the Bangladeshi coastline. This is a similar causal chain to that constructed in the opening sequence to, *Misery in Borinage*. It starts from an extremely distanced perspective showing the oil tar extraction from the position of orbital satellites as an extensive industrial and mechanised process. Accompanying these images is a voiceover mirrored in surtitles that describes the desolating effects of tar extraction on the landscape. This region of Canada is described as hostile, unfit to sustain life, is de-anthroposized. The voiceover then materially connects the oil tar extraction with the following location when the reader states:

‘For a hundred more years there is enough stuff here for heavy fuel that will bring toxic clouds over the boreal woods and continue and swell the seas. No longer to be witnessed but elsewhere in equatorial zones,’ (Biemann, 2013a).

Here the film progresses to Bangladesh, and in contrast to the depopulated Canadian landscape, shows the hundreds of people in wide distanced shots then closer as full body-length video portraits.

The Bangladeshi people are presented as victims of the proceeds of oil extraction, subject to material processes and natural forces not social relations. Biemann doesn’t construct social relations, there are not political and economic agencies at work here, but materially causal relations. A sense of the Bangladeshi’s vulnerability is constructed by the voiceover that describes the inadequacy of the coastal alarm system set up to alert the inhabitants of coming storms. The consequence being that ‘[p]opulations along coastal areas drown in their sleep [as the] signals were muffled and came too late,’ (Biemann, 2013a).

These words are displayed down one side of the screen, as a full-length portrait of a Bangladeshi worker stands motionless and speechless in a separate frame, split by a soft montage, adjacent to the text that the voiceover whispers. The intention of the whispering and the prostration of the Bangladeshi worker are not immediately evident but the effect, a reduction of the subject to the status of victim, is clearly discernable.

There is a shift from politics to ethics here that has been enacted by the decentring of the individual as the socially causal nexus. Voiceless and standing at the will of the artist for the scrutiny of the viewer, the worker is disempowered but for the fact that she remains standing, despite the effects of the storms that took the lives, presumably, of her friends and relations. She stands, therefore, as what Badiou terms a 'being-for-death,' (2001 p. 12). This is a being whose existence resists a corporeal mortality alone, an animal being that is in contrast to a human being. The human is a being who resists, not only a corporeal death, but also being changed into something other than that which she is, that which she stands *for*, an ideological being and anything other than victim. The worker that is portrayed in Biemann's film does not stand for herself, for who she is, as her identity, what she stands *for*, is not represented. The ideological basis of the work in Ethics designates the worker as victim as she is portrayed resisting only death and is not able to remain being *herself*, i.e. anything other than a victim of circumstance.

The Ethical basis of the work conditions the outcome of the causal chain of relations that Biemann visualises in the work, as it is suggested that the Bangladeshis are the victims located at the logical conclusion of this process. If this is the case then there must be a perpetrator, an origin that, like the conclusion, resides in human action. However, the beginning of the chain of images that leads to the Bangladeshi's situation originates in the distanced images of oil extraction and the patrons of this originating act remain oblique. The miners are simply referred to as 'they,' (2013a), and no particular mining company is named. At the final end of the causal chain the portraits of the Bangladeshis stand roughly life size in the installation space and the spectator is confronted with their images face to face. The patrons of the Bangladeshis' situation then, are not the mining companies operating in the opening images or the miners themselves, but the spectator as she stands in the gallery space confronted by the Bangladeshi worker who stands against the inevitability of another tragic storm.

The consumers of the oil products who are also the consumers of the images of the victims of climate change are confronted by their own culpability in this reality. They are confronted by the denied reality that they do not wish to see because they know they are responsible for it. However, as a spectator of these images, of this reality, the

feeling that is affected is not transformative. What is lacking is the appeal to the audience to reconfigure the reality that stands before them. The audience is ethically aware of their position in relation to the Bangladeshi worker but not socially conscious. The video appeals to the viewer to intervene in the condition of the subject as she stands victim to the situation, not the situation itself, the relationship between them. It does not elicit the revolutionary potential of avant-garde film as it does not appeal to the viewer to act, in the case of, *Misery in Borinage*, to strike in resistance to irreconcilable reality, but rescinds the transformative potential with an experience of injustice, of the ethical unacceptability of the reality that is depicted.

Political Futility in the Symbolic Domain

The ethical basis of the relationship between the victim of ecological crisis and the consumer of oil based products acts as an emphatic panacea sublimating political action, as a form of response, to the sympathising judgement of the spectator. This reflects a very contemporary situation that citizens of Western Industrialised nations find themselves in. The seeming inability to reconfigure social relations when faced with the doleful task of recognising one's own culpability through these relationships to individuals, such as those depicted in *Deep Weather*.

This can be understood as being induced by the apparent ineffectuality of attempts, whether individual or in the form of collective political action, to change such relationships. Nature is a sublime and powerful force that is extremely difficult if at all possible to physically resist, as we see in the images of Bangladeshi workers constructing coastal barriers. Ecological change can only be affected by a transformation of industrialised societies so great that they would themselves emerge beyond recognition. Gestures by individuals of industrialised societies in changing their lifestyle habits are therefore unavailing within existing systems. Latour refers to an analogy made by James Lovelock between the war and climate change in his book, *The Revenge of Gaia*, (2006), to express the apparent futility of action in the fight against climate change whereby 'if we win we lose and if we lose against her [nature], well, we lose too!', (Latour, 2011 p. 5).

The apparent inability to change the current reality also persists within the political domain. This has been demonstrated in the ineffectuality of the biggest demonstrations in history, that have changed nothing in these societies in the face of international trade agreements, such as the World Trade Organisation demonstrations in Seattle in 1999, illegal wars, such as the Iraq War demonstrations of 2003, or economic inequality, such as the Occupy movement that began in 2011.

European political avant-garde film, as discussed in the previous chapter, constituted a form of resistance to a prevailing ideological status quo by appealing to a political reality outside of its own social and national boundaries i.e. it appealed to Marxist-Leninism.²⁶ The political futility of *Deep Weather* resides, not simply in the effect of a sublimation of politics to Ethics. It resides in the fact that it cannot appeal a reality beyond that which it reflects. It cannot appeal to an exterior ideological body, or reality beyond that which is reflected in the work. It cannot appeal to a reality beyond that of global energy production and consumption i.e. global consumerism, any more than it can appeal to an outside of climate change i.e. nature.²⁷

However, *Deep Weather*, does constitute a form of resistance to a prevailing reality, as do many other works by Biemann. Just as political avant-garde film resisted the political realities of capitalism and fascism, *Deep Weather*, resists the reality of global oil consumption and subsequent environmental crisis by depicting it through a critical process.

Jacque Rancière identifies the use of a dialectical approach to the depiction of reality in contemporary fine art and describes the lack of political determination as a disconnection from an 'horizon of emancipation,' (2009a p. 32). For Rancière all forms of emancipation affect a change in the social configuration of relations that lead to 'the dismantling of the old distribution of what could be seen, thought and done,' (2009a p. 47). Like Biemann's, *Deep Weather*, the contemporary work Rancière

²⁶ As is recognised in Chapter 2, where many of the filmmakers discussed were members of the AEAR or Communist Parties in Europe.

²⁷ However we may see that the two are becoming intrinsically linked if we look to publications such as, *This Changes Everything*, (Klein, 2014).

considers²⁸ employs the same formal technique of visualising the social relations that constitute society as a heterogeneously composed reality and constitute what he terms a ‘critical procedure,’ (2009b p. 29).

Rancière describes a moral effect that is central to this critical procedure. The first requisite of this is recognised as the visualisation of a reality that the spectator does not know how to see. This is a reality that is constructed of social relations that are not apparent as they are hidden through a process of reification. Rancière also identifies a second reality that emerges in the process of visualisation ‘the obvious reality that you [the spectator] do not want to see because you know you are responsible for it,’ (2009a p. 27).

Deep Weather, fulfils both of these requisites. Firstly it shows the audience what they do not know how to see by connecting the Athabasca tar sands with the people on the other side of this reality, the Bangladeshis in the case of this work. In doing so Biemann also fulfils the second requisite in succeeding to confront the viewer with a reality that she denies herself, making her ashamed of what she does not want to see; her own connection to these people. This is a connection to other humans that we habitually deny ourselves recognition of, at least when we consume oil derived products in our daily lives.

This device therefore constructs a causal chain, two points of social relation, between the spectator and the subject, the Bangladeshi people desperately attempting to curtail the advancing sea. However, without committing to a course of political action the work only resists this reality within a symbolic or visual domain i.e. it does not resist the material reality of global oil consumption and environmental crisis, but the representation of such realities within the consensual domain of news media and the oil industry. The news media displays images of climate change in isolation, as a reified form of our actions in consuming oil. *Deep Weather* resists this form of depiction by reconnecting images of environmental crisis with images of oil, just as Ivens and Storck reconnected newsreel footage of images of unemployment and hunger with the manipulation of the food markets.

²⁸ Rancière focuses on the work of the contemporary photographer Josephine Meckseper in the chapter, *The misadventures of Critical Thought*, (Rancière, 2009b)

However, *Deep Weather*, without presenting a potential to transform that reality remains, like news media imagery, symbolic. The work sensationalizes the subject that it depicts. The narration dramatizes for effect the events described in the video and the whispering delivery of the voiceover appears to be an attempt to mystify them. The abstract synthesised sounds that accompany the images of the Bangladeshis working and the unexplained mid range shots of the workers pausing, stationary, staring blankly into the camera constructs an otherworldly sense of time out of joint.

The expanse of both the operation of oil extraction and the construction of coastal barriers produces spectacular images of devastation and construction.

The same consumers of oil products, the production and expenditure of which contributes to ecological crisis, stand in the gallery and consume images of the devastation of the Bangladesh coastline. *Deep Weather*, is therefore bound by the very logic it denounces, the process of production and consumption, whether the process of production and consumption of oil or the process of the production of spectacular images in response to the consumption of images of spectacle. The work functions as a critical procedure that is based in ‘the dual logic of the activist intervention of the past,’ (Ranci re, 2009a p. 29). However, by operating within the symbolic realm it cannot appeal to an outside of the symbolic domain of images, a material reality.

Egyptian Chemistry, Material Forces

Biemann’s, *Egyptian Chemistry*, 2012, like her earlier work, is organised around the depiction of relationships. In these earlier works such as, *Sahara Chronicle*, and *Black Sea Files*, these relationships were located in human experience. *Egyptian Chemistry*, is not organised around human experience or human actions such as migration or the building of a pipeline, but around a single form of matter, water. By centralising the theme of the work around the material water, *Egyptian Chemistry*, de-centres the human as subject of the work. Biemann shot the footage for *Egyptian Chemistry* in 2011, a year in which Egypt was experiencing social transformation in the form of a revolution.

This event had been referred to as the ‘revolution of the thirsty’ due to the privatisation of water and its diversion from agriculture that is said to have contributed to it, (Piper, 2012). The decision by Biemann to figure water as central to the Egyptian reality is pertinent to the small part that water management played in contributing to the cause of the revolution and declares the intended political status of the work. How Biemann depicts water as an actor in constructing this social reality and the political status of the work in doing so must therefore, be questioned.

Egyptian Chemistry, consists of a series of videos installed in a gallery space along with props displayed on a plinth and wall texts and drawings. The walls of the installation space are painted blue to represent the focus of the work on water. Projected on two large screens that dominate the space are the videos that together are titled, *Water Sampling 1-6*. These act as establishing shots or bookends to the installation due to their large scale, prominence and the fact that their narrative is static, in that the actions within them are repetitive. The act of sampling is also the beginning of a process of pseudo-scientific analysis and the work as a whole constructs a pseudo-scientific approach to a reflection of the reality of Egypt in 2011.

Scientific Neutrality

The sense of scientific neutrality is extended into the three, *Videos on the Nile Ecology*, that are displayed on three small screens consecutively numbered Parts 1 to 3 that are from 12 to 16 minutes each and is established from the outset with the opening sequence of *Part 1: Agro-Sciences*. The video begins with a sequence of night-time landscape shots. The narrator’s voice refers to a celestial event, the alignment of planets that occurs on the first night of the filmmaker’s arrival. Images of a geodesic dome are compared to a giant spaceship. The voiceover refers to the filmmaker in the third person stating that ‘*she* came here to film,’ (Biemann, 2012 my italics) as if from another world. Biemann situates the viewer from the outset, not simply within the close quarters of a reality of social relations, but from an objectivised position, similar to that established in the opening sequence of, *Deep Weather*.

This constructs a sense of an expansive objective material reality, a macrocosm that

suggests that we are outside of human perception, beyond a subjective perspective. As we move through the parts of the film we are situated within a middle ground, a reality defined by human perception and action in part 2, and part 3 reflects mainly the microcosmic reality of chemical reactions.

Latour uses the word cosmopolitics to describe politics as it is understood as the relationship between humans and the material world. The word cosmos preventing the limitation of politics to the human domain, and in bonding the cosmos to politics the naturalization of things and matter as separate from the actions of humans is also prevented. The two are thus bound by each other in interrelation. Latour states:

‘That politics has always been a cosmopolitics, that it has always been about landscapes, animal husbandry, forest, water, irrigation, about building cities, the circulation of air, the management of disease, in brief about cosmic and material forces, is so obvious in so many traditions that I do not have to belabor the point,’ (2011 p. 3).

This notion of politics as it is defined in the relationship between humans and nature also coincides with Lukács’ definition of an intensive reality, the ‘closed integration,’ ([1938] 2010 p.31) that constituted society. However, Biemann’s attempt to de-anthropocize reality at times theoretically places matter outside of this intensive reality i.e. the social in denying a relationship to the human subject. Latour further links this idea of cosmopolitics to Marxism and states that ‘cosmopolitics is another word for materialism, as it were. But as usual the difficulty is to learn what is meant by the word matter,’ (Latour, 2011 p. 3). *Egyptian Chemistry*, appears to be an attempt to consider matter following Latour’s lesson but this at times takes the film outside of the ‘social’ reality of Egypt.

Egyptian Chemistry, refers to a cosmopolitics in encompassing the politics of human action within this material, objective reality of things. The scientific neutrality of the work that is constructed by de-centering of the human in a reality composed of a network of relations between humans and non-humans, at first appears to de-politicize the work’s agenda. The familiar social issues, such as pollution, protest, and work are pushed away from the foreground and equalized among seemingly non-political actions of chemical reactions and the movement of celestial bodies. *Egyptian*

Chemistry for this reason balances precariously between asserting a perfect and pure form of scientific truth, an absolute that is beyond politics, and drawing the material basis of politics back into social discourse so that the material reality of inequalities can be acted upon.

The work also ‘performs’ a scientific method that is pronounced throughout the videos. *Water Sampling 1-6* presents a young Egyptian scientist pouring water between the same test tubes that are arranged on a blue plinth in the center of the space. The second adjacent video projection shows men collecting water in plastic drinks bottles from various locations along the Nile. These locations are indicated in surtitles that display the number of the sample, the location, time, temperature, pH level and other chemical attributes. The scientific posturing of these videos appears to come from an intention to impose a sense of neutrality in the work. A sense of a pure and perfect science is constructed that appears to be politically neutral. This frequent perception of science is described by Latour as a false contrast between the ‘concerns of the human world and the *cold reality of things*,’ (2004 p. 253 n. 9, my italics). Biemann in de-centering the human subject to a cold reality of things appears to be aspiring to this pure and perfect reflection of a material reality that is unsullied by the recognition of the power relations that support it; water as a natural resource that is managed according to politics that in turn structure society.

The action of water sampling is presented as a functional and repetitive gesture. A scientist walks into a landscape shot of the river Nile and at the water’s edge fills a plastic drinks bottle and returns. However, whilst at these various locations the camera explores the surrounding landscape. These shots linger on the presence of political activity, ecological concerns or economic structures such as industry and trade. We are shown, for example, thick black smoke billowing from a factory at Kom Ombo Sugar factory. At Aswan, we see effluent from a fertilizer plant drifting out into the Nile. A bridge appears in the background of the water sampling shot at Zamalek, and the video cuts to protesters seen through a long lens crossing the bridge. Roadside fishmongers display their catch for sale following a water sample taken at Lake Magut in the Nile Delta. The water sampling enacted in the video draws the viewer’s attention to the Nile and constructs the notion that water connects political, ecological and economic concerns such as pollution, production, protest and trade.

Water in this video is shown to be a connecting force, we follow its path as it connects the sugar factory at Kom Ombo with the fertilizer plant at Aswan and diverts the path of the protestors over the bridge at Zamalek. Water is shown to be central to the Egyptian social reality as it runs through the center of industry just as it runs through the center of the city and is a source of food, commerce, irrigation as well as a form of waste disposal. The water sampling indicates a point at which these activities, human actions, interact with water and influence its chemical state. Its chemical state is both affected by the actions of humans and in return effects a response in the form of water engineering. The act of sampling the water of the Nile, to establish its chemical makeup, is both a symbolic gesture and scientific measure that registers active point at which matter and social relations act upon each other.

Part 1: Agro-Sciences

Part 1 of *Videos on the Nile Ecology, Agro Sciences*, presents two terraforming concepts, the New Valley Project that aims to transform 500'000 acres of desert into arable land and the Nile Delta Project that aims to integrate sea water agricultural systems along the Nile delta. These two projects show how water could be used to transform the material reality of Egypt. Water from the Aswan damn and Mediterranean Sea are central to these projects and water is shown as a force, which is incorporated through the engineering of the Nile into the social domain as, 'electricity, fertilizer, irrigation and the growth of agriculture,' (Biemann, 2012). Water in this sense is an essential participant in the actions of humans and *Agro Sciences* focuses on the transformation of the ecological reality of Egypt from desert sites. However, matter in this video is very much subject to the determinations of humans and the two terraforming projects represent a totalising manipulation of nature that is reminiscent in potential of the macro-engineering projects of the first soviet five year plan such as the Turkestan Siberian Railway or the great dams constructed as part of the American new deal.²⁹

²⁹ These were depicted in films such as, *Turksib*, (1929), and, *Salt for Svanetia*, (1930), or photography of American photographer Russell Lee that depicted the construction of the Shashta Dam.

The political avant-garde film, *Zuiderzee (New Earth)*, (1933a), by Joris Ivens also centralises water as a main subject in the depiction of one such macro-engineering project, the closing of the Zuiderzee bay in the Netherlands. The Zuiderzee engineering project, like those featured in *Agro Sciences*, reclaimed arable land. *New Earth* focuses on the materiality of this transformation. The camera expounds the material quality of the clay boulders used to create the foundations of the dam as they are dredged up from beneath the waves. The consistency of the cement and the structure of the steel reinforcing cages it is poured into are accentuated through the focus of the camera³⁰. Objects are shown to be the collaborators; active participants in this process of realisation as the volition of the pulleys and conveyors move these materials through space. The caterpillar tractor belts displace their weight across the newly exposed quagmire of the seabed. These active forces and material agents are ultimately all orchestrated by the actions of the human workers who are depicted as conquering the force of nature. The workers heave great drainage pipes across their backs and operate the cranes that hoist these objects through the air. The activity stops when the workers pull the levers to halt the machinery to break for food, and begins again when they are refreshed. The Zuiderzee damn is the produce of *human* labour. Man is connected to the material world through work, through the transformation of matter through labour that brings the new social reality into being.

The macro-engineering projects in part 1 of, *Egyptian Chemistry*, are realised through a different force. The scientists that are interviewed describe the creation of new earth through chemical processes in relation to global ecosystems. Nature is not conquered but manipulated. Humans participate with the materials employed to fertilise the earth on a chemical level in contrast to the very physical construction that forges the new social reality of *New Earth*. Water, like the fertilizer and pesticide capsules that are also placed in the desert soil, has the potential to transform the ecological reality of Egypt, as active chemical agents, i.e. non-human actors, as opposed to being treated as a force that must be bent to the human's will as in Ivens' film. The mangroves and other halophytes that will produce sea-based crops are chosen because of their active ability to interact with the other non-human actors in the Nile delta such as seawater.

³⁰ Though photographed by Eli Lotar many of the shots in, *New Earth*, accentuate a physicality that is reminiscent of the new objective style that Ivens employs in his earlier film *Regen*, (1929).

They are described by the atmospheric physicist that is being interviewed, Carl Hodges, for the process by which they transform matter:

‘stomates [sic] open up, they take carbon dioxide in, they put water in the atmosphere’ (Biemann, 2012).

The new transformed reality is described through a process of chemical reactions that occurs through non-human actors such as water, mangroves and pesticides. These act upon on each other and are entwined with the actions of humans.

Hodges continues in his description of the transformation of the Nile Delta through saltwater agriculture, which, he discloses, was enabled by funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. This, however, is the extent of his acknowledgement of the power structures and political organisations that lay behind such projects. What he does go on to describe is a future reality:

‘Take a small river from the sea, eventually take a big river, build communities along this new river [...] Grow the equivalent of soy bean of rice and wheat and forests out of mangrove trees, and it’s seawater agriculture biofuels that don’t just produce biofuels, they produce food they make fresh water available,’ (Biemann, 2012).

Both macro-engineering projects in Biemann’s film are speculative. They project into an unknown future and are therefore disconnected from the material social reality that has yet to be determined by them.

Hodges’ description of this new reality is non-anthropocentric in the same sense that science is generally understood as apolitical. The very human concern that is central to Ivens’, *New Earth*, i.e. how people will live in these communities and who will build this new world, is not indicated. Situated between the presentation of the two macro-engineering projects is footage titled ‘New Minya Medicinal Plantation Desert Experiment,’ (Biemann, 2012). In this footage workers are seen picking flowers. Unlike the scientists they are not given a voice as they are not interviewed directly and the conversation is not translated. In, *Agro-Sciences*, these people, the people of

Egypt, have been de-centred, not by material objects but by experts in the field of science.

Part 2: Land Reform

Part 2 of, *Egyptian Chemistry, Land Reform*, re-centers the human subject by describing the transformation of society through political legislation and activism. Here the link to water is more inferred than literal. This is constructed with an opening text that states that since it has been subject to human engineering the Nile no longer spreads fertilizer across the Nile Valley during floods. The loss of this ‘democratic’ phenomenon, and the introduction of ‘hydraulic structures’ are subsequently credited for shifting fertilization into the ‘social sphere,’ (Biemann, 2012). Here the influencing forces that construct reality are back within the familiar territory of the social domain.

This introduction is followed by an interview with a peasant activist, named Shahenda Maklad, who describes how land reforms that followed the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 led to land distribution among the people despite this action continuing to be violently challenged by the former landowners of the previously feudal system. Maklad is noticeably moved as she describes the assassination of her husband Salah Hussein who led the resistance to these attacks. The land reforms were reversed, during the Sadat era that began in 1970, who under the influence of the World Bank turned Egypt towards a consumer society. The production of wheat, by the Egyptian peasant farmers, was ended, which led to the country relying on American food imports.

The price of wheat is also central to Ivens,’ *New Earth*. Once the sea has been drained and the crops that are produced on the reclaimed land are harvested, huge amounts of wheat are produced. However, as the film states in a voiceover, the political reality is that ‘the wheat of the world is not raised for food but for market speculation,’ (1933a). This last section of the film is an account of the ‘overproduction’ of food during the great depression of the 1930s that led to the same burning of wheat to raise market prices. This led to the hunger and starvation of millions of the unemployed. The world that emerges out of the reclaimed land in *New Earth* is the same

dialectically opposed reality that is depicted in the opening montage of, *Misery in Borinage*. Maklad's statements attest a similar social situation in Egypt prior to the revolution of 2011. Following the 2011 revolution Maklad explains that a new generation of peasant farmers are unionizing for the first time. Following legislation fixing the price of wheat it is again being produced but primarily for consumption within Egypt. Maklad insists that only when self-sufficiency is achieved will wheat then be grown for economic reasons.

The new political reality that follows the completion of the New Valley and Nile Delta projects is yet to be determined. However what Maklad's testimony describes are the processes of economic and political power behind such projects and the struggle to control and resist such forces. The peasant farmer's statements begin to describe the new configuration of relations that constitute the new Egyptian society following the revolution. Maklad's statements, however, are not connected to other actors but isolated in Biemann's film as a case study or example. The decentralizing makes priority not of a politics of emancipation but the illustration of causal links alone.

This new political reality, that the peasant farmers are striving for, self-sufficiency as Maklad describes it, is tested in 'three peasant statements' that follow Maklad's interview. Three farmers, who explain how the recent land reforms have affected them and how they should be dealt with differently, deliver these statements directly to the camera.

Following the statements the viewer is then led to a cooperative at dusk by the same peasant farmers and descend into what feels like a clandestine world due to the apparent unease of the guides and the dimly lit corridors. Here a door is opened to reveal hundreds of bags of pesticides stacked in a warehouse. During the course of this montage surtitles read:

'natural Nile fertilizing and agricultural subsidy systems materialize Egypt differently,' (Biemann, 2012).

Biemann reminds us here of the ‘natural’ system of fertilization that is described in the opening text. This non-human domain is again contrasted with the human system of agricultural subsidy that belongs to the social sphere. Biemann’s position on their difference appears to be neutral, not advocating one over the other. Biemann’s film retains a position of neutrality but this does not convincingly draw our attention to the fact that both nature and society are political systems and that both systems are integrated, they are one and the same.

Part 3: Ecologies and Metaphysics

Part 3 of, *Videos on the Nile Ecology*, is divided into two subjects indicated in the title. The first, considers the ‘changing Nile ecology’ created by the human engineering of the Nile. This is described as impacting on fish species and migration, pollutant levels in the water and quality of the Nile atmosphere in an interview with hydraulic engineer Emad Imam. The film also visits the Hydraulic Research Institute and presents a model for testing new designs for the Assiut Barrage in the Nile.

At first it appears that the water of the Nile is subject to human forces alone. For example by slowing the Nile the population of fish species that prefer slower current increases. The slower current also builds up more pollutants as they remain in the river’s substrate. However, Biemann insists this is not the case, stating in subtitles that ‘Humans have used the force of the Nile, but so have lazy fish, suspended pollutants, ammonium nitrate, cement factories, and wheat crops. The Nile is a hybrid interactive system, that has always been at once, organic, technological and social,’ (Biemann, 2012). The suggestion is not that a causal chain results in lazy fish, suspended pollutants... etc., but that these other entities are active participants in this configuration of human and non-human actors. Fish, pollutants and ammonium nitrate and humans all *equally* exploit, or are influenced by the changing force of the Nile. Humans are not the originators of this force and their actions in engineering the course of the Nile are not definitive, but lead to other actors modifying the state of affairs further.

The second part of Part 3 features predominantly an interview with Graham Harman that is announced by a subtitle title that reads, ‘Speculative Realism, Object Oriented

Ontology, Tahrir Square, Graham Harman, Metaphysics,' (Biemann, 2012). In this interview Harman introduces Object Oriented Ontology, a term he coined to describe a philosophical position that, like Biemann's work, de-centralises the human within a reality constituted by relationships between objects. Harman states that Object Oriented Ontology does not privilege the materiality of objects and illustrates this point by stating that the American University Cairo, where he is sat and the protests in Tahrir Square, that can be heard in the background of the interview, are as real as a copper atom. Harman further states that 'any real relationship is a new object and that is the political level,' (Biemann, 2012), but it is also the political limit for Harman as he explains that a connection to politics through human experience, reality as a correlation between subject and object, is not a concern that he shares.

Biemann punctuates the interview with Harman with surtitles that list objects by Harman's definition:

'Weather systems, chemical substances, water, wheat crops, microbes, electricity... they all exert significant impact on the planet and yet they are inanimate asignifying [sic] and thoroughly anti-metaphorical. Intelligibility is not a human privilege,' (Biemann, 2012).

Here Biemann concedes to a definition of objects that appears to follow Harman's step away from social and political concerns in the rejection of reality as a correlation between subject and object. As Harman states in his interview with Biemann:

'I don't feel the need to ground everything in politics. I think that this idea that the cash value of any philosophy is its political virtues is in a way the last phase of a correlations philosophy that all that matters is human experience and politics becomes the new transcendental category for all access to reality,' (Biemann, 2012).

Biemann similarly does not take up a political position throughout the three parts of, *Videos on the Nile Ecology*. For example in the first half of part 3 no position for or against the effects of the engineering of the Nile is taken, whether with the environmental politics of changing species by cutting migratory species' access to the Mediterranean sea off, or with increasing pollution level due to slower currents. Similarly the activist peasant farmer's criticisms of the land reforms since the

revolution are presented in a matter of fact presentation that is careful not to connect the politics of their position with that of the film. The event of the revolution itself is surprisingly absent from the work, the only image of the protests being shown in the extreme distance as protesters are seen through a zoom lens in the background of the afore mentioned water sampling shot at Zamalek. It is as though the event of the protests that led to the social revolution in Egypt have been screened off as they are too socially engaged, too anthropocentric for the film.

The disregard, however, is disrupted in Biemann's film when suddenly the interview is stopped as it is announced by someone off screen that there are bombs outside the building. Harman leaves and Biemann follows exclaiming 'this is ridiculous,' (Biemann, 2012). Biemann vigilantly attempts to continue by asking a further question: 'Maybe one last question I have relates more to the political question because of the reservation that I sense among many fellow artists...,' (2012). However, Harman interjects:

'Just as soon as you asked that question teargas came into my eyes. For those watching this video we are shielded behind a large building from Tahrir, [square] we are probably a hundred meters from Tahrir, we are shielded behind a large building and yet tear gas is still drifting over here enough that my eyes are stinging and watery. I'll do my best,' (Biemann, 2012).

Biemann's political question that relates to reservations of her fellow artists' remains unanswered but it is significant that it is left in the heavily edited sequence. Politics is mentioned but the work itself does not construct a political position in the same way that is central to political avant-garde film. Rather the relationship to the social sphere, the protests, and therefore the political status of the work is enacted; the political question is performed for the camera but the work does not constitute an ideologically structured reflection of the reality behind the walls of the compound, nor does the camera venture beyond them to depict the material presence of the protestors as an active social force, as Ivens does with images of the hunger marches in Europe and America in, *New Earth*.

This material presence of the protestors, that the teargas is intended to dispel, is pertinent to the success of the revolution. The Arab awakenings and in particular the

protests in Tahrir square, and subsequent occupations of central squares around Europe relied on the material presence in space of the bodies of the protesters. That very presence itself is an embodiment of the socially conscious state that the political avant-garde films appealed to in their audiences, and that Biemann's work denies.

Conclusion

Biemann's films, *Deep Weather*, and, *Egyptian Chemistry*, clearly display a formal connection to the political avant-garde films considered in the previous chapter. Both deploy the formal device of the visualisation of causal relations to depict current social and political realities. This device, however, is significantly reconfigured according to contemporary conceptions of reality. Though, *Deep Weather*, is dialectically constructed, the opposition between the two sides of the reality that it depicts are reflected as a constant harmonious state rather than irreconcilable. The social relations that are visualised between the events of fossil fuel extraction and oceanic warming and subsequent displacement of coastal populations of the Indian sub-continent are not structured according to an ideology of emancipatory politics, as the work does not lead to their reconfiguration. Instead the depiction of social relations that connect these causal entities, including the Western spectator of the work, is structured according to an ideology of Ethics.

This lack of a political structure could be understood as a failing of the work if we were looking to find an existing form of political avant-garde film in contemporary art. This, however, is not the aim of this thesis; instead I ask in what configuration this form of realism, with its origins in political avant-garde film, takes in reflecting the current historical moment. *Deep Weather*, can be linked to previous forms of art as activist intervention following Rancière's analysis. According to Rancière such works function as a form of critique by visualising social relations through montage but this is a device that is intrinsically tied to the consensual forms that they denounce. It is here in this difference, the gap, between the political avant-garde and contemporary fine art film that we find an insight into the current social reality. The lack of a political structure to Biemann's work, despite it being a in opposition to consensual forms of media, i.e. example of transformative realism, and its claim of a political status, reflects a political futility in an inability to appeal beyond the reality that it

critiques, that is also experienced in Western oppositional politics. It is *contained* within the same structures of spectacle and capitalism that it denounces.

Egyptian Chemistry, attempts to sidestep this problem by decentering the human and incorporating non-human objects as actants following Latour's ANT. As is stated in the aims of the, *World of Matter*, project this is intended to reconfigure our definition of the material world so that matter is understood as more than simply a resource. As Latour states in his description of ANT the intention of his theory is to situate social conditions in material reality and incorporate matter into social politics.

For Biemann the decentering of the human is a step away from the politically subjective position of feminism that structured her earlier work it is in itself a political act.³¹ This decentering or equalisation of human and nonhuman actors is enacted through a form of pseudo-scientific neutrality or objectivity, in both, *Deep Weather*, and, *Egyptian Chemistry*. Matter, unlike in the avant-garde example *New Earth*, is shown to be a participatory force rather than an entity to be conquered. Biemann reflects reality as a system of relations between human and non-human actors and, *Egyptian Chemistry*, gives voice to a political position in the interviews with the peasant activist Maklad and peasant farmers just as molecules are also given a voice and credited with intelligibility towards the end of the film. However, the work does not construct an ideology of politics and the film does not engage with the social outcomes of this process of participation. This denial is enforced to the point whereby the main social event to which all of the relationships that Biemann visualises lead i.e. the revolution, is quite literally obscured. This is despite the fact that the control of access to water, the material that structures the work, through political legislation, is recognised as a contributing cause or catalyst of the social transformation that Egypt underwent during the making of, *Egyptian Chemistry*.

Biemann's films, therefore, do not engage with the emancipatory politics that led to the event of the social revolution in Egypt. Biemann's films do claim a political status in the gesture of de-centring the human and showing non-human actors as participating in the construction of social reality. This could be seen as a form of

³¹ See Appendix 1.

materialism following Latour's definition of cosmopolitics as politics that has always concerned the connection between humans and nature, a connection Biemann visualises in, *Egyptian Chemistry*, and one that is augmented by the action of equalising the human and non-human actors.

If we follow Lukács definition of art as objective truth, which is theoretically based in dialectical materialism, art is a reflection of objective reality and the correlation between art and reality will always be ideologically structured. By not engaging with the politics of the revolution the work denies that it is itself ideologically structured which is to step away from this correlative approach as Harman advocates. To do so not only denies one's own political subjectivity but also one's social position by stepping outside of what Lukács terms intensive reality i.e. society, which is in itself political.

Chapter 4, Martens – Estrangement

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the film, *Enjoy Poverty*, by Renzo Martens, which is set in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an area of conflict and also extreme poverty. Here Martens reflects on the production and distribution of images of poverty produced by photojournalists and aid agencies, revealing an image economy by making a futile attempt to redistribute the means of production among the poverty stricken subjects themselves.

Martens is the central figure of his film that provides an insight into the social reality of its subjects and the interventions of the news and aid industries. Martens' ability to embed himself within this reality is possible as he parades as a photojournalist, relying on an international press pass to grant him the same access as other journalists.

In a conversation with Els Roelandt, Martens reveals that the photojournalists that he accompanied moved between locations photographing the same subjects consequently producing the same images as 'most of the photographers, [Martens explains] take few risks. More often than not—at least on this trip—I belong to that group as well,' (2008 p. 2).

Despite shadowing the photojournalists' movements Martens does produce a film that is distinct from the news media and aid images that originate in the same realities. It is a work that parodies these consensual forms of media, which also include industrial documentary and ethnographic film.

Like Biemann's, *Deep Weather*, Martens' film depicts an other side to a reality that we already know; that of our own. The main focus of the film is the poverty of the region that exists regardless, or because, of the presence of predominantly American and European companies that mine gold and farm palm oil and the charity organisations and photographic journalists that accompany them.

Where Biemann connects the audience to the Bangladeshi people, in, *Deep Weather*, Martens connects the audience to the Congolese workers that he depicts not only through our economic ties to them, but also through our consumption of their poverty. In this respect Martens' film shares similarities to Buñuel's, *Land Without Bread*, in that they both constitute parodies of not only consensual forms such as ethnographic or documentary films, but also of films by other artists.

In the previous chapter I consider the device of the visualisation of social and causal relation in Biemann's recent work as a case study. The difference of the configuration and re-deployment of this device from that of its use in political avant-garde film reveals something of a shift in the conception of reality and indeed the political structure of reality itself. There is distinctly lacking in Biemann's use of this device a politically ideological structure that has been either displaced by an ideology of Ethics or lessened in the attempt to de-centre the human subject as the causal nexus of reality.

Martens conversely centralises the individual within the network of relations that constitutes social reality through the redeployment of the device of estrangement. However, through this method Martens presents a very different conception of reality, not as an equalisation of human and non-human actors but as a subjectively inscribed form of materialism.

In this chapter I shall consider the device of estrangement in Martens' film as a case study, wherein this sense of political futility again appears. This however is different to the futility of Biemann's work as Martens purposefully set out, in making this film, to challenge the lack of political efficacy in fine art film, and indeed consensual media in general.³² Martens appears to intervene directly in the material social reality that he reflects in, *Enjoy Poverty*, through his presence at least, and so, further to my study of Biemann's work, I consider not only the configuration of the device of estrangement as it is used to reflect a contemporary reality, but also an active challenge to the

³² Martens states: 'If the film does one thing, it is that it embraces its own inconsequentiality. It embraces the fact that political art for the most part only looks political. This piece uses a similar, political sign language, but what sets it apart is that it embraces the fact that it is only there for its own sake. So, if the film is one thing for me, it is an attempt to problematize the inconsequentiality of the political in contemporary art,' (Demos et al., 2012 p. 17).

Ethically ideological structuring of a reflection of reality or ‘inconsequentiality’ of political fine art as Martens terms it, (Demos et al., 2012 p. 17), that is enacted and challenged by Martens.

This chapter will consider, *Enjoy Poverty*, through three acts of estrangement. These are to be considered as acts in both senses of the word. They are not only acts as in scenes within the film, regardless of the film’s delineated structure. They should also be considered as actions, the deployment of the device of estrangement as it acts upon the Subjects of the film, the artist himself and the viewer. Each act constitutes a process of becoming conscious that defines the formal device of estrangement.

Act 1 considers the seemingly absurd request made by Martens to the World Bank and Congolese Government, that Poverty be considered a natural resource due to the revenue that it brings into the country as an estrangement device. Martens takes this absurd claim and rationalises against the hidden or denied motivations behind the charity and news organisations’ interest in the region.

Act 2 considers how Martens represents the Congolese subjects in the film. Where in Act 1 their presence or status as individuals is denied, in Act 2 their subjectivity is revealed through an insistence on the politics of their social condition. This is achieved through a complication of the ethics of representation that constitutes a second estrangement device.

Act 3 recognises the subjectivity of Martens himself as protagonist at the centre of the film. Here Martens estranges the audience by addressing the viewer directly and positioning them in relation to the subject. This conventional form of estrangement is, however, reversed and leads to an awareness in the audience, not only of the process of perception of reality but also of their social position in relation to reality.

Act 1

Like Biemann’s, *Deep Weather*, Martens’ film depicts a social reality that is dialectically constituted and Martens, like Biemann, also depicts the people that are on the impoverished side of that reality. This follows in the tradition of political

avant-garde films such as Buñuel's *Land Without Bread*, Yves Allégret and Eli Lotar's, *Ténérife*, (1932b), George Lacombe's, *La Zone*, (1928), and Henri Storck's, *The Houses of Misery*, (1937), that revealed an impoverished side of reality despite the people who endured that poverty often being essential to the prevailing situation through the labour they provided. As is indicated in the title, poverty is the main focus of Martens' film and this is a state of poverty that is in stark contrast to an immense wealth of natural resources found in the Congo, which is exploited by multinational companies and the donation of billions of dollars of aid made to the country.

These multinational companies, aid agencies, photojournalists and United Nations (UN) soldiers constitute a Western presence in the Congo. Martens identifies this presence, firstly, by depicting his own apparent arrival by boat on the shore of a river. As Martens disembarks he is confronted by a UN soldier who he shows a press pass to, explaining that he is a journalist. We are shortly led to a building in Kinshasa where a World Bank conference is being held. Here Martens will make a statement that is central to the film's logic. Following the announcement of a 1.8 billion dollar donation by foreign governments to the Congo, to fight poverty, the journalists are invited to ask questions. Martens steps up and asks:

‘This annual contribution, 1.8 billion dollars I believe. How big a part is that of the Congo's total revenue? [...] And if it is a high percentage I'd like to know whether the fight against poverty, for which this money is destined, may be an important natural resource for the Congo? Or even the most important?,’ (Martens, 2009).

Despite poverty being denied as a natural resource amongst laughter from the panel, the World Bank representative does acknowledge that ‘It is true that development aid brings in more money to the Congo than copper or coltan or diamonds. Even if combined,’ (Martens, 2009). The World Bank representative, in rejecting Martens' statement, insists that there is a disparity between capital (the money that natural resources ‘bring in’), and poverty, the material social condition of the Congolese, (that the ‘development aid’ is intended to alleviate). The money in the form of ‘development aid’ is deemed to be distinct from the money of the economy because of its connection to poverty, the material social condition of the Congolese. Therefore

conversely, the money of the economy is not perceived to be connected to the material social condition of the Congolese.

The perception of the economy as disconnected from a material social reality, which is expressed by the World Bank representative, is described by Žižek as a ‘capitalist speculative economy,’ (2014a p. 31). This follows Marx’s definition of capital that does not simply exist in its two inert mutual forms of commodity and money (value), but that appears as its own Subject when in its circulation it ‘suddenly presents itself as an independent substance, endowed with a motion of its own, passing through a life-process of its own,’ (Marx, [1867] 1976 p. 172). Žižek explains, (2014a pp. 29-31) that the process of the becoming-Subject occurs with the emergence of the self as described by G. W. F. Hegel. Hegel proposes that the emergence of this self ‘appears at first as a disparity between the I and its object [substance, but that] it is just as much a disparity of the substance with itself,’ (1979 p. 21). The self therefore, in emerging not out of a gap between the I and its object (substance) but from within substance as a disparity with itself, it can never detach itself fully from the substance from which it emerges. This, according to Žižek, informed Marx’s definition of capital as even in its most ideologically abstract form as the capitalist speculative economy it still cannot escape the pre-subjective substance from which it emerged i.e. material social reality. As Žižek explains:

‘it is far too simplistic to claim that the spectre of this self-engendering monster [the self circulation of capital] pursuing its ends regardless of any human or environmental concern is an ideological abstraction, and [it is therefore necessary] to insist that one should never forget that behind this abstraction, lie the real people and natural objects on whose productive capacities and resources capital’s circulation is based and on which feeds like a gigantic parasite,’ (Žižek, 2014a p. 30).

This connection of the capitalist speculative economy to social reality is precisely what the World Bank representative refuses to concede to in his response to Martens’ question. Martens’ conflation of natural resources, the substantial basis of capital, with poverty, is therefore unacceptable to the World Bank representative precisely because it recognises the connection between the capitalist speculative economy and the material social condition of the Congolese, as its origin and/or outcome.

Conversely in asserting that ‘development aid’ is part of the capitalist speculative economy, and not the material social condition it is intended to dispel, Martens’ statement acknowledges that the humanitarian organisations such as the United Nations Refugee Agency, (UNHC), FIDA, Medecins San Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) and News Media agencies are in fact present within a capitalist capacity. The Western presence in the Congo, therefore, whether commercial or humanitarian, ascribes to a process of capital.

The individuals that represent these companies, in the film, both commercial and humanitarian, the ‘Western protagonists’ as I shall nominate them, such as the World Bank representative, acknowledge the impoverished position of the Congolese but cannot, or do not, connect it to the process of capital in which they are embroiled. They appear, in the film, as though their perception of reality has been distorted by the power of money, be it made from coltan, copper and diamonds or distributed as development aid. Marx describes this power of money over the perception of reality as a:

‘*distorting* power both against the individual and against the bonds of society, etc., [...] Since money, as the existing and active concept of value, confounds and confuses all things, it is the general *confounding* and *confusing* of all things – the world upside-down,’ (Marx et al., [1932] 1959 p. 61).

At first Martens’ statement appears absurd, but it describes a parallax, a gap between two perceptual notions of the same reality that is unrecognised on the part of the Western protagonists. The disparity between these two positions, that of the Western protagonists and that of Martens, creates moments of absurdity throughout the film.

For example the film’s opening shot introduces us to Martens’ first subject, the plantation worker who is clearing a wide expanse of the landscape whilst altercating with his superior. He exclaims, ‘It is just too much work. This whole area. It is more than I can handle. So much work,’ (Martens, 2009). The camera cuts to the co-worker who responds, ‘We work hard. But we’re not making any money. We’ve had enough of this company,’ (Martens, 2009). When Martens asks how long it will take to clear the land before them the plantation worker replies ‘Two or three days [...] Three days to finish one day’s quota,’ (Martens, 2009). The affect of the disparity between the

daily quota and what is actually possible to achieve in that time places the plantation worker in an absurd situation whereby the more that he works the more he falls behind in his work. He can never catch up with his quota and all attempts to do so set him further back in his task. The absurd situation in which the plantation worker finds himself in demonstrates the estrangement of labour following Marx's description:

‘The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The *devaluation* of the world of men is in direct proportion to the *increasing value* of the world of things. [...] The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The *devaluation* of the world of men is in direct proportion to the *increasing value* of the world of things,’ (Marx et al., [1932] 1959 pp. 28-29).

Martens later visits the plantation worker at his house at night where the plantation worker shows a letter that he explains was used to fire him. However, Martens is confused when he reads ‘our hiring policy depends on the need for labour’ as he is aware that the plantation worker continues to work, therefore confirming the need for labour. The worker clarifies that he works everyday but now without a contract:

‘If you’re hired like me as a day labourer after years you’re given a contract. And then you're fired. It goes round,’ (Martens, 2009).

The worker must be fired so that he can continue to work.

The effects of the excessive quotas and lack of employment rights are shown when the plantation worker explains, in a separate scene at his house, that he has only leaves to eat when he comes home from work and that this is also all that he has to feed his children. One child in particular, his daughter, is shown plucking and eating a raw chick, and is obviously severely malnourished. A doctor is also present with a book of figures that records malnourished children that live on plantation settlements. The figures reveal the fact that there are more malnourished children on plantation settlements than in farming villages. The doctor points to the fact that to be employed and earn a wage places the workers in more poverty than to be out of work and living in a farming community.

Martens takes the malnutrition figures to the plantation owner to confront him with the situation, of poverty, that employment on his plantation places his workers and their families in. The plantation owner discounts his connection to their situation, by referring to them as a set of percentages, calculating the amount of children per worker and likelihood of malnutrition. He surmises that '16 [malnourished children] out of 8000, I think is not so bad,' (Martens, 2009). Despite the doctor's findings that malnutrition is worse on plantations the plantation owner refuses to attribute the malnutrition to the conditions of employment on his plantation, and suggests instead that it is because the fathers of these children are drunk.

Further to these absurd situations or moments of absurdity in the film there is also a disparity at the centre of the declared purpose of the aid that is donated by the world bank. This is revealed in a phone conversation that Martens has with an author of an unidentified report that states that 70% to 90% of some countries' aid flows back to the country that gave the aid. This is described, by 'Jesse' the author of the report, as being because 'the donors effectively are putting their own interests above the interests of the poor countries that aid is supposed to help,' (Martens, 2009). The conversation is held by Martens amongst a large group of children in a refugee camp, two of whom are seen miming the action of spooning food into their mouths from empty plastic cups as if to illustrate the effect of this disparity.

Martens, in a conversation with a truck driver who works for Anglo Gold Ashanti (AGA), also challenges a disparity between the declared presence of the UN forces and the effect of their presence. This is achieved by conflating the purpose of their deployment in the area with the commercial interests of the mining company:

Martens: 'Why does the UN operate in this place?'

AGA employee: 'To crack down on the militia that were here.'

Martens: 'Why was the militia so active here?'

AGA employee: 'Because of the gold.'

Martens: 'The presence of the UN forces is instrumental to your operations?'

AGA employee: 'Definitely. The local militia got scared of the UN forces. The firepower they've got... No need to compare to what the militia got. The UN forces got a lot more. It makes our job a lot safer. So we can do what we have to do,' (Martens, 2009).

The UN presence is shown in effect to be facilitating the presence of the mining companies who extract the resources from the Congo.

Reality Back on Its Feet

Within the context of the abstract reality Martens' statement, to insist that poverty is a commodity, seems absurd to the World Bank and Congolese government representatives. However, it is Martens' very insistence on the fact of poverty as a commodity throughout the film that eventually has a reversing effect on the ideological misperception of reality adhered to by the Western protagonists in the film. Where Martens' statement was ridiculed as absurd at the press conference it now appears plausible against the absurd reality where employment leads to malnutrition, aid donations benefit the donors and UN peacekeeping forces are used to protect corporate interests. Martens' statement has the effect of turning the world of the Western protagonists right side up by insisting that it places its feet firmly in the material social reality of the Congolese people.

This grounding of the Western protagonists' ideological abstract perspective of reality in the material social reality of the Congo also exposes their misperception of this relationship to be a fallacy. A central tenet of Brecht's notion of realism was to expose such misperceptions, or lies as he refers to them, and in doing so to rebalance the perception of the ruling strata:

'Nor can the demand for a realist way of writing any longer be so easily overlooked. It has become more or less self-evident. The ruling strata are using *lies* more openly than before, and the lies are bigger. Telling the truth seems increasingly urgent. The suffering is greater, and the number of sufferers has grown,' (Brecht, [1938] 1964 p. 201 my italics)

The truth to which Brecht refers, as is true in Martens' case, is the overcoming of a misperception, the lie that the abstract ideological perspective of reality as perceived by a dominant group within society is not connected to its affects in determining a material social processes to which the Congolese are subjected. In, *Enjoy Poverty* it is the truth that the plantation worker is being underpaid, that his contract is revoked to

curtail his rights and that the position of poverty that this places him in is the reason for his daughter's malnutrition. It is the truth that the UN peacekeeping forces presence in Eastern Congo facilitates corporate interests in that area. It is the truth that poverty is the only resource that the Congolese are left with and that this too is exploited by the Western presence of aid agencies in the Congo.

Image Economy

Throughout, *Enjoy Poverty*, Martens attempts to rationalise his statement, poverty as commodity. One method in this regard is to demonstrate that Congolese poverty is being exported through its reified form, images, by the Western news media and aid organisations. Martens begins this process by establishing the monetary basis of this image economy in a conversation with an Italian photojournalist based in Kigali who works for Agence France Presse. They meet in the film amongst a group of photojournalists in the town of Kanyabayonga, which appears to have been abandoned because of fighting.

Martens begins to question the Italian photojournalist about how much he is paid, which amounts to 50 dollars per photograph plus expenses that are paid in full. Another journalist explains to Martens that if his documentary was being made for the news media it could earn him around 300 dollars for a 90 second story. Martens asks what kind of stories are needed and the journalist replies 'unfortunately the only time they're interested in stories is if there's something negative so usually it has to be a disaster or a humanitarian crisis. Dead people or something. But if they have a nice parade or a carnival, we're not interested [...] But its not me, It's supply and demand. It's a market out there,' (Martens, 2009).

The film returns to the Italian photojournalist as he edits his images and Martens turns his enquiry to the question of ownership. Martens eludes to a connection between the image economy and the material social condition of the Congolese through a transference of ownership of poverty, as a resource, from the Congolese to the photojournalist as images:

Martens: 'Those you photographed own nothing'.

Italian photojournalist: ‘No, because I took the pictures. I’m the photographer, the author of the pictures’.

Martens: ‘But they organised everything that is in the picture’.

Italian photojournalist: ‘What do you mean organised?’

Martens: ‘They made the situation you made the picture of’.

Italian photojournalist: ‘But its me that’s made of that situation a picture. There are thousands of situations. I choose the one that I think is a good picture. And that makes that picture mine,’ (Martens, 2009)

During Martens’ tour of Kanyabayonga the same Italian photojournalist draws his attention to a photography shop that is boarded up with a sign above the door that reads Studio Bolingo, Paris-Style Photographs. Martens returns to Studio Bolingo to find the owners of the business, a group of seven young photographers whose business is to take pictures of weddings, birthday parties and other ceremonies. Martens quickly enrolls the Studio Bolingo photographers in an impromptu lesson, taught in a makeshift classroom setting complete with whiteboard, to teach them why it would be more profitable to photograph war over birthday parties.

In this class Martens demonstrates, according to the information given by the Italian photojournalist, that images of war, or as he makes more specific raped women and corpses and later adding malnourished children, make 1000 dollars per month against the 1 dollar per month that the Studio Bolingo photographers currently make photographing parties and celebrations. Martens justifies the change in subject matter by echoing the journalist who explained that due to the supply and demand of the market the news agencies are only interested in images of humanitarian disaster. This to Martens is the rational choice but of course his justification is not without irony as he points to the absurdity of the photojournalist’s rationale:

‘You need to make choices based on rationality. Not based on traditions,’
(Martens, 2009).

They set out to take pictures based on this new rationale, beginning at a refugee camp the Studio Bolingo photographers take pictures of a man constructing a grass hut.

Martens instructs them by repeating the rationale of the Italian photojournalist:

‘All of this. The man, the grass, the situation. Its you who chooses the right moment to take the picture. Even though he creates the situation its him

working, it's his house... You choose the moment. As a result you are the owner of the image. Not him,' (Martens, 2009).

Martens continues to instruct the Bolingo photographers towards their new role as photojournalists when they move on to photograph malnourished children in a medical clinic. Again Martens instructs the photographers according to how the photojournalists operate. He asks the doctors how the photographers for Doctors Without Borders on their previous visit staged their photographs. He is told that the infants were undressed to make apparent their malnourished state and so Martens asks that the Studio Bolingo photographers also take pictures of them in the same state of undress. Martens explains to the photographers that they need to take two or three good shots, not thousands. His instruction and the animated response of the photographers in their ambitious attempts to succeed in their new roles as photojournalists, turns the clinic into a class in photojournalism, the children into objects of study for their cameras.

Watching the Studio Bolingo photographers take pictures of the malnourished children feels different to watching the photojournalists go about their occupation earlier in the same film. We are more aware, conscious of the actions. Their actions feel staged because they are staged and the Bolingo photographers are acting their role. The treatment of the malnourished children in the clinic appears immoral due to the lack of an ethical purpose, the visualisation of the children's condition, of malnutrition, against their humanitarian right to food. Martens may share this humanitarian concern but it does not appear to be his purpose. What he does achieve is the demonstration that the Western photojournalists' purpose is also economical, whether within their professional capacity or in contributing to a wider image economy. The actions of the Western photojournalists are exposed as also being in disregard for the condition of the children, and therefore also as unethical as Martens' staged performance of their actions. They too, like Martens have an ulterior vested interest in their occupation.

This is shown to also be true of the aid agencies that are also vested in the image economy when Martens interviews the organiser of a UNHC camp. Many of the tarpaulins that form the tents in camp bear the UNHC logo and Martens turns the

conversation to the fact that if the refugees want to shelter from the rain using UNHC tarpaulin then they must have a logo on their tent and asks the reason for this. The camp organiser replies ‘visibility,’ (Martens, 2009) and smiles and shrugs as if to recognise that the proposition is contrary to the rational purpose of the tarpaulins, and therefore absurd.

Act 2

The Congolese Subjects are photographed by photojournalists, aid workers and artists and these images are distributed globally, through the image economy that is described above. These images, of poverty, are consumed in Western cities, and elsewhere, within the same societies that rely on the material resources that are also extracted from this region. Despite this there is an invisibility of these Subjects that is greater than mere anonymity.

In the film we are introduced to the same aforementioned plantation owner at an exhibition that displays many portraits of only Congolese people. Martens asks the plantation owner, who has just bought three of the photographs displayed before them, whether they were taken on his plantation and if they are his workers displayed in the photographs. His wife standing by him grins proudly as he answers ‘Probably, probably,’ (Martens, 2009). The lack of recognition of the workers indicated in the plantation owner’s hesitant answer could be due to the sheer number of workers on the plantation, but it also betrays a general disregard for the Subjects of the images.

Following this conversation, Martens asks a woman, stood staring at various photographs showing plantation workers at work, the question ‘Do you think these people [in the images] are poor or rich?’, (Martens, 2009). It is clearly apparent that there are only plantation workers in the images yet she still replies ‘Which ones [people]?’, (Martens, 2009), looking at each picture in turn as if there are no people in them that relate to the question. Martens responds by pointing to them all one by one:

‘Well, these ones. Or that one... Or that one...’, (Martens, 2009).

During a round table discussion of, *Enjoy Poverty*, that is transcribed in the book *In and Out of Brussels*, (Demos et al., 2012), one panel member Toma Muteba Luntumbue remarks on a brief moment in the film when in a refugee camp Martens records a photojournalist quite impersonally photographing the portrait of a man sitting in a makeshift tent. The photojournalist's only word for the man is 'Fantastic,' (Martens, 2009), and once the shot has been taken the sitter turns his head away and sighs as the photojournalist moves on to his next shot. Martens positions his camera in the same place as the photojournalist and he asks the sitter his name. He simply replies 'Richard' (Martens, 2009).

Luntumbue describes this scene as 'the perfect image of a displaced man, totally dehumanized, it is the very expression of a gradual loss of identity. It is the same face of a refugee that is seen the world over, a man with no name who no longer has any social status,' (Demos et al., 2012 p. 14). Luntumbue's description of the refugee could be understood according to Giorgio Agamben's theory of homo sacer (1998); an individual that is placed outside of the citizenship of his own country and therefore beyond the protection of the law that is afforded to those with a social status.

This position, as in Luntumbue's account, dehumanises him, he becomes less than a political being, a citizen, instead being reduced to a status of 'bare life,' (Agamben, 1998), that is attributable to the subjection of human's to human rights, an ethically based form of jurisdiction as opposed to the recognition of his position as attributable to a political reality. This is the status that most of the Congolese Subjects that Martens depicts are reduced to; the plantation worker in his lack of rights in employment due to the perpetual suspension and renewal of his contract and the position of helplessness that the low pay puts him in; the malnourished children, who are beyond any political right to food and so suspended between the responsibility of the charity sponsored medical clinics and plantation owners; and even the militia leader who sees his country as being occupied by the Western presence that he fights outside of the law.

Beyond access to, but still subject to, political law, the Congolese Subjects are not protected by citizenship but by their rights as humans alone. Badiou describes the foundation of human rights as a form of law that is 'first of all law 'against' Evil,'

(Badiou, 2001 p. 8), and therefore based in the ethical preposition of universally recognised cases of offence or crime that are defined by being potentially sufferable by all human beings. Through this process of law, according to Badiou, the human is universalised (hollowed of political subjectivity) as the Subject is posited by universally identifiable forms of evil; injustices that potentially and actually aggrieve all humans, whether as passive sufferer or active interceptor.

This system of human rights and humanitarian action (aid), described in the previous chapter as being ethically based, reduces the status of the human Subject, through the universality of the injustice suffered by them, to that of victim. Images of these people, which are displayed in the news media images and advertisements for aid organisations, are so familiar to *us* the Western consumers of these images that they are mostly disregarded. The Subjects that these images represent become a symbolic mass, representing universalised crimes against humanity. Badiou asserts that through this process ‘[p]olitics is subordinated to ethics, to the single perspective that really matters in this conception of things: the sympathetic and indignant judgement of the spectator of the circumstance,’ (2001 p. 9).

The ideological basis in ethics, of the process of representation of the Congolese people by news media and aid agencies is demonstrated in, *Enjoy Poverty*, when Martens arranges a meeting between a Doctors Without Borders doctor³³ named Mr Fred and the Studio Bolingo photographers. In the meeting Martens asks that they may gain permission to photograph his patients, but Martens makes it clear that, like the photojournalists and aid agencies, these photographers also intend to make money from the photographs. Mr Fred is careful in his response citing his (ethical) responsibility to his patients, malnourished mothers and their children, as the reason for not letting them *exploit* their misery financially in exhibiting their photographs.

When Martens challenges Mr Fred on the point by asking if he would refuse a paid photojournalist the same opportunity he replies:

‘No, because he’s here to make news, not money,’ (Martens, 2009).

³³ It is assumed that Mr Fred is a doctor as he refers to ‘his’ hospital and a responsibility to ‘his’ patients in the meeting, although his professional status is unclear.

News to Mr Fred, like aid, has a higher purpose that is perceived to be in the humanitarian interest of the Congolese people that it depicts, as it supposedly exposes them to the universally attributed justice of human rights. The ideology of ethics, or ethical justification, of the photojournalist prevails over the political commitment of Martens, to empower³⁴ the Studio Bolingo photographers with the ability to capitalise on their own position of poverty, precisely where it is being extracted as a resource by news media and aid agencies. Mr Fred insists on ethics whereas Martens, like Badiou, insists that this is a political situation as it is ‘one that calls for a political thought practice, one that is peopled by its own authentic actors,’ (Badiou, 2001 p. 13), the Congolese or Studio Bolingo photographers in this case.

The Studio Bolingo photographers are denied the opportunity to photograph the patients of the Doctors Without Borders hospital and Martens’ political solution, in his attempt to empower the Bolingo photographers with the same potential to capitalise on the material social reality of the Congo as the Western photojournalists, is precluded by an ethical doctrine.

Martens commits to the same political objective throughout the film. Towards the end of the film Martens returns to the plantation worker’s home with a meal of curried meet that he delivers to his children. The plantation worker begins to thank him, but Martens returns the compliment by stating that ‘I need to thank you, too, for the labour you supply almost for free,’ (Martens, 2009). Martens spells out the political and economic reasons for the plantation worker’s situation to him while at the same time indicating to the Western viewer their culpability in his position:

‘I think it is almost impossible for your situation to change. You will always have a job with low wages. In Europe we don’t want cocoa or coffee or palm oil or coltan... ..we wouldn’t want it to be more expensive,’ (Martens, 2009).

The plantation worker interjects, ‘Listen here. Please. A man needs a salary. Whatever the price. A man needs a good salary,’ (Martens, 2009). Here the political

³⁴ Martens appears to attempt to empower the Congolese throughout the film through various lessons such as that given to the Studio Bolingo photographers. This agenda is declared towards the beginning of the film when he states ‘What you should do is train them, empower them,’ (Martens, 2009).

subjectivity of the plantation worker is revealed. His position is placed against the viewer's not within an ethical capacity, as do the aid agency advertisements, but within an economic capacity. He is not presented for the viewer to be judged by their sympathising sensibility. Instead the plantation worker is shown to be a causal nexus, an individual economically tied to the Western consumers of the commodities his labour produces and the inequality of this relationship, indicated by Martens, designates its political configuration.

The plantation worker is revealed through a process of subjectivization. He is transformed, albeit briefly and incompletely, from a universalised being, that is affected through the ethical process that also depicts the Congolese in the Image Economy. Martens ironically enacts this ethical process by pinning logos on the plantation worker's daughter as she eats. This action appears to illustrate that the humanitarian aid that is deployed in the region, like all acts of charity, both have a vested incentive for the donor and are disempowering.³⁵ The act of pinning the logos on the girl in exchange for food also appears unethical as, like the request to photograph Mr Fred's patient, Martens acknowledges an economic incentive. It is a form of exchange rather than an unconditional response to an ethical appeal.

The Congolese Subject is shown instead to be a politically reflexive individual who, when reminded of his economic position within society, demands not his humanitarian rights but the political right to fair pay. The ethical process of human rights, i.e. his depiction as a mortal being, a victim by the news and aid agencies, places him beyond access to this political right. As if to illustrate and confirm the effect of this process, a third man from outside the shack interrupts the conversation in support of the plantation worker:

'Mr journalist, in your country is your life as hard as ours? We're badly treated here, we're used like beasts. A strange situation. Stranger than ever,' (Martens, 2009).

The clearest description of this political subjectivity in *Enjoy Poverty* is made by the Congolese militia leader that Martens interviews when he states that 'The Americans

³⁵ Martens alludes to the Chinese fable: to give a man a fish, at various points in the film.

are getting their share. Whether it's the Europeans, the Americans or the Chinese, they're all out to get their share. Here it's as if we're a well. Each of them comes to draw water and heads home [...] If I'm president. When I'm in Kinsasha, the gold I extract from here, from Ituri, it must first go towards building Ituri before it goes elsewhere,' (Martens, 2009).

This argument for self-sufficiency against the interests of global capitalism is similar to the statements made by the peasant activist, Shahenda Maklad, in Biemann's, *Egyptian Chemistry*. Although Martens, like Biemann, acknowledges this politically subjective description of reality, he himself also does not commit to it through the film. The film is not structured according to the same political ideology. The reality as it is reflected in the consciousness of Maklad and the Congolese militant does not constitute the same objective truth, in Lukács' terms, as reality as it is reflected in the film itself.

This does not mean, however, that, *Enjoy Poverty*, does not commit to an ideologically political form of truth. The commitment to politics over Ethics that, *Enjoy Poverty*, displays can be understood as what Badiou defines as 'truth' (*a* truth), the real fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity *produces* in the situation,' (2001 p. 42). The truth that compelled Martens to travel to the Congo, the event in Badiou's terms, was the realisation of the connection between *his* reality and that of the Congolese. The truth that the material social reality of the Congolese is attributable to the economic system, of resources or images, that ties it to the Western European reality. A second truth also compelled Martens in the production of, *Enjoy Poverty*, that is the inconsequentiality of political fine art practice, (Demos et al., 2012 p. 17).

Martens does not embed himself within the military struggle against imperial economic interest in the region by joining the Congolese militants. To do so would be to share the anti-imperialist politics that they themselves commit to, which the film does not. In response to the militant's comments Martens returns to the subject of the Congolese people and suggests that their poverty is as attributable to the militant's action as the Western presence there. Martens therefore does not argue for the militant's cause. Martens also does not compel his audience to demand change from

their governments who allow this social reality to continue. This is where we find a gap between Martens' film and Buñuel's and political avant-garde film in general. Buñuel's film compelled its audience to demand the Republican government of Spain to address the situation of poverty within Spanish society.

Instead of taking the position of the militant, Martens, as he did in his first film, *Episode I*, takes the position of the Western Spectator, which ultimately he shares with his audience, and it is to the truth of *their* position within this global social reality that Martens commits. Martens' film does not simply constitute a form of 'political sign language,' (Demos et al., 2012 p. 17), the critique he levels at much of political fine art practice and that compelled him to make, *Enjoy Poverty*. However, it could be said to reflect a political futility because it is inconsequential, despite some of the minor financial benefits to some of the film's subjects.³⁶ It is inconsequential because it does not connect, as Buñuel's film, *Land without Bread*, does and as did much of political avant-garde film, with a political ideology outside of the reality that is constructed by the consensual politics and forms of media that his film critiques. Martens acknowledges that his film is restrained by logic of aid, imperial capitalism and consensual forms of realism and the consequences for the Congolese people in interview when he states: 'whether it is photography or economic development or aid or artist programs there is a price that is being paid ... and it is very clear in the film who pays the price for the inconsequentiality of the art, So I tried in this film to at least reveal it.' (Martens, 2011). Here Martens also distinguishes his film from these consensual forms for the fact that 'Yes it remains without consequence but here you can see how terrible it is that it remains without consequence,' (Martens, 2011).

Act 3

Visually, *Las Hurdes*, employs the conventional formal approach to depicting its subject that characterised the travelogues and social documentary films of the era. This was contrasted by scathing and contemptuous voiceover that distinguished the film from the convention in an act of satire. Early screenings of the silent version of

³⁶ The main Congolese subjects of the film signed a contract with Martens whereby they receive a percentage of any money that the film generates. Martens has also sold the photographs on behalf of the Studio Bolingo photographer privately.

the film are recorded as being accompanied by a live voiceover performed by Buñuel himself, (Gubern et al., 2012 p. 173). Buñuel's presence, in these early screenings, and also in his scripting of the voiceover performed in latter sound copies of the film, therefore constitutes the reflexive element that distinguishes the work from the conventional forms it parodies and critiques.

Enjoy Poverty, shares these two attributes, the employment of the formal attributes of the genre that it parodies and the perspective of the filmmaker, Martens himself, as a reflexive device. The documentary reality of the film is constructed formally by recognisable signifiers contemporary with the time of the film's production, such as the hand held camera, dirt on the lens and the often wide distortion of Martens' face in close up due to the short length of the lens. Martens also parodies other works of fine art video, or the reflexive device of including other media producers, photojournalists, new reporters etc., in the frame to reveal the process of production.³⁷ The process of the production of *Enjoy Poverty* itself is also shown to be the subject of the film, and likened to the vested interest in the area of the other forms of Western presence, as explored above.

These documentary realist and materialist fine art traits originally functioned as returns to the Real, the material reality outside of the fictional construct of its own making. This could be considered in a naïve sense as a form of Brechtian estrangement, or 'distancing effect' (Willett, 1964 p. 5) as it has been more appropriately defined in this specific case. These have however become cliché in their utilisation as conventional signifiers of 'realism' that conversely mask the constructive nature of the supposedly factual genre. Within the context of fine art this invocation of the estrangement device, as a reference to a political status that Brecht's work embodies, can be understood as a form of 'political sign language' as Martens labels it, (Demos et al., 2012 p. 17), that constitutes an act of formalism as the device is empty of content or function and is there only for its own sake. Žižek therefore claims that these moment should be considered not as returns to the Real, but instead

³⁷ See Aernout Mik's use of un-broadcast documentary footage taken by ITN during the war in former Yugoslavia in, *Raw Footage*, (2006a), or, *How to Make a Refugee*, by Phil Collins, (1999), that depicts photojournalists photographing refugees in camps at Stenkovec and Chegrane in Macedonia during the Kosovo crisis of 1999.

as ‘the exact opposite of what they claim to be – *escapes from the Real*, desperate attempts to avoid the Real that transpires in (or through) the illusion itself,’ (Žižek, 2014b).

In, *Enjoy Poverty*, there is one scene at least that appears to parody these reflexive devices. As Martens walks through a flooded forest with two porters that carry large trunks on their heads he trains the camera on his face and starts to sing. Slowly, the original version of the song, *Man Needs a Maid*, by Neil Young, fades in, roughly in sync with Martens singing. The viewer is dislodged from the sense of documentary realism by the discontinuity of the setting and the non-diegetic soundtrack. This can be understood as a tongue in cheek parody of the estrangement device that is employed by fine art films to indicate their status as such, fine art, rather than for any authentic formal effect. The insincerity of the scene certainly attests to a sense of mockery.³⁸

In reversing the intent of the device, to return to the material real outside of the film’s construct, we could also consider this scene more sincerely as an escape to the Real that transpires in the illusion of fiction itself. The audience not only hear the non-diegetic soundtrack that is superimposed but also appear to share in this experience with Martens, placing them central to a subjective reality that Martens inhabits. The non-diegetic soundtrack that we hear in the film may impede a sense of documentary realism, as it is obvious that it is a constructive element that does not originate indexically in the objective reality that the film depicts. However, it appears as an escape to the Real of Martens’ subjective experience in the Congo. For a brief moment we share Martens’ subjective position and the earworm³⁹ (in the form of the non-diegetic soundtrack) that is running through his mind. This gives an insight into the illusory nature of the subjective reality of the filmmaker that most consensual forms of media go to great lengths to avoid in order to convey a sense of factual objectivity. This scene should not be considered in contrast to traditional indications of materiality (returns to the Real) as expressionistic, the depiction of a subjective experience of reality that Lukács’ authentic realism opposed itself to, ([1938] 2010).

³⁸ Martens acknowledges that although being a fine art film also parodies fine art film in a round table discussion documented in, *In and Out of Brussels*, (Demos et al., 2012).

³⁹ See Oliver sacks study for a further definition of earworms, (2007).

Instead we should think of the short moment wherein the non-diegetic soundtrack merges with Martens' singing, as what Žižek describes as a materialist subjective reality by referring to a statement made by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan:⁴⁰

““Sure, the picture is in my eye, but I, I am also in the picture”: the first part of Lacan's statement designates subjectivization, the dependence of reality on its subjective constitution; while the second part provides a materialist supplement, re-inscribing the subject into its own image in the guise of a stain (the objectified splinter in its eye). Materialism is not the direct assertion of my inclusion in objective reality (such an assertion presupposes that my position of enunciation is that of an external observer who can grasp the whole of reality); rather, it resides in the reflexive twist by means of which I myself am included in the picture constituted by me—it is this reflexive short circuit, this necessary redoubling of myself as standing both outside and inside my picture, that bears witness to my “material existence,” ’ (2006 p. 17).

Martens' presence in his images of the Congolese material reality, his literal inclusion in the frame of his camera, functions in the conventional sense as a reflexive device that acknowledges that the reality that we are shown in the film depends on his subjective constitution. Martens also shows that the perception of the material reality of the Congo by the Western spectator is visually mediated, in images, whether by the consensual media, or himself by exposing the image economy, as discussed above. These images of the material reality of the Congo, as in Lacan's analogy, are not only subjectively constituted by the position from which they are perceived, that of the Western spectator (the subject), but inscribe that subject within the material reality itself. Within the consensual media the presence of the Western spectator is symbolically represented by the Western presence, the aid agencies, logos, the UN peacekeeping forces, the mining companies etc. Martens' film extends this notion of symbolic representation by linking the perception of the Western spectator to their inscription in that material reality by visualizing the social relations that they share, both political and economic.

The act of perception of the material reality of the Congo, by the Western spectator, is therefore part of the same act of the material determination of the social structure by the Western presence. The Western presence in images of the Congo, whether seen in

⁴⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, (1981 p. 63).

forms of consensual media or Martens' film, therefore functions as a blind spot in the perception of the Western spectator, the 'reflexive twist by means of which I [the Western spectator] myself am included in the picture constituted by me,' (2006 p. 17). The very presence of the Western spectator in the material reality of the Congo, whether actual as in Martens' case, or mediated via for example photojournalists, ontologically shifts that reality.

Conscious Mediator

Martens like the other Western protagonists, travels to the Congo on a mission, the intention of which is indicated towards the beginning of the film in a statement that he delivers ambiguously to either himself or the audience: 'You cant give them anything that they don't already have. You shouldn't. Give them anything they don't already have. What you should do is train them, empower them,' (Martens, 2009). The mission's intention appears at first to contrast intentions of the other Western protagonists in empowering the Congolese rather than helping them through charity or exploiting them through labour or the extraction of natural resources. Despite the emancipatory intent this mission is shown to be just as futile an objective when towards the end of the film he reflects on the difficulties that he encounters in the deployment of his mission:

'Its' not easy despite all intentions to help people benefit from their talents from their own resources. You never know what the outcome will be. One needs to be aware of one's own vanity. And I know I am capable of vanity. It saddens me,' (Martens, 2009).

The material inscription of Martens' subjectivity in the reality of the Congo, for Martens, renders his intentions as vain in both senses of the word. Initially he cannot see that his perception of the material Congolese reality shifts that reality, as he perceives it, because of his vanity. Therefore any attempts to change the reality of the Congo are made in vain; his vanity blinds him to the disparity between what he thinks is the solution to poverty and that solution continues to elude him throughout the film. However, through this process of failure Martens becomes conscious of his vanity, his misperception. Martens through his perception of the material reality of the Congo is

inscribed himself in that reality.

His presence constitutes what Žižek calls a ‘blind spot’, (Žižek, 2006 p. 17), but in the acknowledgement of the futility of his action, due to his own vanity he becomes conscious of this blind spot, conscious of the shift affected by his subjective perception in that reality. Martens, as our mediator when watching the film, embodies our presence in the material reality of the Congo that is posited there by us, but this is a retroactive presence that returns our gaze by addressing ambiguously in the statements that Martens makes to himself such as the mission statement and his acknowledgement of his own vanity, above. He also addresses us indirectly through the Congolese subjects in the film, such as when he erects a neon sign in the centre of a village explaining that ‘The sign is in English. It is In English so that the audience at home can understand it,’ (Martens, 2009). Martens makes a speech to inaugurate the lighting of the neon sign, explaining to the villagers that:

‘Your not merely people in need of aid. You’re also people that aid the rest of the world. So we launch the publicity for the viewers back home or at gallery exhibits. Surely they will be open to the idea that Africans are taking charge of their own resources. OK that’s all,’ (Martens, 2009).

Both the sign and Martens’ presence are intended, like Buñuel's voice in his live performances of, *Las Hurdes*, to address the audience, reflexively embodying the audience’s own presence embedded in the material reality of the film’s location. The words of the sign that Martens erects ‘ENJOY POVERTY PLEASE’ appear to be directed at the Congolese imploring them to enjoy their poverty, but it in fact addresses the Western spectator. The sign itself, the greatest spectacle in the film, appeals to the Western spectator to recognise the inscription of their subjectivity in the material reality that they perceive. Sardonicly it appeals to the Western spectator to enjoy the poverty of the Congolese, an impossibly grievous existence in poverty within which *our* privilege is inscribed.

Conclusion

Martens’ film enacts three acts of estrangement that are reconfigured very differently from that which is deployed by Buñuel in, *Land Without Bread*. Despite similarities

seen in the conventions of the device and the complication of the ethical treatment of the subjects in both examples. In formal terms, what is revealed to the audience is not only the material trappings of the theatrical experience (of cinema) or their position within the film theatre in relation to the subject alone. In, *Enjoy Poverty*, the estrangement device, following Brecht's own description, prevents the viewer from engaging empathetically with the subjects, whether the Western protagonists or the Congolese, and places them at a critical distance to the situation whereby the formal structure of social reality, of the political situation, is exposed and must be rationalised by them. This reveals a disparity between two perspectives of the same reality, not only between the viewer and film's Subjects (actors), but also between the capitalist speculative economy, the image economy, and the material social reality of the Congo. Martens' absurd statement, poverty as commodity, has a rationalising effect on this disparity and exposes the absurdity of it.

A second effect of the estrangement device as deployed by Martens, is the depiction or construction of the political subjectivities of the film's Subjects. Where consensual forms of media such as journalism and advertising for aid organisations generalise the identity of the Congolese, to the point that to some of the Western protagonists in the film they are invisible, *Enjoy Poverty*, reveals these Subjects to the spectator by visualising this process of generalisation.

This constitutes a form of estrangement as the image of the Congolese, that the spectator habitually recognises, is de-familiarised. The Congolese Subjects of the film are not engaged with empathetically but are seen to hold politically ideological beliefs i.e. they are committed to forms of truth. Unlike the treatment of the Subjects in Biemann's, *Deep Weather*, Martens does not reflect a reality as structured according to an ideology of Ethics. Martens does not simply complicate the Ethics of representation, but ignores the correct Ethical protocol and instead commits to a reflection of a political subjectivity, a form of truth. However, Martens does not commit to the same truths as the Congolese subject, whether that of the worker, the refugee, or the militant. His film, instead, pertains to the same logic that it seeks to critique and therefore, is inconsequential i.e. it reflects a political futility.

Finally, as he did in his first film, *Episode I*, Martens takes the position of the Western Spectator, which he shares with his audience, and it is to their position within social reality that Martens commits. This is the truth that the Western spectator is connected to the Congolese people economically and politically and that the exploitation of these people and their resources sustains the privileges of the Western spectator's reality. This commitment does not lead to the emancipation or equality that the political ideologies of the 1920s and 1930s aspired to. Instead the privilege of the Western spectator is inscribed in the material social reality of the Congolese through a process of reflection and perception of a shared social reality that has also become a form of social awareness through the deployment of the estrangement device. However, without a commitment or appeal beyond this political configuration the social reality of poverty continues.

Chapter 5, Spanish Labyrinth, South from Granada

An Introduction to Practice

The film, *Spanish Labyrinth: South from Granada*, (2016), that accompanies this thesis as a DVD constitutes my practical research. This contains the same aims and contributions to knowledge that are identified in the introduction to my thesis and that I attempt to answer in the main body of the preceding chapters. The two forms of research are not only intended to complement each other but are theoretically intertwined. In the case of my practical research the points of reference, arguments, questions and propositions that I consider in my theoretical research are woven into the narrative fabric of the film. The concerns that are explicitly described in the written thesis are used to inform and construct the dialogue between the two main protagonists of the film, the Narrator and the dramatized character of the political avant-garde filmmaker Eli Lotar. These two positions within the film are also in dialogue with the images that the film contains.

This chapter aims to reflect on the effect of these two voices in the film and their placement in relation to the images that the film contains, in respect of the two central formal devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement. Through my practical research project I have attempted to re-deploy and reflect upon these devices *through* practice. That is to say I have attempted to deploy them in a manner appropriate to the content to which they relate, the contemporary social reality that is the subject of the film.

The practical research itself, *Spanish Labyrinth*, reflects on these Marxist aesthetic devices not only as they were deployed, by political avant-garde filmmakers, but also as they could possibly be deployed today. This method, like the former chapters, follows the Brechtian edict that form should change to suit content. As is directly quoted by the Narrator of *Spanish Labyrinth*, Brecht writes:

Breadth is appropriate to realism as reality itself is broad, varied, contradictory. History creates and rejects models. The truth can be withheld in many ways, and it can be told in many ways. We derive our aesthetics, like our morality,

from the needs of our struggle,' ([1938] 2003a p. 226-227).

The reflection on the device of the visualisation of social relations here considers how the practical research responds to a changing conception of matter and its role within social reality. Here I reflect on my own response to Latour's Actor Network Theory and interpretation of the implications for the conception of the role of matter in producing social relations.

The second part of this chapter reflects on my use of the device of estrangement. I consider here how the practical research uses verbatim accounts, other textual sources and documentary film footage to construct a form of truth, not limited to or claiming a factual status but that leads to a notion of truth that is ultimately considered in terms of the absolute.

The Visualisation of Social Relations, Latour's proposal

The pervading form of a Marxist aesthetics during the 1930s followed Lukacs' and Brecht's interpretation that insisted that realism depict social relations rather than their reified forms. As I discuss in Chapter 2, a prevalent response to this proposal was the formal device of the visualisation of social relations. In Chapter 3 I explored how this notion of reality as a network of social relations has more recently been extended to include non-human actors as defined in Latour's Actor Network Theory, (2005). My own film as practical research, *Spanish Labyrinth*, attempts to extend the Marxist notion of social reality as a network of social relations to include this redefinition of matter. The film aims to reflect, and reflect upon, a definition of reality that following Lukacs' and Brecht's descriptions, is found not in the surface of things but in the relationships between them. This I extend beyond social relations between individuals that lay beneath the surface to include non-human 'actants,' as they are described by Latour, (2005 p. 71), as also actively producing social relations.

This I understand as having the potential to expand the realm of the social into the material and conversely bring matter into the realm of social agency. *Spanish Labyrinth*, expresses this notion, of the extension of social relations to include the non-human, as a positive development of Marxist aesthetics as it allows the

possibility of politicising material. However, as I observe in Biemann's work, the inclusion of non-human actors can lead, as is the declared intention of Biemann's work, to a definition of reality whereby the human is decentred. This I observe has the effect of also diminishing the potential of the individual as a causal nexus within a network of social relations to the point whereby the individual is placed outside of an ideology of politics and within an Ethically ideological domain. This is an effect that I have consciously attempted to avoid in *Spanish Labyrinth*. I have instead attempted to re-deploy the device of the visualisation of social relations in two prominent forms. Firstly by avoiding a reified reflection of reality, not only in the visual sense of a singular image but by avoiding a form of narrative that constructs a singular form of truth. Secondly I have attempted to extend the definition of social relations to present matter and by extension Nature as a system of matter as actively engaging in the production of social relations therefore determining social reality.

Non-closure in narrative form.

Spanish Labyrinth, is narrated by two voices. Indirectly through the voice of Eli Lotar, heard as tape recordings of his reminiscences of his journey through Spain (recorded in French) and directly by that of 'the Narrator' who's character is undisclosed. Despite this it is indicated in the film that he is the person that filmed the location footage of Spain through a first person narrative. These two figures are intended as a counterpoint to each other and this contrast is mirrored in the contrast between contemporary footage and the film, *Tenerife*.

This formal device of contrasting both contemporary and avant-garde images and ideas of aesthetics and politics is intended to reflect both similarities and differences in avant-garde and contemporary modes of representation of social and political reality. The character of the Narrator reflects less on aesthetics and representation so as to allow more time for exposition and as it is expected that the film itself acts as a proposal for a contemporary form.

The two voices of Lotar and the Narrator are intended to work as a call and response. This functions both through affirmation, where one confirms the position of the other, and through contestation as discrepancies between the two narrators' positions arise.

This placement is intended to displace any central authority or closed notion of truth. This narrative device is also intended to function co-visually, between voice and image, and historically between a contemporary social reality and that of 1931. This occurs when both similarities and discrepancies appear between the contemporary images of Spain and the images of Tenerife from 1931, and between observations and opinions of the two narrators relating to their respective historical context.

In contrast to the de-centring of the human seen as one response to ANT, the diffusing of a central narrative voice in *Spanish Labyrinth* is intended to conversely place the viewer as central to the work in that they are required to construct their own interpretation of the subject between the two main voices of the film in conjunction with the images. The intention here is to retain the aspect of the device of the visualisation of social relations, that places the individual as the ‘causal nexus’ as Brecht puts it ([1938] 2010 p. 70-71) within the reality that is reflected in the film. In a literal sense relationships between events such as for example the forest fires and the 15M protest movement or the alojamiento system of charity in the 1930s and supermarket raids in Cadiz are made. However, it is the viewer who must take these events and construct meaning through their connection according to their own position, rather than their position being constructed by a singular authoritative narrative voice as is familiar in news media coverage of such events.

Oppositional narrative form, Carmona, Granada

The main theoretical theme for the chapter of, *Spanish Labyrinth*, set in Carmona is the representation of protest and the construction of truth using factual visual documents. This discussion is based in an argument posed by Shklovsky, ([1926] 2004), that the factual basis of film footage resides in the indication of location and time. The assumption that visual documents constitute fact is undermined by a notion of truth that is constructed through narrative. The chapter in Carmona in particular is intended to suggest that reality in its non-mediated form is not linear, singular or hierarchical in form but that these forms are constructed through narrative.

The voice of the Narrator and Lotar in tandem with the found footage of the protest describes the construction of narrative around such events and acknowledges that

actions are staged in pre-emption of this fact. The assertion is that the dominant perspective of news media is constructive, and reinforces a dominant political narrative. Though it is acknowledged that a narrative around the event is also constructed by the protesters, the following chapter set in Granada, that gives an account of the 15M movement in Spain in 2011, suggests that this political movement is a non-hierarchical network. This is most explicitly stated by the Narrator's voice:

Narrator: The protests embodied carnevalesque forms of theatre, street festivals in which the anger of the protesters coexisted with their joy in the display. But the organisation of this new political movement was also carnevalesque in form. Like the language of carnival, the narrative contains many voices and images. There is no centre that dictates meaning. Instead meaning arises, only out of the exchanges among all the voices and images in dialogue.

This manifestation of multiple voices and images constitutes a form that opposes the monologue of the news media. It refuses to claim any closed form of truth, by constantly transforming its own narrative form.

In the theatre of the carnival, the unbelievable becomes real, and the suffering of life is exposed to the laughter and tears of the spectator. This act has contained within it, a perpetual creative motion, a form of innovation that can transform reality itself.

(Appendix 2 p. 171).

This description is intended to show that the 15M movement in Spain not only opposed the news media narrative of such events by constructing an opposing narrative but that the narrative that it created was also oppositional in form. This account is also intended to mirror the objectives of Allegrét and Lotar in their attempt to produce a film on the social reality in Spain in 1931 that would have opposed a dominant journalistic narrative of that time as is evident in their film, *Tenerife*. The character of Lotar reflects on political agency in avant-garde film in relation to newsreel in the 1930s and motivations behind producing such work. The Narrator extends Lotar's reflections of such films' political function through a consideration of narrative structures within the 15M protest movement in contrast to contemporary official forms of political narrative such as news media. The form of the narration of, *Spanish Labyrinth*, is intended to 'function' as a non-hierarchical network of relations that reflect the organisational form of the 15M movement and social reality as such.

Social Relations and Systems of Matter, Los Olivos.

The first chapter of the film, tells the story of Los Olivos, where this chapter is primarily set. The story of Los Olivos is intended to follow loosely the structure of Bertolt Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, *The Exception and the Rule*, (Brecht, [1930] 1979). Like Brecht's story, the story of Los Olivos is both a political and moral tale that considers how the social structure of the village dictates the lives of the villagers and attempts some degree of social and moral instruction. This I have narrated using actual accounts from George A. Collier's anthropological study of the village, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia: unacknowledged revolutionaries of the Second Republic*, (1987). This is intended to function as a *mise en abyme*, the story of Lotar's aborted attempt to reflect the social reality then within my own attempt to relate that reality to the present through the making of, *Spanish Labyrinth*. Brecht's fable delivers a clear and distinct political message about class. With the story of Los Olivos I have intentionally attempted to complicate the moral and political positions. This I have done by confusing a sentiment expressed by Lotar in the statement 'between mystery and chance lies imagination, the only thing that protects our freedom, despite the fact that people keep trying to kill it off altogether,' (Appendix 2 p. 160) with the subject of religious belief as indicated by relevant shots from *Tenerife* and the historical account of the burning of religious statues in Los Olivos that later contributes to the murder, as punishment, by incumbent Falangist troops.

In telling the story of Los Olivos this chapter of the film is also intended to describe a traditionally Marxist interpretation of both social and material reality as constructed through social relations and the people of the village's relationship to the land. This is expressed through the description of the effects that land and property ownership and control of labour has on structuring the lives of the inhabitants of the village and also how these relationships change with political reform.

A Marxist interpretation of Nature and relationship to nature is also described here⁴¹ through the use of the footage from the film, *Tenerife*, that shows the process of the

⁴¹ For a Marxist definition of Nature see: *Uneven Development nature, capital and the production of space*, (Smith, 1984).

production of the commodity bananas from the land. This is further developed through the story of the villagers who depend on the land for work. This section of the film therefore is intended to establish a conventionally Marxist definition of social reality as a network of relations and a material system, or Nature. The connection between the two systems of Nature and Social reality is the transformation of matter into commodities through the process of labour and ownership.

This Marxist definition of social reality and its relation to Nature is connected to a contemporary conception of reality that proposes that the two systems are more intimately connected and, as proposed by Latour, that matter plays an active role in the generation of social ties. This constitutes a definition of Nature that is also a response to the realisation of climate change that is inherently political in nature (Latour, 2011, Latour, 2004). My intention in, *Spanish Labyrinth*, was to respond to the effects of climate change, specifically with the case of the forest fires in the Malaga province, 2012, as an example, on our changing perception of matter and systems of matter or Nature as it is more generally termed here.⁴²

Through the interplay of the narrative voices in, *Spanish Labyrinth*, the Marxist definition of the relationship between social reality and Nature is extended to include Latour's proposal that matter be recognised as an actant. This is articulated through a chronology of historical political revolt in the region spanning from the end of Spain's first Republic in 1874 to the beginning of Spain's second in 1931, the year that Allégret and Lotar visited the region, that is documented in Collier's anthropological study (Appendix 2 p. 162-163). In each case cited a connection to the landscape as a trigger for these events is emphasised; for example the processing or extraction of mineral resources, or through weather events such as drought or tornado. This is extended in to the present with reference to the contributing effects of water privatisation to the Egyptian revolution of 2011 (Appendix 2 p. 163), and into the future with similar projected effects of climate change in Andalusia on the organisation of water published by the IPCC (Appendix 2 p. 163).⁴³

⁴² James Lovelocke's Gaia theory can also be seen as an influential redefinition of a the material system of Nature that renegotiates our relationship to, or place within, it, (1995).

⁴³ The chronicling of a history of political revolt in connection to the landscape is influenced by Daniëlle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub's film, *Too early / Too late (Trop tôt / Trop tard)*, (Straub, 1982).

The purpose of extending this Marxist definition of the relationship between social and material systems, social reality and Nature, is to challenge the non ‘correlative,’ (Biemann, 2012), notion that to understand an ontology of objects we must depoliticise or detach from the social and political as discussed in chapter 3, in the context of Biemann’s film, *Egyptian Chemistry*. Instead the changing perception of matter that is being seen as a response to climate change is defined in, *Spanish Labyrinth*, as part of a social reality and that social reality is in part defined by such systems of matter. In both cases these are tied to a history of political revolution following a Marxist tradition.⁴⁴

The chapter of, *Spanish Labyrinth*, that is set in San Roque is the most explicit example where matter is described as an actant in Latour’s terms. This is contrasted with the more traditionally Marxist description of matter as commodity in, *Tenerife*, in the scene that depicts cargo being unloaded from ships. However here the Narrator’s voice extends this notion of commodities presented by Allegret and Lotar’s film to describe matter as an active participant and identify a imaginary void between social reality and Nature as a system of matter:

‘This interrelation of human action and synthetic matter perpetuates the illusion that we are separate from nature,’ (Appendix 2 p. 172).

Previous to this line I also explore the potential of extending to non-human actants, i.e. matter, the potential to produce or reconfigure social relations. The definition of Nature and its connection to social reality remains fundamentally Marxist, however matter within that definition becomes an active producer of relations:

Narrator: The people of the 15M movement relied on mobile devices to communicate and organise their actions.

Graffiti: COLTAN = A BLOODY BUSINESS

Narrator: These devices contained heavy metals mined in Africa such as coltan. Materials taken from the land it seems, are also integral to this transformation of

⁴⁴ The narrators comments on the connection between social and climate change quote the book, *This Changes Everything*, by Naomi Klein (2014; Appendix 2 p. 174) that along with other text such as *The Revenge of Gaia: why the earth is fighting back and how we can still save humanity*, (Lovelock, 2006), captures this idea.

social relations.

(Appendix 2 p. 172).

Coltan is used in communication devices that in turn can be used to orchestrate political movements such as the M15 movement in Spain. Here coltan enables the form of the protest movement (as described above) and subsequently social change as the mineral, as utilised in communication devices, produces social relations as a technological determinant. However, the supply of these potential uses of coltan's properties also creates social relations i.e. the use of thousands of child labourers in mining and the perpetual conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁴⁵ The systems of social reality and matter are symbiotic.

Landscape as Subject, Sierra de las Nieves Forest, Ojen

As with Los Olivos, the location that is presented in the film as the forest of the Sierra de Aracena is on the most likely route that the party would have taken south from Las Hurdes, but no factual account exists of their passage through it. Images of the Sierra de las Nieves Forest located in the Malaga province following devastation by forest fires in 2012 form the visual basis for the suggested location of the forest surrounding

To further articulate the notion of Nature as an active participant in the production of social reality I construct the idea of Landscape as subject or 'actor' (Appendix 2 p. 162) The conclusion of the chronological history of the connection between Nature and political revolt described above is drawn to the conclusion that 'landscape is no longer simply a setting or backdrop for the actions of humans' (Appendix 2 p. 162). This conception of Landscape relates to a shift in painting and literature that occurred around the beginning of the Romantic period (Lefebvre, 2006 p. xiii). This is acknowledge through the reference to poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and demonstrated in the use of his poem, *Ode to Spain*, ([1820] 2009).

⁴⁵ This is widely reported on in journalistic articles and is also the subject of the film by artist Steve Mcqueen, *Gravesend*, (2007).

Within Spanish Labyrinth the idea of the Landscape as a subject is most fully explored when the Sierra de las Nieves Forest speaks:

Your doings, evil and obscene,
Have turned me grey. Once I was green.
Look at my present sorry sight
A woods was I, a woods was I!
I curse you as I slowly die,
No longer reaching for the sky.
How old I am! How green I stood!
A woods was I, a woods was I!

(Kraus et al., [1919] 1974 p. 234)

This abridged poem was taken from, *The Last Days of Mankind*, by Karl Kraus a work that like much of, *Spanish Labyrinth*, was constructed from quoted ‘factual’ documents. This was originally presented as the spoken apparition of a forest destroyed by War. The purpose of constructing the Landscape as a Subject within, *Spanish Labyrinth*, is to suggest that the changes in the landscape that occur through climate change (as they have historically through labour and war as visualised in Kraus’ apparition) determine social relations as human actors do.

Estrangement, from fact to truth

In my previous chapters I have described the device of estrangement, as was deployed by political avant-garde filmmakers, as a disruption of the recognition of reality with the aim of awakening within the viewer a form of consciousness. This is a form of consciousness not only of the act of perception but a conscious perception of their social position in relation to the content of the image, the social reality the work reflects. This disruption of the recognition of a reflection of reality was intended to reveal the true reality behind the illusion of consensual forms through a process of disruption. In the case of *Las Hurdes*, by Buñuel, for example, this was the reality of poverty that resided behind the newsreels and travelogues of the time.

The gestural enacting of the Brechtian estrangement device by contemporary fine art filmmakers often takes the form of the depiction of the constructive process of film

production that alludes to its illusionary or constructive nature. Without due concern for content this becomes a form of ‘political sign language’ as Martens described it, (Demos et al., 2012 p. 17 endnote). In terms of its politically ‘organizing function’ in a Brechtian sense, (Benjamin, [1934] 1973 p. 100), the gesture could be thought of as symbolic alone, an empty signifier of artistic status. Beyond the context of contemporary fine art it is now commonplace in many forms of fiction film, more as an aesthetic than as a device, to signify documentary realism.

The device as deployed in its most elementary form in political avant-garde film, as montage, disrupted the unconscious recognition of reality, (Benjamin, [1934] 1973). The reality that was known, for example the happy promenade of tourists along the sea front in Nice as shown in Vigo’s, *À propos de Nice*, is contrasted with that which we deny ourselves knowledge of. In the case of Vigo’s film the poverty and disease that resided in Nice’s back alleys and slums. This disruption of a recognized reality with images from its darker side, once labeled a deadly parallel, (Hogenkamp, 1986), was appropriate to the social reality of the time. However, as Ranciere points out when he states ‘if everything is nothing but spectacular exhibition, the contrast between appearance and reality that grounded the effectiveness of the critical discourse disappears,’ (2009a p. 29), this device is now commonplace and ineffectual in its ubiquity. We experience this parallel in reverse daily as every journalistic report or documentary film that we view on television or online is disrupted by the abstract reality of advertising.

Žižek also reflects on the use of this device as a means of instigating a consciously perceived reality, or the Real as he terms it, when he states that in ‘contemporary art we often encounter brutal attempts to ‘return to the real’, to remind the spectator (or reader) that he is perceiving a fiction, to awaken him from the sweet dream. [...],’ (2014b p. 88). However, the Real for Žižek, that is the same dialectic reality of subject and object intertwined that political avant-garde filmmakers sought to reflect, does not reside in the object of material reality but in its appearance. Žižek continues:

‘Instead of reading these gestures as attempts to break the spell of illusions and confront us with the bare Real, one should rather denounce them for what they are: the exact opposite of what they claim to be – *escapes from the Real*,

desperate attempts to avoid the Real that transpires in (or through) the illusion itself,' (2014b p. 88).

Concurring with these observations and reflections on the deployment of the estrangement device in its symbolic form, as signifier of reality yet unconnected, in its relationship with content, to reality I attempt to avoid the disruption of reality through 'brutal attempts to 'return to the real,' (Žižek, 2014b p. 88), or at least do not commit these returns fully.

Lotar's Voice Fiction from Fact

That the character of Eli Lotar is built upon and informed by documentary and theoretical sources is essential to the character's function within, *Spanish Labyrinth*. The Real that transpires in Lotar's voice originates in reality despite its illusory construct. To construct the character of Lotar I first took into consideration the biographical information that was available, which described his actual circumstances within an historical context. His personal history, his social status, his political commitments, how he became an artist and filmmaker and how he became associated with the Surrealist group and the political theatre group, Groupe Octobre. For example, the decision to stage Lotar recording his memoirs privately rather than in interview was made as he was described as socially withdrawn towards the end of his life.

Accounts of Lotar are rare and so to complete a picture of his character I collected statements made by his contemporaries, most of whom he had worked with and shared ideological outlooks with, such as through the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists of which he was a member. The main figure of influence was Luis Buñuel who Lotar returned to Spain with to film the Las Hurdes region again in 1933. Lotar's opinion of post-war art and cinema, in the film, is directly quoted from Buñuel, as are his reflections on subjects such as the imagination and freedom. Other statements were either quoted or paraphrased from other political avant-garde filmmakers that were contemporaries of Lotar, such as Jean Vigo and Joris Ivens. The character of Lotar in the film therefore embodies an archetype. He is representative

not only of one member of the political avant-garde film movement but of the movement's ideals, beliefs, commitments and tendencies in essence.

The circumstantial or historical accounts in Lotar's script also reference factual sources wherever possible. This extends to the people that are mentioned in his account such as Braunberger who donated a Kimano camera to the expedition and Herriot who secured their release from prison. I also used verbatim descriptions of Spain around that time from sources not related to Lotar directly. Lotar's description of arriving at Los Olivos, the description of solidarity between opposing factions and eating arrangements in prison, all closely follow an actual account, documented in an audio recording, by an International Brigadier from Nottingham (Gregory, 1983).

Theoretical discussions that informed the realist debate into Marxist aesthetics also inform Lotar's beliefs and thoughts. The various formal concerns and devices that are discussed by Lotar originate from that debate. I have also tried to situate Lotar's character in Paris in 1968, by referring to political events in Paris that occurred the year before Lotar's death.

This origin in factual sources is integral to the intended sense of estrangement produced by the film. For this reason an annotated version of the script is included below (Appendix 2). Like Buñuel's, *Las Hurdes*, the story that I construct in, *Spanish Labyrinth*, originates in fact but has been fictionalised through narrative. However where Buñuel uses absurdity to alienate the viewer from the factual basis of the film I have chosen to curtail this act of estrangement. The content of the film remains factual, it is only in its compilation that an illusion is produced and within this illusion it is hoped that some degree of truth may be found as it existed in the absurdity of Buñuel's film commentary.

Device as Decoy

The film does reference a materialist or naïve form of estrangement by at times depicting the constructs of its own making. For example the microphone is shown in the shots of *Tenerife* played on the computer screen in the courtyard scenes.

Throughout the film the tape recorder that is playing Lotar's audio recording is shown

to denote a source for his disembodied voice. The videos that are supposedly found footage are shown on a Youtube webpage to indicate their origin, which is shown to be on a laptop computer; a screen within a screen that may prompt the viewer to acknowledge that the images of the film that they are viewing are also compositionally framed. These formal traits do figure as indicators of what the film is not i.e. a form of consensual media as signifiers after the gestural form of contemporary fine art films discussed above. Despite this they are also intended as decoys. Rather than attempting to return the viewer to the Real, the social reality that constitutes the content of the work by disrupting the illusion of the work, which I concede they do not, they are intended to distract the viewer from the illusion of the film's construction to aid the sense of the Real that transpires within the illusion itself.

The primary example of this is the dramatised voice of Lotar itself that could be revealed to have been recorded by an actor or the voice of the Narrator that is not literally the filmmaker reflecting on found footage but a scripted role. The images of the tape being played on the tape recorder would be used in terms of the conventions of the estrangement device to expose the reality of the source of the voice with the assertion 'this is not the disembodied voice of Lotar that has returned from the past to narrate the film but an audio recording.' Instead of affirming a documentary source or disrupting the illusion of a narrative voiceover, the images of the tape recorder are intended to distract the viewer from the illusion of Lotar's voice as a fiction, to act as a double bluff so to speak. If the images of the tape recorder were to be deployed as an estrangement device that revealed the illusion or constructive nature of Lotar's voice they would have to go further to show that in fact his voice is a fiction that is constructed from factual accounts and the memoirs of various different avant-garde filmmakers; but I intentionally do not do this in the film. Again Buñuel's, *Las Hurdes*, can be used as an example here as, despite the *apparent* factual status of the footage in, *Las Hurdes*, the voiceover's increasing absurdity does eventually undermine their factual status. Although the images of the tape recorder in, *Spanish Labyrinth*, does not corroborate the status of the tape recording as a factual document of Lotar's voice this possibility is left open. The images of the tape recorder that plays Lotar's recording do not reveal the hard reality outside of the constructs of this mediated form, the construction of the film, but instead are intended to constitute a different form of reality, 'the Real that transpires within the illusion itself,' as Žižek describes

it, (2014b p. 88).

Here it may be claimed that the construction of Lotar's voice and the formal signifiers of the estrangement device such as the display of the computer screen upon which found footage is played are not forms of estrangement at all. If they do succeed in functioning as decoys to distract the viewer from the dramatised elements of the film, predominantly the voices of both Lotar and the Narrator, then it could be claimed that they aid the unconscious perception of the viewer rather than disrupt it. However, despite the fact that, the two narrative voices are not revealed as constructs the content of these character parts is intended to indicate through reflective discourse the constructive nature of all forms of mediated reality.

Into the Absolute.

The reality that, *Spanish Labyrinth*, ultimately aims to reflect, therefore, is not attempted through a gestural form of estrangement. Instead it aims to reflect something what was central to the political avant-garde film, that was invoked by both of the devices described above; a form of truth that showed itself in the absolute.

Žižek asks the question what is the absolute and describes it as '[s]omething that appears to us in fleeting experiences, say, through the gentle smile of a beautiful woman, or even through the warm, caring smile of a person who otherwise may seem ugly and rude,' (2014b p. 89). George Orwell describes a similar scene in his book, *Road to Wigan Pier*, when he glimpses a woman kneeling in a gutter in a back alley. Orwell wrote that 'She knew well enough what was happening to her – understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold,' (1937 p. 15). Moments such as these reoccur throughout the examples of political avant-garde film that I have considered in the former chapters. What are shown are not the devices I have considered here in their effect but the moments of absolute that are produced through their disruptions of reality in its mediated form.

Žižek describes the absolute in Hegelian terms stating the 'absolute' does not add some deeper, more substantial, dimension – it includes (subjective) illusion into (objective) truth itself, (Žižek, 2014b p. 106). It is the moment of recognition of the

individual as both subject to the objective reality and the recognition of their potential within that reality to change it. The ultimate principle of both the devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement is to awake in the viewer a consciousness of their potential, of their subjective position within the objective reality.⁴⁶

In, *Spanish Labyrinth*, I draw attention to such a moment in Allegrét and Lotar's film, *Tenerife*. It is moment where a woman washing clothes by the sea is captured singing and this is recognised when the character of Lotar describes the scene saying:

Lotar: One woman sang and the sound was the only moment of absolute truth. But of course we could not capture it. We had no sound equipment and so it was lost to the wind.

(Appendix 2 p. 157)

This shot is remembered in the final scene of the film where the character of Lotar again reflects on it, paraphrasing Orwell to say:

Lotar: She knew well enough how dreadful her destiny was... and yet... she still sang.

(Appendix 2 p. 175)

Though subject to her position within the objective social reality within which she is held, she is, regardless of the hardship it entails, consciously so, and this privilege of truth, is her one empowering grace.

Conclusion

Spanish Labyrinth, attempts to re-deploy the devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement in response to a contemporary social and theoretical context. In this chapter I discuss, *Spanish Labyrinth*, in light of the theoretical

⁴⁶ The narrator of the film, *Sans Soliel (Sunless)*, by Chris Marker, (1983), describes the filmmakers attempts to capture on such moment in the look of a young African girl stating: 'He writes that he can now summon up the look on the face of the market lady of Praia that had lasted only the length of a film frame'.

framework established in the preceding chapters and specifically in terms of the devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement. I relate these to the two main narrative voices of the character of Eli Lotar and the Narrator and their placement in relation to the use of primary and found footage in the film.

The main concern of this chapter is to reflect on my own determinations in re-deploying the devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement in relation to contemporary notions of matter following Latour's proposal that non-human actants be recognised as producing social relations. Here I discuss how, *Spanish Labyrinth*, attempts to extend a traditionally Marxist notion of social reality to include such a conception of matter without becoming removed from social or political concerns. This is proposed through a redefinition of Landscape as subject and Nature as a system of matter in response to the effects of climate change.

A non-linear or hierarchical conception of reality is shown to be reflected in the narrative form of the film through the placement of the two narrative voices in relation to each other and the images in the film that constitutes a dispersed form of truth. Rather than a closed form of truth being delivered by a single narrator the viewer is required to construct their own interpretation of the facts as presented to them in mediated form.

In terms of the device of estrangement and its re-deployment in, *Spanish Labyrinth*, I recognise that the film does contain signifiers of the conventions of this device but propose that in this they constitute bluffs or decoys. The act of estrangement does not occur in effect through these forms but the constructive nature of the film as a mediated form of reality is indicated through the content of the film. This is the reflexive element that draws attention to the viewer of their own act of perception and that what they perceive is a mediated form of reality. This discourse is held between both narrators and the images of the film that reflects on notions of fact, truth, reality and forms of realism, both within a contemporary context and that of the avant-garde period.

Finally a notion of the absolute is introduced to attempt to describe the nature of truth to which, *Spanish Labyrinth*, aspires. This is not a hard material reality beneath the

illusion of images but a sense of the real that transpires in the illusion; the inclusion of the subjective within the objective truth itself. This is described in terms of the core affect that is central to both the devices, of the visualisation of social relation and estrangement, the recognition of ‘the individual man as a causal nexus’ of social reality as described by Brecht, ([1938] 2010).

Conclusion, By Remaining the Same We Are Ultimately Changed

This thesis sets out to achieve various aims that question political avant-garde film, contemporary fine art film, their relationship to a concurrent social reality that they seek to reflect, and a form of truth of that reality itself. This it sets out to do by bringing into light and into the context of art theory many films of the avant-garde period that have been excluded from this field of theory, in my opinion, due to their political content, sense of social responsibility and use of photo-realism, which over the course of the 20th Century saw them defined against a Griersonian definition of documentary film. It is my hope that the phrase *Transformative Realism* goes a small way in securing their position as forms of creative practice regardless of their political content. In respect of understanding a contemporary form of art practice, it is my hope that by invoking political avant-garde's principle strategies contemporary fine art film's ability to reflect social and political realities independently, and with social responsibility is encouraged.

Transformative Realism

The phrase transformative realism stems from Brecht's 'functional transformation,' (Benjamin, [1934] 1973 p. 93). This can be split into two characteristics the transformative, that transforms the means of production of knowledge of reality i.e. realism, and function that indicates a potential for social reorganisation. However, these are interchangeable. The works can also transform the ideological structure of knowledge, of consensual forms of media, and re-function its affect in the viewer. The word *transformative* as I use it in the moniker transformative realism, therefore, compounds the meanings that Brecht indicates by the use of both of the words transformative and function in his phrase 'function transformation,' (Benjamin, [1934] 1973 p. 93).

Avant-Garde Transformative Realism

This phrase embodies the culmination of the whole period of film making from Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* to Buñuel's *Land Without Bread*. For this reason it is better understood in more depth as it progressed through this period. Transformative

realism's connection to the current reality is forged in the event of the Bolshevik revolution. This is both in the relationship of art to the historical reality that this event triggered, as historical contingency, and in its requirement that art be *closer to life*, a correct correlation between art and life i.e. one that was structured according to a dialectical materialist conception of reality that corresponded ideologically with Marxist-Leninism.

In this thesis I demonstrate how Dziga Vertov incorporated these demands into an experimental form of newsreel. This broke with the conventions of the newsreel form that insisted on fact being corroborated by a time-place index that was used to validate its status as a form of objective truth. Instead Vertov developed a form of 'newsreelness' that suspended the present moment through its treatment of time and an ideological structure that reflected the current *social* reality.

This form of filmic realism was carried into European avant-garde filmmaking, partly by Vertov's younger brother and cinematographer Mikhail Kaufman, as seen in Vigo's film, *À propos de Nice*. A link between Vertov's work and that of the European avant-garde artists is shown in its dialectical structuring that is discussed in Vertov's *Kino-Pravda I*. Vertov's influence can also be seen in the montage technique employed by Storck in *The History of the Unknown Soldier*, and opening sequence to his collaboration with Ivens, *Misery in Borinage*. These film works, by Ivens and Storck, provide one example of a transformative potential, in that they take the material content of the consensual form, newsreel, and transform both the formal and ideological structure of it. Storck and Ivens' films should be considered creative works that were part of a wider cultural movement, not only according to Ivens' testimony in Rouch's film *Cinémafia*, but also following the Shklovskian definition of art as an active perceptual process, that their transformation of the consensual form, newsreel, makes them a reflexive form of realism. Their status as art is also supported by the realist debate that considered an authentically Marxist aesthetic in art at the time. Storck and Ivens' films embodied a principle formal device that defined the dominant notion of realism, described in this debate by Lukács as Authentic Realism. The principle tenet of which was to depict society as a totality of relations with the individual as a causal nexus. This was shared by Brecht, with some reservations, and sought to visualise these relations in contrast to an opposing form of realism in art,

New Objectivity, that sought to depict the reified form of social relations, the surface of things, in single images.

The second formal device that is distinctive of political avant-garde film is that of estrangement. This was developed from Shklovsky's definition of art most prominently by Brecht through his theatrical form, epic theatre. Here interruptions of a scenario or social situation distance the audience from the play, and the audience members from the events on stage. This, by Brecht's definition not only provokes a form of awareness of the process of perception, the constructs of the medium that is being perceived, but also a form of social consciousness, or conscience through a process of rationalisation. In chapter 2, I consider the device of estrangement specifically in relation to film, as an interruption of the expectations of a consensual form of media. This is demonstrated through a study of the film, *Land Without Bread*, as an interruption of the audience's expectations of the conventions of ethnographic film and the travelogue.

Avant-garde transformative realism can therefore be defined by its use of the devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement, among others. Both of these formal devices affect the viewer by invoking in them a form of social consciousness or conscience whereby that person is aware of their position in society and the potential to transform that reality which that position embodies. In the case of both these devices this is achieved by interrupting consensual forms of media, a transformation of their form and ideological structure, to provide them with a social function. This constitutes a form of liberation of the means of production of knowledge of reality, to produce an oppositional form of realism that can also be defined independently as art.

Contemporary Transformative Realism

The contemporary form of transformative realism is understood as a response to the current historical contingency that was triggered by the attacks carried out on the World Trade Centre, New York, in September, 2001. This provided a catalyst within fine art production for the incorporation of documentary modes of practices and the representation of political and social realities. Many of these forms of practice sought

to reflect *current* realities, which in turn led to the consideration of both art's relationship to documentary film, following a Griersonian tradition, and journalism.

The contemporary works that I have identified are considered not as remnants of an avant-garde film practice but as a contemporary form of transformative realism in that they respond to the *current* moment of historical contingency. These can be defined as art following Sklovsky's description of an active perceptual process and link to political avant-garde film through the redeployment of the devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement. These devices in their more recent configuration are studied more closely in the work of Biemann and Martens in chapters 3 and 4.

In chapter 3 I look specifically at the device of the visualisation of social relations in the recent work of Biemann, specifically *Deep Weather* and *Egyptian Chemistry*. These two works were conceived and exhibited within the context of the research and exhibition project *World of Matter* that reconsidered definitions of matter following Latour's Actor Network Theory.

Firstly I consider, *Deep Weather*, through the most fundamental tenet of the device of the visualisation of social relations i.e. its dialectically materialist conception of reality. *Deep Weather*, implicitly gestures towards a dialectical conception of reality through binary oppositions. These take the form of materials such as oil and water and territories such as land and sea. In Biemann's work these display a harmonious symbiosis rather than an irreconcilable tension that leads to a transformation of reality itself and are therefore defined as a naïve form of dialecticism. Biemann's work can be considered transformative in its relationship to consensual media as a form of critique. However, the work is shown to lack a socially transformative function due to being structured according to an ideology of Ethics as opposed to politics. Herein lies a gap between the device as it is deployed in the avant-garde period and its current form that expresses an inability to reach beyond the structure of the consensual forms of media and indeed politics that it claims to critique. This is described as an act of political futility, as the work as a form of critique pertains to the same logic of the reality that it denounces.

The second study in chapter 3 is the analysis of a wider conception of reality as a network of relations that Biemann's work is informed by. Here, *Egyptian Chemistry*, reconfigures the device of the visualisation of social relations by de-centring the human subject. This is enacted by, as according to Latour's ANT, attributing non-human objects with the ability to actively influence other objects, whether human or non-human. My study considers whether, *Egyptian Chemistry*, as Biemann claims, successfully extends causal potential to forms of matter or demonstrates this. This is seen to be the case and the reality that Biemann presents in the work does constitute a political gesture, as she terms it. The extension of the definition of the social into the realms of matter and the incorporation of matter in the definition of the social, a form of cosmopolitics as termed by Latour, does have the effect of re-grounding the perception of social reality, in particular the conditions faced in respect of climate change and the increasing privatisation of and depletion of natural resources depicted in, *Deep Weather*, in a material reality. The social consequences of capitalism and climate change (the latter being understood as attributable to the former) are shown to be manifest in the material condition of social reality.

Despite this Biemann's works, in decentring the human subject, in particular in *Egyptian Chemistry*, resort to a form of pseudo-scientific neutrality that eschews the sullied practice of politics. The lack of an explicit ideological position in, *Egyptian Chemistry*, suggests a desire for objectivity *in form*, reminiscent of photo-realism's early claims of an objective form of truth through its corroboration by fact. Here Biemann, in her apparent association with a current philosophical trend for an object oriented definition of reality, produces a contradiction in terms of realism. The consequence is that though the extension of the definition of social into the realm of material agency constitutes a political gesture, *Egyptian Chemistry*, like, *Deep Weather*, fails to embody an ideologically political structure in itself.

Biemann's work claims a political status as a reflection of current social realities. Despite not explicitly or implicitly committing to an ideology of politics, whether emancipatory or otherwise, art nevertheless remains an ideologically structured form of knowledge. In *Egyptian Chemistry* Biemann identifies a reservation among many fellow artists that relates to the question of the political that can also be felt in the work itself. Through a lack of recognition in this respect, Biemann's work reflects a

contemporary political dilemma in that a politically critical position cannot or will not aspire beyond the parameters of its own condition.

In chapter 4, I consider the device of estrangement in, *Enjoy Poverty*, by Renzo Martens. As in the case of the redeployment of the device of the visualisation of social relations by Biemann, the device of estrangement is reconfigured in its redeployment by Martens. Martens' film is distinct from Biemanns' however, as his conception of reality does not de-centre the human but conversely centralises the individual, in particular the Western spectator, of images of poverty, who he stands in for as the central character of the film. Martens' film can also be understood as being structured according to an ideology of politics through a commitment to a truth. This Martens reveals to the audience, not through the distancing of the audience from the work but by distancing the Western protagonists in the film from the Congolese Subjects. The distance between these two positions in the social reality of the Congo is created when Martens indicates a disparity, a gap, between the reality of the speculative capitalist economy to which the Western protagonists adhere and the material social reality that the Congolese Subjects must endure.

In a further reconfiguration of the device of estrangement Martens' film reveals the Congolese Subjects as individuals that express political subjectivities in contrast to the generalised depiction that they are subjected to in the consensual forms of media that his film critiques. The Western Spectator is not only required to acknowledge the Congolese Subjects as individuals but also their own complicity in their situation of poverty, their social relationship to them. Here however, Martens, and therefore his film, does not take the position of the Congolese Subject. Martens is also not critical of the position of the Western Spectator, as Buñuel is in, *Land Without Bread*, in his ironically scathing voiceover. Instead, in committing to the same truth that the film reveals to the Western Spectator, their economic and social connection to the Congolese subject, *Enjoy Poverty*, constitutes a form of political inconsequentiality that defines consensual media and characterises, as according to Martens, much of political contemporary fine art, both forms that the film explicitly sets out to critique. Rather than affect in the viewer a sense of social consciences, as Buñuel did in targeting both the supporters of the Republican government in Spain and his bourgeois social peers, Martens inscribes the social position of the Western spectator

in the material social reality of the Congolese. This does not lead to social re-organisation but merely reiterates the inequality by showing that poverty is the result of the inconsequentiality of art.

Both works, whether ethically or politically structured, choose not to relate to an ideology beyond the social system that they seek to reflect and in doing so critique. Within social politics this could be seen as the apparent ineffectuality of political action made within the political system that is abjured. In order for political action to have an effect it must appeal to an ideology beyond the system that it seeks to change. In terms of art, the ineffectuality of political action can be equated to the performance of the political, in place of a commitment to such an ideological structure. The work of both of the artists stands as testimony to the fact that such ideologies exist. This is shown in, *Deep Weather*, in the attempts to resist coastal erosion and therefore the need for a redefinition of water as a territory of citizenship, that the hundreds of people in Bangladesh are engaged in. This is also seen in, *Egyptian Chemistry*, in the accounts of the peasant activist Shahenda Maklad, of resistance to global economics and a desire for self-sufficiency and national sovereignty following the revolution in Egypt in 2011. This is also seen in the demands of the Congolese worker for a fair wage and the description of the social reality in the Congo as it is given by the militia leader in his interview to Martens.

In chapter 5 I discuss the practical research, the film, *Spanish Labyrinth*, in light of the theoretical framework established in the preceding chapters and specifically in terms of the devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement. I relate these to the two main narrative voices of the character of Eli Lotar and the Narrator and their placement in relation to the use of primary and found footage in the film.

The main concern of this chapter is to give insight into my own choices in the re-deployment of the devices of the visualisation of social relations and estrangement in light of the critical discussion of their use by Biemann and Martens respectively. In response to Latour's proposal that non-human actants be recognised as producing social relations I attempts to describe how, *Spanish Labyrinth*, extends a traditionally Marxist notion of social reality to include such a conception of matter without becoming removed from social or political concerns. I also explain how this notion of

a system of matter is characterised through a redefinition of Landscape as subject and Nature.

I also reflect on the narrative structure of the film that reflects a non-linear or hierarchical conception of reality. This is achieved through the placement of the two narrative voices in relation to each other and the images in the film that constitutes a dispersed form of truth. This 'non-closure' of truth in narrative form opposes the singular truths constructed by consensual media, particularly newsreel or its contemporary form news media. Instead the viewer is required to construct their own interpretation of the facts as presented to them in mediated form therefore attributing them the role of constructing their own notion of truth through the reflection of the constituent parts of the narrative.

My re-deployment of the device of estrangement in, *Spanish Labyrinth*, is a response to the recognition by various theorists and filmmakers such as Martens, Ranciere and Žižek that a widely employed form of estrangement, the disruption of the reflection of reality to supposedly return the viewer to the real is ineffectual and constitutes an empty signifier of political content. I acknowledge that these signifiers do exist in, *Spanish Labyrinth*, but I assert that they are intended as decoys that are intended to distract the viewer that, although constructed from fact, elements of the film such as Lotar's character are in fact constructed. The act of estrangement does not occur in effect through signified forms but the constructive nature of the film as a mediated form of reality, and similarly that of news media, is indicated through the content of the film. This is indicated to the viewer through the narrators' voices and the images of the film that reflects as a triad on notions of fact, truth, reality and forms of realism, both within a contemporary context and that of the avant-garde period. A contradiction exists between the content of the film and the form as the content undermines the supposed reality that the form conveys.

Towards the end of the chapter Žižek's definition of the absolute is introduced to attempt to describe the notion of truth which, *Spanish Labyrinth*, attempts to invoke through the two central devices. This is partly a response to the inability of the central devices to return the viewer to a hard material or objective reality within a contemporary context. Instead, the notion of truth that, *Spanish Labyrinth*, aspires to,

resides in the real that transpires through the illusory form of the film itself. This is also described as the inclusion of the subjective within the objective truth itself. This truth is described as relating to the ultimate affect in the viewer, their realisation of their subjective position within the objective reality and the potential that that position embodies.

The Contemporary Dilemma

The works by both artists that I consider can be considered forms of transformative realism, including my own film, *Spanish Labyrinth*. They produce forms of realism using devices established in the avant-garde period that wrest the means of production of knowledge of our social reality from consensual forms of media by expanding our conception of that reality. This constitutes an independent form of realism that is implicitly oppositional to the dominant form of politics that defines the social reality.

I define the period of avant-garde transformative realism as ending with both the consolidation of the documentary form with the interests of national government and a more politically direct, or militant tendency in political avant-garde film, in line with the popular front's efforts to oppose fascism. Following this logic, the reluctance of contemporary transformative realism to appeal or commit to an ideology outside of that which it critiques could be understood to be due to such a form of commitment placing the work outside of the system that defines the work's status as art.

However, in its lack of a clear political engagement, contemporary transformative realism reflects a very contemporary dilemma that I believe is definitive of the current historical contingency. The problem of not being able to appeal to an outside of this paradigm is not appealing beyond this paradigm. However, this problem is not simply tautological, it is revealed in truth to be a dilemma, because in order to appeal beyond we must also leave behind much of what some of us, but by no means a majority, have become comfortable with, that which we feel defines us. This is not a form of compromise; as if we do not commit to change then we will lose what we value to the changing reality in which of which we are a part.

Appendix 1

Email to the author
Sent 30th June, 2015

Hi Sam

it's a vast terrain that opens up when engaging in new materialisms, ranging from a metaphysical search into mattering processes to linking local events to a larger universal entity. My branch of feminism has always been materialist, so no big news on that front. Only, as I totally agree with Elisabeth Grosz in this rather short and concise interview, the focus is no longer on the subject but on new forms of engagement and processes where the human is only one part of the mix. Egyptian Chemistry is doing that. If you are interested in theories, it's not the urgent and most pressing events you want to represent for there is little potential for philosophical reflection there.

<http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/a-conversation-with-elizabeth-grosz-heather-davis/>

To decenter the human will make us feel that the center of the image is empty, no political subject either. But the move humans away from the center is in itself highly political.

the key question for me right now would center around the agency of art in worldliness, i.e. art as an organizing force in the world; the multiplicity of worlds generated and inhabited by different species; and the shift from a focus on subject-oriented (feminist) philosophy to geophilosophy with the question of how this decentred human figures in this new mix.

That's how I would discern my new endeavor in Indonesia next month. But it rings true for my few previous projects as well.

all the best for now,
Ursula

Appendix 2

Spanish Labyrinth, South from Granada

Annotated Script

Lotar: In a word the forces of the old and new imperialism, the bourgeoisie and capital, always align to create a world in its image. British Petroleum and pop music, the European dollar and anti-trade unionism laws...

We must destroy that image if we are to create a different reality.⁴⁷

Earlier this year the students and the workers joined forces to fight for control of production. The production of culture as well as production in work. The May uprisings⁴⁸ brought images of Spain back into my mind.

A glorious people vibrated again,
the lightning of the nations;

Liberty, from heart to heart, from
tower to tower, scattering contagious fire into the sky,
liberty gleamed.

My soul spurned the chains of its dismay,
clothed in rapid wings of song, sublime and strong.⁴⁹

Title:

Spanish Labyrinth
South from Granada⁵⁰

Narrator: The surrealist photographer and revolutionary filmmaker Eli Lotar recorded his memoirs to tape in the final years of his life in Paris.

He recalls an epic journey to Spain that he made with friends and fellow filmmakers Yves Allégret and René Naville. They set off together in 1931 the year that Spain's second Republic was declared.

Their intention was to film the poverty of Las Hurdes, a region in the mid-West. From there they diverted South, to capture the uprisings and revolutionary communities, that they had heard were forming in Andalusia.

They filmed the strikes and demonstrations that filled the streets of Seville, then sought rest in Carmona on the outskirts of the city. But here, they were arrested and their footage confiscated.

⁴⁷ Quoted from the film, *British Sounds (See You at Mao)*, (Godard, 1969).

⁴⁸ Refers to demonstrations and strikes in Paris and across France in May 1968 that led to the dissolution of the National Assembly and scheduling of new elections.

⁴⁹ Section of, *Ode to Liberty*, (Shelley, [1820] 2009).

⁵⁰ Title references Gerald Brenan's books, *Spanish Labyrinth*, (1962), and *South From Granada*, (1963)

On their release they were ordered to leave the Spanish mainland, which they did but only to sail to the island of Tenerife to continue filming.

Tenerife: The Canary Islands actually belong to Spain.

They are situated to the north west of the Sahara.

In Ancient times they were known as the Islands of Fortune because the weather is always clement.

Narrator: Lotar never spoke publically of the arrest or the film that was never to be made, and in his later years he withdrew from society. What is known is that he returned to Spain to re-shoot the footage of *Las Hurdes* with Luis Buñuel a few years later. But the footage from his first trip, of the mountains around Aracena, and the protests in Seville, was lost forever.

Tenerife: Tenerife the most important and the vast of the Canary Islands, without rival in the world. The temperature never goes below 10 degrees.

Narrator: This film follows the path of Lotar, Allégret and Rene Naville through Andalusia; from the village of Los Olivos in the forests of the Aracena Mountains, that they crossed to reach Seville, Carmona where they were arrested and to Cadiz where they boarded a ship for Tenerife.

These locations provide the events of the story with a setting.⁵¹

However, history is not made of events and locations but of people, and it is not only made of people remembering, it is made of people acting and living their past in these same locations in the present. The Spanish landscape provides us with a theatre, for not only what *has* happened, but also what *is* happening today.⁵²

Lotar: Los Olivos was like a white jewel in a sea of green compared to where we had just been. We had travelled from Las Hurdes, in the mid-west, which was baron and remote. Allégret wanted to film the extreme poverty and isolation of the Hurdanos people, who I filmed again a year later with Buñuel.⁵³

Hearing about the uprisings in Andalusia we decided to travel south over the mountains of the Sierra de Aracena towards Seville⁵⁴. It was hard to get to, as there

⁵¹ Setting as according to Anne Cauquelin as described in, *Landscape and Film*, (Lefebvre, 2006 pp. 20-21).

⁵² Jacob Bronowski quoted from, *The Ascent of Man*, (Gilling, 1973 episode 13).

⁵³ Lotar returned to film, *Las Hurdes*, (1933) with Buñuel a year later as documented in, *Buñuel: The Red Years, 1929-1939*, (Gubern et al., 2012 pp. 159-160).

⁵⁴ Documented in, *Buñuel*, (Baxter, 1994 p. 143).

had been a tornado the month before, which had damaged the road.⁵⁵ Still it was one of those villages where you slid all the way along the main street on mud and goats' shit⁵⁶ and neither the reforms of the Republic nor the fervour of the more revolutionary farming communities had reached the village.

Narrator: The tornado that had damaged the road had in fact triggered a chain of events in the village of Los Olivos that would change it for good. Before this change, the villager's lives were controlled by the one or two landowners, who owned the farmland around the village, for as far as the eye could see.

Tenerife: On one plantation of 62 square Kilometres the bananas stretch out until the sea, the culture of its trees and the gathering of the fruit are the principle occupation of the people of this country.

Narrator: Lotar said 'the landscape made a prisoner of man'⁵⁷ and just as tending the rows of bananas seemed endless, working the land around Los Olivos governed every aspect of the villager's lives.

Lotar: The produce of the land, the bananas, were declared the private property of the plantation companies who received any profits. Yet the land itself was state owned so that any losses made by the companies were incurred by the people.

We believed that the natural resources belonged to those that worked the land. This truth was what the farm labourers and peasants were struggling for. The reality in Tenerife was far from this.

Tenerife: Throughout the Orotova Valley there are great cement reservoirs containing artificial lakes. Drained to the sea and filled by pumps the sweet water is stored in these reservoirs.

Lotar: Not even water was considered a right.

Tenerife: The sweet water in the Canaries is very rare and meanwhile the banana trees need to be watered everyday. While the principle concern of the farmers is to capture this water and carry it to the various systems of agriculture via a very simple system of irrigation.

Lotar: I had filmed the magnificent streams of water that were channelled through the centre of the mountain villages in Spain. They were central to life, like archeries,

⁵⁵ The cyclone is an actual event that took place in 1931 in Los Olivos as is documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia* (Collier, 1987 p. 83).

⁵⁶ International Brigadier Walter Gregory paraphrased from sound recording, *Walter Gregory Spanish Civil War Memories*, (1983) held at the British Library, London.

⁵⁷ Quote taken from the anthropological study, *Las Jurdes. Etude de geographie humaine*, (Legendre, 1927), that inspired Allégret and Lotar's trip to Spain and the film, *Las Hurdes*.

they watered the people and ran on to the fields below but in Tenerife even this resource had been taken by the banana companies...

Lotar: Capital was always given priority over the people, and the plantation workers had to wash in the sea.

Tenerife: The flowers cover the banana tree, on each leaf grows a large bunch of bananas.

Lotar: The banana plants grew like exotic monsters that hung over the workers who toiled like slaves tending their limbs.

Tenerife: De-flowering consists of taking away the debris of the petals at the tips of the fruit, continuing the cycle of growth. This operation requires great dexterity; if they don't do it right the banana falls and rots.

Lotar: The workers' relationship with these plants became surreal. The status of the bananas was elevated above the people. It was completely alienating and whenever I eat a banana an image of this exotic monster comes into my mind.

Tenerife: Each bunch are cut ten days before maturity. Cut too early and they are not ripe... cut too late and they have gone off.

Narrator: At the time that Lotar passed through Los Olivos it was governed by its richest landowner a man named Celestino Lopez whose say in who was and who was not given work in the village ensured his place as Mayor at every election.⁵⁸

Like most land owners Lopez increased his profits by lowering workers' wages or by hiring women and children as they provided cheaper labour. This created a lack of work for the men of the village and allowed the landowners to lower wages in general. The result was a day's wages could not feed a family.⁵⁹

To prevent an uprising the village, like most others, had a system of food charity. This allowed those who were starving to collect food parcels donated by the richer landowners in the village.⁶⁰

Narrator: The Republican Government abolished the system of charity and made reforms to increase wages and employment, so that people could afford to buy their own food.

Today, once again, people in parts of Spain cannot afford to feed themselves.

⁵⁸ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 pp. 40, 72).

⁵⁹ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 pp. 79, 103).

⁶⁰ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 pp. 71, 75, 141).

In 2012 raids on supermarkets were carried out in and around Cadiz for food and school essentials, which were distributed among the poorer families. These raids were sometimes led by a local Mayor, Juan Manuel Sanchez Gordillo, who the media dubbed the Spanish Robin Hood.

Basic products such as lentils, beans and oil were taken, but they insisted that their intention was not to rob, and gave the food to non-profit organisations to distribute to needy families. The images of the events were symbolic as they visualised the fact that the same supermarkets that were raided threw away tons of food everyday, even though people don't have enough to survive.

The supermarkets are also accused of ruining the small scale farmers as four or five multinational companies control the market prices, which are now lower than production costs.

Only two-per cent of the landowners now own 50 per cent of the arable land. A concentration of land ownership that is 10 per cent higher than it was during the Second Republic, and that has created many landless and unemployed farm labourers.

Tenerife: While the unemployed wait for work to start again the women wash the laundry by the sea.

Lotar: We filmed women washing clothes in Los Olivos and so we filmed the same again in Tenerife... One woman sang and the sound was the only moment of absolute truth. But of course we could not capture it. We had no sound equipment and so it was lost to the wind.⁶¹

Tourist (diegetic): The women used to wash their clothes here like this.

Narrator: Lotar said: 'In art you had film, just as you had architecture, painting music etc., and that was one big movement – the avant-garde of the 1930s.'⁶² He said he never used the word documentary to describe his work, because the documentaries of the time were like so many forms of charity. They framed poverty, but did nothing to change the situation.

Lotar: There are many documentaries that exoticise the dirt and squalor that people are forced to live in. I have always tried to make my images more direct, to show the realities that are hard to confront but that engage me as an individual. We believed

⁶¹ See, *Event*, (Žižek, 2014b pp. 90, 106) for representation of truth and notions of the absolute.

⁶² Joris Ivens quoted from the film, *Cinémafia*, (Rouch, 1980) as documented in, *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch*, (Ten Brink, 2007 p. 223).

that art should force the spectator to take a stand, it should dots the “i”s of the audience and if it doesn’t engage an artist, it engages people even less.⁶³

By the end of the film the spectators had to want to do more than simply send the workers money.⁶⁴

Three subjects engaged avant-garde filmmakers at the time: poverty, housing problems and Spain.⁶⁵

Narrator: The road to Los Olivos that had been damaged by the tornado became an object of contention in the village as Spain’s newly elected government had created a grant to pay for public works that would ease unemployment. Lopez, the Mayor, wanted to use the work grant allocated to the village, in light of the damage caused by the tornado, to pave the road which led to his house using his favoured and loyal workers.

This would leave many of the neediest without employment and the damaged road in desperate need of repair.

To challenge Lopez’s decision some of the workers had formed a syndicate, which was headed by a muleteer named Cerefino Santis.⁶⁶

A divide appeared in Los Olivos over how the work grant should be spent and the syndicate ultimately responded to the Mayor’s proposals by violently disrupting the town council session of September the 23rd, 1931, held here in the town hall.⁶⁷

This marked a turning point and by 1933 Santis was elected Mayor and the syndicate had taken control of the village council.⁶⁸

Things from here began to change in Los Olivos. Firstly the newly elected village council repaired the road leading to the village, refurbished the town hall and ordered all landlords to whitewash their houses for their tenants. These changes followed reforms made by the national government such as the abolition of private education and the secularisation of the cemetery.⁶⁹

⁶³ Paraphrased from a quote attributed to the filmmaker Jean Vigo documented in, *Children of Vertov in the Land of Brecht*, (Veronneau, 1984 pp. 418-419).

⁶⁴ Paraphrased from Joris Ivens writing about the film, *Misery in Borinage*, (1933b), in, *Camera and I*, (Ivens, 1969 p. 89).

⁶⁵ Lesley Mitchell describes filmmakers that depicted current events of the 1930s by saying ‘the committed radicals were obsessed by Spain, unemployment and housing problems’ in *Before Hindsight*, (Lewis, 1977).

⁶⁶ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 77).

⁶⁷ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 81).

⁶⁸ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 227).

⁶⁹ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 87).

At the top of this street a bar was also opened by two socialists who had returned from work in the nearby Rio Tinto mines. This formed a meeting place for political ideas to be shared that counterpoised the exclusive casino owned by the former Mayor's cousin.⁷⁰

The syndicate continued to make attempts to take control of work from the landowners. Their most emboldened tactic was to assign different workers to each of the large estates. If not given work, they were to sit with their tools at the landowner's doorstep and demand their wages on a Saturday anyway.⁷¹

The change to the meaning of ownership and of property itself, through how the land was worked, removed the moral superiority of the landowners.

Lotar: One of the greatest changes that I had seen when I returned to Spain in 1933, was to the meaning of property. Traditionally owning land meant absolute control over it. Whether it was worked on or lived in or not, when and by whom. This autonomy implied moral status in society, if you owned property you were good, if you had nothing you were a dependent.⁷² Bunuel almost got caught out by this change as he nearly bought a monastery in La Alberca near Las Hurdes and would certainly have been targeted as a landlord following the outbreak of the war, if he had.⁷³

Narrator: With changes in society must come changes in art. How would Lotar depict the reality of these people today. I photographed these people on a simple digital camera whilst posing as a tourist. The people in the frame think that I am waiting for them to pass through. Close enough and they become aware that the camera is recording. Too far away and they are no longer the subject of the image.⁷⁴ Lotar said that "Year on year we invent ever more ridiculous camera techniques, and create more precise photographic instruments with which to capture reality, and each time we look at the images they are as uncertain as ever."⁷⁵

Lotar: In contrast to the aim of science, journalism or documentary, religion, the objective of art is not to create an exact image of the world, to fix it, but to explore it. Each line added to a sketch, each shot to a film, strengthens the depiction of the world but never makes it final.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 108).

⁷¹ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 141).

⁷² Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 74).

⁷³ Documented in, *Buñuel: The Red Years, 1929-1939*, (Gubern et al., 2012 pp. 1616-162).

⁷⁴ This method of capturing subjects with the camera references Dziga Vertov's filming techniques described by Vertov in, *The Cine-Pravda: A Report to the Cine-Eyes*, (Vertov, [1924] 1988).

⁷⁵ Jacob Bronowski remarks on the certainty of perception paraphrased from, *The Ascent of Man*, (Gilling, 1973 episode 11).

⁷⁶ Jacob Bronowski quoted from, *The Ascent of Man*, (Gilling, 1973 episode 11).

Science documentary and newsreel are becoming like new religions. They presume to be based on the myth that their assertions about reality are incontestable, absolute... and if people continue to believe that they have absolute knowledge, untestable in reality, then grave things will happen.⁷⁷

These social institutions, that define our reality, should also be revealed as fictions. The real role of art must be to throw our certainty of these institutions into doubt. To neglect to do so would only lead to their self-destruction, or our destruction by them.

Narrator: In 1936, with the news of an insurgency, members of the Los Olivos socialist youth group burnt the church and its contents. Wooden sculptures of the saints were denounced as nothing more than limbs of orange trees.⁷⁸

Tenerife: There is a very important official ceremony, the military of the Island of Fortune parades through.

Lotar: It has been a very hard lesson to learn, that we cannot eradicate all mystery, all chance occurrences from the world, but we are forgetting this lesson already. Thankfully between mystery and chance lies imagination, the only thing that protects our freedom, despite the fact that people keep trying to kill it off altogether.⁷⁹

Tenerife: The official ceremony is in progress. There is a very important person making a very important speech.

Narrator: Although no one was harmed in Los Olivos whilst the Socialists remained in control of the village, retribution was carried out across Spain by both sides during the uprisings.

When Franciost troops entered the village they set up their barracks in these buildings seen on the right. On September the 9th 1936 they rounded up ten sons and brothers of the Socialist councillor, who were then murdered outside of the village.⁸⁰

Wives and daughter's of the councillors had their heads shaved and were fed castor oil before being paraded through the streets and forced to clean the charred church.⁸¹

This wall that ran along road to the cemetery was marked for decades after with graffiti that read the path that all must tread.⁸²

⁷⁷ Jacob Bronowski paraphrased from, *The Ascent of Man*, (Gilling, 1973 episode 11).

⁷⁸ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 151)

⁷⁹ Buñuel quoted from, *My Last Breath*, (Buñuel, 1982 p. 174).

⁸⁰ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 pp. 152, 154-5).

⁸¹ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 158).

⁸² Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 156).

The former socialist councillors, including Santis, knew that they would be punished for their management of labour, acts against the property owners and the burning of the church when the troops arrived in the village.

They fled to the surrounding forest with assurances that their families would not be held to account.⁸³

Lotar: To continue to Seville we had to travel through the dense forest of the Sierra de Aracena mountains. Without the forest there was no work. No cork, food for pigs, timber, olives. By converting these common resources into private capital all politics throughout history have been defined by their relationship to the Landscape. In the hands of capital, the landscape makes a prisoner of man. Later the forest also became a refuge for the resistance fighters named the Maquis after the French word that described the dense mountainous forest that sheltered them.

Narrator: In September 2012 Spain's largest recorded forest fire swept through 60 kilometres of Andalusia. After filming Los Olivos a month before, I returned to Spain to film the remains of the forest. Lotar was right. Although photographic technology has progressed no resolution could depict the reality there.

The smell was so heavy I could sense it long before I could see the forest. The camera failed to capture the depth of the black charcoal, or the expanse of the forest that was burnt. The needles and leaves of the trees, shocked white and brown by heat, created a deceptively picturesque impression, as though they were still living.

The lifeless blackened forms seemed to cry out:

Your doings, evil and obscene,
Have turned me grey. Once I was green.
Look at my present sorry sight
A woods was I, a woods was I!
I curse you as I slowly die,
No longer reaching for the sky.
How old I am! How green I stood!
A woods was I, a woods was I!⁸⁴

In Andalusia the change in the climate could be first seen through phenology, subtle changes of the timings of the seasons.

⁸³ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 152).

⁸⁴ Quoted from the play, *The Last Days of Mankind*, (Kraus et al., 1974 p. 234)

People first began to see changes in the timings of Spring. The breeding of birds, the arrival of migrant species, the appearance of butterflies and the choruses of amphibians, all occurred progressively earlier from the 1960s.⁸⁵

Dragonfly and butterfly populations have climbed 210 meters higher to escape the increasing temperatures.⁸⁶ Tree lines also shifted to higher altitudes.⁸⁷

In Andalusia fire frequency and extent has significantly increased from the 1970s compared with previous decades.⁸⁸

By 2020 annual water run off from the mountains will decrease by 23%.⁸⁹ Extreme summer droughts only seen once every 100 years before the 20th Century start to reoccur more often than every 10 years.⁹⁰

The landscape is no longer simply a setting or backdrop for the actions of humans. It has become an actor in this potential tragedy.

Tenerife: Entirely protected by mountains that encircle the sleeping volcano is one of the most beautiful valleys in the world.

Lotar: Resistance against landlords and the inequality of capital became suppressed in Andalusian society when the first republic ended in 1874. But it remained underground and behind closed doors. Occasionally this fire surfaced.

Narrator: In 1888, when the landscape around Los Olivos was desolated by noxious fumes from open-air furnaces at the French and British Owned Rio Tinto mines mineworkers joined local farmers to protest over dangerous working conditions and the destruction of crops.⁹¹ Out of these protests, in 1894, peasant, craft, trade and mine working associations banded together to create syndicates.

In 1909 this allowed strikes by day workers over wages to be planned to co-inside with the winter olive harvest.

⁸⁵ Documented in, *Climate Change in Spain: Phenological Trends in Southern Areas*, (García-Mozo, 2011).

⁸⁶ Documented in, *Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007*, (Parry et al., 2007, Chapter 1.3.5.2 p. 102).

⁸⁷ Documented in, *Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007*, (Parry et al., 2007, Chapter 1.3.5.2 p. 102).

⁸⁸ Documented in, *Fire regime changes in the Western Mediterranean Basin: from fuel-limited to drought-driven fire regime*, (Pausas et al., 2012).

⁸⁹ Documented in, *Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007*, (Parry et al., 2007, Chapter 1.3.5.2 p. 549).

⁹⁰ Documented in, *Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007*, (Parry et al., 2007, Chapter 3.4.3 pp. 186-187).

⁹¹ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 49).

A drop in the demand for iron ore in 1912 led to 20,000 redundancies at the mines and major strikes were held in response.

Two years later a bad harvest led to hunger and unemployment. This led to an uprising in Los Olivos that saw the persecution of the village Mayor and the death of his wife at the hands of the villagers.⁹²

Again in 1929 there had been major droughts that led to Labour unrest. Strikes broke out in and around Seville as a result.⁹³ These strikes continued and would draw Lotar, Allégret and Navillé to Seville in 1931.

Narrator: Following the re-instatement of the Republic many of the peasant communities of Andalusia took control of the land from the landlords in an attempt to farm it collectively. This went far beyond the land reform the Republic imposed itself. The crisis of the landscape caused by environmental changes today also creates a need for political transformation; an opportunity to reimagine our place in relation to the land, and reconfigure our images of society.⁹⁴

Drought induced food and water shortages throughout Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and Libya are recognised as contributing significantly to the Arab Awakenings of 2011.

Before the revolution in Egypt the privatisation of water sent many of Cairo's residents to the polluted Nile as the water companies diverted water from agriculture and domestic use to gated residential communities and tourist resorts.⁹⁵

Tenerife: The varied climate allows all the plants of the world to flourish here from the Malaga fig, to the Alpine plants, right up to the African flowers.

Narrator: By 2030 the summer period will have lengthened in Andalusia. As a result agriculture will compete heavily with tourism for water resources, limiting the domestic supply.⁹⁶

The environment we see before us may not appear to be affected. If we look to other parts of the world, then the reality of that future can be seen now.

When Spain's people were confronted by the crisis of inequality and poverty in the second Republic they didn't change their lifestyle habits they came together to change the system that managed their resources and defined society.

From the forests of the Sierra de Aracena, Lotar, Allégret and Naville travelled South to film the strikes in Seville.

⁹² Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 50).

⁹³ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 30).

⁹⁴ Paraphrased from, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs the Climate*, (Klein, 2014 p. 56).

⁹⁵ Documented in, *Revolution of the Thirsty*, (Piper, 2012).

⁹⁶ Documented in, *Impacts of Climate Change in Tourism and Europe*, (Amelung B, 2009).

There have been strikes in Spain in recent years and I looked for documentation of these online.

This video was titled ‘Miners Demonstrate – Madrid 31st May 2012. It has been claimed that for images to function as fact they must be accompanied by testimony, a time and a place.’⁹⁷

Lotar: We went to Carmona, just outside Seville because we wanted a break from the strikes and protests. The situation felt tense and as two Frenchmen with a lady shooting film we drew a lot of attention, which was exhausting enough, but on top the strikes were beginning to get violent. There were no journalists or newsreel companies there. French, British and American companies felt the story was too ‘Red’ for cinema audiences and strikes were damaging to the new coalition government as it made them look like they were losing control.

Narrator: The construction of events is underpinned by the declaration of fact. The demonstration is captured by protestors, press and police on video. This struggle for the control of the image of reality reflects the struggle to command reality itself.

In the event of a demonstration Landscape becomes setting once again, subordinate to action. The presence of the camera is intended to shape these actions.⁹⁸

Lotar: There was no television in 1931, the only place that people could be exposed to images such as these was in the cinema. The images of students being beaten by the police that were broadcast on television in May this year brought the people of France out to demonstrate across the country. This was the first time that images of this kind had reached the people en masse, literally at home, and they reacted by striking and taking to the streets.

Narrator: Society is shaped through the control of images. As the spread of images cannot be curtailed, across a digital landscape, their meaning and effect is enforced through the construction of narrative. Pre-empting this use, actions stage images that are arranged in the appearance of truth, regardless of fact.

Lotar: In the 1930s the newsreel companies were controlled by the government and commercial interests alike, and they did not want to risk showing images that would cause a reaction.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Paraphrased from, *Where is Dziga Vertov Striding?*, (Shlkovsky, [1926] 2004).

⁹⁸ Paraphrased from, *Images of Emergency*, (Power, 2014).

⁹⁹ Gerald Sanger paraphrased from, *Before Hindsight*, (Lewis, 1977).

In reality there was almost a state of emergency, it was like marshal law particularly in Andalucía. The Spanish government was under pressure from both the right and the left, but particularly the left. There had been a lot of church burnings and the government responded by passing laws to control and punish violence in political, social, and religious confrontations.¹⁰⁰

One of the laws we were warned about was the Ley du Fugas the fugitives law, which allowed the guard to shoot anyone who ran from them on sight.¹⁰¹

The assault guards provoked and intimidated the crowds by lashing out at random individuals or by filing along like roman soldiers. When they started shooting we almost lost our nerve.

We had to be careful not to be caught by the Civil Guard as the camera was a good enough reason to arrest us but we also got some strikers getting aggressive with us as they didn't want their faces being recorded.

Narrator: Early libertarian artists were cautious of using film, as footage of political events had been used against them. In April of 1911 the director of the Pathé movie-hall in Epernay decided that a revolt by vine-growers in Aube would make a suitable subject for a newsreel. The film, titled *A Cavalry Charge* was then used by the police to prosecute as many of those involved as could be recognised.¹⁰²

Lotar: We tried to keep out of sight but it was not long before we were arrested. I remember a large courtyard surrounded by pillars where we sat in the shade drinking and talking, passing the time. I think it was an abandoned nunnery of all places. Someone must have seen us go in and informed on us as the Guards were waiting outside when we came out. When we were approached by an officer we just had to hold our hands up to him and let him take the camera from us. The newsreels influenced the public not by constructing lies, it wasn't necessary to falsify a lie when the same truth could be gained by the omission of fact.¹⁰³ It was obvious why the Spanish wanted to confiscate our footage but the newsreels abroad all colluded in the same kind of censorship.

By not reporting on the strikes in Seville and the situation in Spain the French and British Governments were turning the audience's heads away from the reality at home as well as Spain. Our eyes were kept closed and the objective of art was to open them.

¹⁰⁰ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 111).

¹⁰¹ Documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 117).

¹⁰² Documented in, *Educational Cinema A Libertarian Invention*, (Marinone, 2009 p. 17).

¹⁰³ James Cameron paraphrased from, *Before Hindsight*, (Lewis, 1977).

We were carrying all of our exposed film stock with us and they took everything. The construction of truth continued by the omission of fact¹⁰⁴ until there were the images of the Casas Viejas massacre which was filmed by the English correspondent... Cameron.¹⁰⁵

El Grito Del Sur: I received my technical training in the school of English documentary working with the likes of John Grierson, Basil Wright. I was the only one of the whole group who covered nearly all of the revolutionary conflicts in the world. I was in Abyssinia, Congo, Indochina... Spain. I hadn't been to Spain before and after Abyssinia I was sent by Laquino in 1933 to film the peasants' revolts in Andalusia. It was another attempt to capitalise on that which has always fascinated the English. The vision of Romantic Spain, a tragic Spain. I wanted to show my country the contradictions the government in power had to face. The peasants felt deceived by the Republic because the luck of their situation had not improved at all.

Narrator: When arrested Lotar, Allégret and Naville were taken to the police station that was housed in this building in the main square of Carmona. René was released from custody the same day and immediately returned to Paris. She sought to secure the other's release with the help of a radical politician named Eduoard Herriot. Lotar and Allégret remained in the police cells. They were held for the two weeks it took for the letter from Paris to reach the police station.

Lotar: Apart from losing the footage I didn't resent the time we spent in prison. There were a lot of stories about rivalries or differences between the different parties, Anarchist and Communist but we got to see the exact opposite of this despite the cramped conditions in the prison cell. In fact when it came to mealtime, which was a one big dish for all of us everybody got their share. One man would insist on saving a delicacy, which was usually an eyeball, and placing it in my mouth. His idea of a delicacy was very different to mine.¹⁰⁶

Thankfully the Kinamo camera that Pierre Braunberger¹⁰⁷ had given us was returned.

Tenerife: The big businessmen of Santa Cruz wander about their town. They talk about their affairs, their properties and the latest news.

¹⁰⁴ James Cameron quoted speaking on the construction of truth by the omission of fact from, *Before Hindsight*, (Lewis, 1977).

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Cameron is a fictional character played by Reginald Shave in the film, *El Grito del Sur: "Casas Viejas"*, (Patino, 1996).

¹⁰⁶ Both the story of solidarity between opposing side and the anecdotal story of eating arrangements in prison based on verbal account made by Spanish brigadier Walter Gregory from sound recording, *Walter Gregory Spanish Civil War Memories*, (1983) held at the British Library, London. See accounts documented in, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*, (Collier, 1987 p. 137).

¹⁰⁷ Documented in, *Buñuel: The Red Years, 1929-1939*, (Gubern et al., 2012 p. 163).

Lotar: We wondered if we had become the latest news in Paris but of course nothing was written about our arrest by the newspapers.

Tenerife: ...the latest news of the day is carried away by the wind. The inhabitants of Santa Cruz on Tenerife no longer worry. They are interested in other things. They have other passions... Bullfighting.

Lotar: At last we were free but only to leave Spain, so we decided to head for the coast to see if we could take a ferry further south.
Resistance also simmered under the surface of Tenerife, within the people, locked up in the indigenous culture.

Tenerife: Canarian wrestling is a measure of physical agility and posture. The regime of fighting goes back to the epoch of the indigenous people of the archipelago who lived a peaceful and dignified life before being subjected to the domination of Spain. In Canarian wrestling the fighter considers himself beaten when he touches the ground with his body.

Lotar: England yet sleeps; was she not called of old?
Spain calls her now; as with its thrilling thunder,
Vesuvius wakens Aetna,
and the cold snow-crag by its reply are cloven in sunder.

Her chains are threads of gold,
she need but smile and they dissolve; but Spain's were links of steel,
'till bit to dust, by virtue's keenest file.

Twins of a single destiny!
Appeal to the eternal years enthroned before us!
In the dim West, impress us from a seal,
all you have thought and done!
Time cannot dare conceal.

Granada is perhaps the most romantic of all of Spain's cities. It has captured the imagination of artists for centuries.

In his recordings Lotar recites a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley *An Ode to Liberty* written in anticipation of Spain's first republic in 1820.
Romanticism elevated the Landscape in art to a subject in its own right and the Romantic writers were the first artists to turn their backs on the elite, the aristocracy and the church.

Shelley was not an enemy of the common man. He showed that realism did not mean giving up imagination.

Graffiti: MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

Breadth is appropriate to realism as reality itself is broad, varied, contradictory. History creates and rejects models. The truth can be withheld in many ways, and it can be told in many ways.

We derive our aesthetics, like our morality, from the needs of our struggle.¹⁰⁸

As Shelley attempted to convey the reality of Spain's liberation to the English people so too Lotar wished to rally the people of France with images of Spain. It was an event across the Mediterranean that rallied the Spanish people.¹⁰⁹

On the 15th May 2011 two groups, Youth Without Future and Real Democracy Now, coordinated demonstrations via social media networks in 58 cities across Spain. 150,000 people in total took the street to demand radical change in Spanish politics.

In Madrid alone 50,000 people gathered under the slogan "we are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers".

Lotar: The decision to make art on this subject was simple as it was obvious what needed to be done. You only had to see exploitation or poverty and you knew the difference between what was right and wrong because what was wrong outraged you. To resist meant not to accept the situation and by standing up you joined the flow of history, changing the status quo. To create was an act of resistance. To resist was a creative act. But we must always look around us and stand up to what outrages us in our own societies.-Now it is the young who should stand up to these injustices.¹¹⁰

Graffiti: YOUTH

Narrator: The 15th May demonstration ended with a peaceful sit down protest in the main square of Madrid, Puerta del Sol, which was violently broken up by police.

In response around one hundred people regrouped to camp overnight. The next day those gathered at the camp decided to stay until the coming elections to be held a week later.

Graffiti: ANDALUSIA FREE OF EXPLOITATION, SEXISM, CAPITALISM AND SPAIN

¹⁰⁸ Paraphrased from, *The Expressionism Debate*, (Brecht, [1938] 2003a pp. 226-227).

¹⁰⁹ See, *The World Left After 2011*, (Wallerstein, 2012).

¹¹⁰ Paraphrased from, *Time for Outrage!*, (Hessel, 2011)

As Shelley attempted to convey the reality of Spain's liberation, to the English people, so too Lotar wished to rally the people of France with images of Spain. This new social movement, that called itself 15M after the date the protests began, was not formed out of traditional political groups.

Graffiti: 10M DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE GENTRIFICATION OF PLAZA ALTA

Narrator: These people were brought together from all backgrounds, all parts of society by a feeling of anger at the social reality that they saw around them. Together they stood against unemployment, the two-party system, the banks, political corruption, the media, privatisation... the list included all aspects of their reality. The protests were a response to this situation, and their feelings were embodied in the slogan "they do not represent us."

Graffiti: YOUR SYSTEM, OUR CRISIS

Narrator: In 2011 it was an event across the Mediterranean that rallied the Spanish people.

This new movement, or form of political organisation, that called itself 15M after the date the protests began, was not like the old social groups such as the nationalists, the working class nor were these people simply Anarchists. They were varied some were believers, some were not. Some political thinkers, others apolitical, but all concerned felt anger at the social reality that they saw around them. The protesters shared a rejection of unemployment, the two-party system, capitalism, the banks, political corruption, the media, privatisation, the list responded to all aspects of their reality but all was embodied in their slogan "no nos representan" they do not represent us."¹¹¹

Narrator: Two days after the protests had started police cleared the encampment of around 150 people from Puerta del Sol. Without any instruction or co-ordination by leaders, people began organising a response through SMS and social media networks. By 8pm that same day, 12,000 people gathered in Madrid and thousands more in other cities.

Today mass media channels are ever more in the hands of the rich, and pander to their interests alone. The demonstrations in Spain were also an uprising against the means of mass media communication. This offers nothing but mass consumption as a prospect for our youth, contempt for the least powerful in society, contempt for culture, and the outrageous competition of all against all.

¹¹¹ Quoted from the Real Democracy Now manifesto, *Ghost Manifesto - Spain's Real Democracy Now*, (Democraciarealya!, 2011).

Lotar: Movies today, the so called neo-realist, and film noir... How is it possible to hope for an improvement in the audience when every day we are told in these films, even in the most insipid comedies, that our social institutions, our concepts of Nationality, Religion, Love, while perhaps imperfect, are unique and necessary? The true 'opium of the audience' is conformity... and the entire, gigantic film world is dedicated to the propagation of this comfortable feeling, wrapped though it is at times in the insidious disguise of art.¹¹²

Graffiti: CHURCH = DEATH

Lotar: The 'official' films of the 1930s, those that consented to the dominant political powers of the time such as social documentary and newsreel, showed nothing of the reality of the situation. Although we were artists we wanted our film to reach the widest audience which is why we tried to make a newsreel that would be shown in the cinemas.

Graffiti: CULTURE IS FREE AND FREE FROM ELITISM

Lotar: Showing films at Union meetings and working men's clubs was important but you were preaching to the converted.¹¹³

Graffiti: TO VOTE IS TO WRITE A BLANK CHEQUE > DON'T VOTE, FIGHT

Lotar: There was even a chance with newsreel that you could get past the censor. Every cinema showing regular public cinema shows had to have a license and therefore its films had to be passed by the censor. Newsreels were the only exception for the very obvious and practical reason that by the time they had been shown to the censor and got its approval the thing would no longer be topical.

By trying to film the reality in Spain we were attempting to reflect reality in France. The ruling classes and capital who control the means of representation keep this from us.

Graffiti: THE POLICE TORTURE AND MURDER THE T.V. DOES NOT REPORT IT

Lotar: For attempting to breach this control we were imprisoned which in itself was an act of state censorship.

¹¹² This statement is paraphrased from a quote attributed to Buñuel in (Shandy, [no date] p. 187). The referral to Film Noir has been added to infer a resentment towards Yves Allégret's success directing this genre of film.

¹¹³ Paraphrased statement by George Elvin in, *Before Hindsight*, (Lewis, 1977).

Graffiti: FREE JULIAN ASSANGE

Narrator: By the time of the election, one week after the protests began, 28,000 people were camped in Puerta del Sol, 16,000 across Spain and 1000s more in countries across Europe including England.

Graffiti: GRANTS = UNICORNS

Lotar: We didn't just want to 'report' on the situation in Spain, we wanted to create a film that would show how seemingly separate elements of society were related to form the reality of the situation and that this condition could be related to the situation of people in Paris or Lyon or wherever the film would be shown¹¹⁴.

Graffiti: STOP GENTRIFICATION

Lotar: To visualise these relationships between people was important as the conventional newsreel did the opposite they separated people and situation and turned them into isolated events.

Graffiti: EVICTION = VIOLENCE

Narrator: The protests embodied carnivalesque forms of theatre, street festivals in which the anger of the protesters coexisted with their joy in the display. But the organisation of this new political movement was also carnivalesque in form.

Like the language of carnival, the narrative contains many voices and images. There is no centre that dictates meaning. Instead meaning arises, only out of the exchanges among all the voices and images in dialogue.

This manifestation of multiple voices and images constitutes a form that opposes the monologue of the news media. It refuses to claim any closed form of truth, by constantly transforming its own narrative form.

In the theatre of the carnival, the unbelievable becomes real, and the suffering of life is exposed to the laughter and tears of the spectator.

This act has contained within it, a perpetual creative motion, a form of innovation that can transform reality itself.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Paraphrased from Joris Ivens when he describes re-editing newsreel footage of events around the world, which he and his collaborators 'would then level with a current event in our own country,' (Ivens, 1969 pp. 96-97).

¹¹⁵ Paraphrased from discussion with reference to Mikhail Bakhtin in, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (Hardt et al., 2005 p. 210-211).

Lotar: For reality to be transformed, the relationships between people, the workers and the plantation owners, had to be visualised. We considered our work as art not journalism as we sought not merely to report facts but to show the social reality.

Graffiti: WHICH IS THE AESTHETIC REVOLUTION?

Lotar: Images of the plantations alone showed nothing of the reality of the lives of the people that were conditioned by working on them.

Narrator: The people of the 15M movement relied on mobile devices to communicate and organise their actions.

Graffiti: COLTAN = A BLOODY BUSINESS

Narrator: These devices contained heavy metals mined in Africa such as coltan. Materials taken from the land it seems, are also integral to this transformation of social relations.

Tenerife: The port of Santa Cruz the main port of the Canaries is situated to the East of Tenerife. On the way North ships make a stop. Here they bring what is necessary to the people of the island. Petrol, coal, tourists... [...and leaving] with the tourists fuel, tobacco, dried fish, tomatoes and bananas. All the goods of the Canary Islands. CEPSA.

Narrator: These natural resources are transformed to create the material and social reality of which we are part. This interrelation of human action and synthetic matter perpetuates the illusion that we are separate from nature.¹¹⁶ Without images and narratives that connect us and connect us to the landscape, the ecological crisis, like the social crisis, will continue.

The CEPSA refinery at San Roque in Andalusia is highly fortified. Images of the extraction of natural resources from the landscape and their transformation, such as oil into fuel and plastics, or gas into electricity, are in the control of capital and market dynamics. But as is known, images of refineries say nothing of these relationships.¹¹⁷

Tenerife: Exported from Venezuela crude oil travels in tankers, which are unloaded at the CEPSA plant in Santa Cruz where it is pumped into the refinery. The petrol is

¹¹⁶ Observation of natural resources perpetuating a sense of separation of nature paraphrased from Ursula Biemann's statements in the interview, *The Politico-Aesthetics of Oil and Water in Ursula Biemann's Video Works*, (Pendakis, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Refers to Bertolt Brecht's statement that 'the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions,' ([1932] 2000 p. 164).

stored in enormous reservoirs before being transformed into domestic fuel oil. The refined oil comes back to the port via pipeline. The ships head back to Venezuela.

Narrator: Without these imperative forms of depiction, we can only imagine the continued destruction of the landscape in the interests of capital, and the social realities that this produces, and that we already know so well.

Tenerife: On the Isles of Fortune there is no fuel supply to the workers' district.

Lotar: We were ordered to leave Spain and it was recommended that we return to Paris, which we would have had to do if they hadn't returned our camera. Instead we returned to Seville as we knew we could acquire some film stock from a contact there and then we headed south for the ferry at Cadiz.

Once we reached the port we posed as French tourists heading for Tenerife and when we were asked about the camera we told the civil guard "we are going to film the beautiful Orotava Valley and the sleeping volcano to show our friends in Paris."

Narrator: Lotar's film on Tenerife mimics the travelogue and newsreels of the time that happily display images of these foreign landscapes, the goods that they produce and the people that inhabit them. They present the opportunity to indulge in spectacle and illusion, the pleasures of looking.

Tenerife: In Santa Cruz like elsewhere there is a festival of music. Those seated listen to the music and watch the people go by. The boys look at the girls and the girls look at the boys.

Narrator: We project an idealised image of ourselves into these landscapes, as did the audiences of the newsreels of the 1930s. The world is framed as we wish to see ourselves within it.

At times Lotar's images display a compositional symmetry a rhythm. The passers by, the non-actors,¹¹⁸ pass through the shots sometimes caught unaware¹¹⁹ sometimes not. They enter the frame stage right... and they leave the frame stage left.

Lotar and Allégret boarded a ship for Tenerife at the port.

These same tankers that ferried the two filmmakers, also carried tourists to Tenerife who travelled there to see all of its wonders and beauty. The ships returned the same day carrying not just those returning home, but also the refined oil and the produce that the island of Fortune was also known for.

¹¹⁸ Reference definition of 'non-acted cinema' in *On the significance of Nonacted Cinema*, (Vertov, [1923] 1984b).

¹¹⁹ Reference to the title of Vertov's film, *Kinoglaz (Life Caught Unawares)*, (1924).

Tenerife: Transported to the port by lorry the cases are charged onto the little boats to be loaded onto the tankers.

Lotar: We wanted the film to be widely distributed so it had the appearance of a newsreel. It showed all the exotic flowers and beautiful landscapes, the bull fighting and parades, the industry and of course the thousands of crates of produce, mostly bananas, that were transported around the world.

But... ..this was only one side of the picture. Behind the images of these spoils was a different reality. A reality that awaited the dockers and plantation workers when they left at the end of their working day.

Tenerife: Their day at an end the dockers leave the quayside. The men of the fields leave the plantation. All of this little world goes tranquilly home.

Lotar: The film followed the workers home to show something that the Parisian audiences knew existed but never saw on the cinema screen.

Tenerife: The varied climate of the Canary Islands allows all the plants to live and all the flowers to grow but the banana doesn't nourish these people and it is in these sordid barracks that the workers of these islands of fortune live.

Lotar: We wanted to reflect back at the audience their own prejudices and their own denials... to confront them in the faces of the workers... to see that they were connected to these people through this system of capital.

But... we didn't even get as far as distributing the film. Jacques Prévert agreed to help with a script... but despite four years of writing and editing the film, Pathé refused to distribute it.¹²⁰

Narrator: We look and we look away, or look and do not see. We create narratives that displace responsibility onto experts in the field or that disconnect us, at least for the moment.¹²¹ We tell ourselves the reality we see in these images is remote, far away and abstract. The need to produce alternative images, narratives and forms of distribution is as pertinent as it was when Lotar travelled to Spain, more so...

Newsreel in the 1930's was an accompaniment to entertainment and the theatre owners and managers expected the producers of films not to consciously outrage their

¹²⁰ This is documented in, *Buñuel: The Red Years, 1929-1939*, (Gubern et al., 2012 p. 159), despite Pathé cataloguing the film as being made in 1932, a only year after Allégret and Lotar travelled to Tenerife.

¹²¹ Paraphrased from, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs the Climate*, (Klein, 2014 p. 3-4).

patrons.¹²² Endorsed by capital and vetted by government it was subject to a system of self-censorship.¹²³

But Lotar's film, like all good art, did not submit to these constraints. Eventually Pathé acquired Lotar's film but long after it's potential to outrage had diminished, according to them.

Lotar: Whenever I doubted that it was possible to capture the truth or the reasons for trying I thought of that woman singing by the sea. She knew well enough how dreadful her destiny was... and yet... she still sang¹²⁴.

Credits:

FIN

A film by
Samuel Stevens

Eli Lotar
Phillipe Smolikowski

Narrator
Hywel Morgan

Joseph Cameron (Operador ingles)
Reginal Shave¹²⁵

French translation
Virginie Sélavy

Translation of *Ténérife*
Miranda Pennell

Spanish translation
Jesús Manuel Bermelo Roldan

¹²² Paraphrased from statement made by Gerald Sanger in, *Before Hindsight*, (Lewis, 1977).

¹²³ Noam Chomsky describes a notion of self censorship put forward by George Orwell in an unpublished introduction to his book, *Animal Farm*, (1945), in the interview *World on the Edge*, (Chomsky, 2014). This is elaborated on in Chomsky's book *The Secular Priesthood and the Perils of Democracy*, (2002).

¹²⁴ Paraphrased from Orwells description of a woman as seen from a train: 'She knew well enough what was happening to her – understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold,' in, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, (1937 p. 15).

¹²⁵ Credited to indicate that Joseph Cameron the 'Operador ingles' in the film, *El Grito Del Sur: "Casas Viejas"*, (Patino, 1996), from which the interview is taken, is a fictional character played by an actor.

Story of Los Olivos based on
Socialists of Rural Andalusia
George A. Collier

The name of the village of Los Olivos
and those of its inhabitants have been
changed to protect their anonymity.

Archival material
Ténérife, 1932, Yves Allégret & Eli Lotar
Gaumont Pathé Archives

El Grito Del Sur "Casas Viejas", 1997, Basilio Martin Patino
Canal Sur

Youtube videos

Occupy EEUU, entrevista a Juan Manuel Sánchez Gordillo.

Uploaded by PersonajesMexico

Uploaded on 15 Feb 2013

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6JAdEGMOjs>

Manifestación de Mineros - Madrid, 31 de Mayo de 2012

Uploaded by Canal de Ecos15M

Uploaded on 31 May 2012

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiEb7C7p88c>

Manifestación DemocraciaRealYa en Madrid 15.05.11

Uploaded by Malopez2064

Uploaded on 15 May 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKV-LQZVVeA>

Concentracion Puerta del Sol Democraciarealya 17 mayo

Uploaded by Malopez2064

Uploaded on 18 May 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XAoqf4TL3I&list=UUnCeGQ4NvAOINe6v9xr8wwQ>

Democracia Real Ya! Jaén, 15 Mayo 2011. La Carrera

Uploaded by Rafael Verdejo

Uploaded on 16 May 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvgAH-knRPo>

Manifestación Democracia Real Ya 15 Mayo 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWJJQR89zKA>

Uploaded by Rafael Verdejo

Uploaded on 15 May 2011

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Filmography

- 1918-19, *Kino-Nedelia*. Directed by the M. C Committee, Russia.
- 1922-1925, *Kino-Pravda*. Directed by Dziga Vertov, USSR.
- 1922, *Kino-Pravda I*. Directed by Dziga Vertov, USSR.
- 1924, *Kinoglaz (Life Caught Unawares)*. Directed by Dziga Vertov, USSR.
- 1926, *Stride Soviet*. Directed by Dziga Vertov, USSR.
- 1927, *Voyage Au Congo*. Directed by Marc Allégret, France.
- 1928, *The Eleventh Year*. Directed by Dziga Vertov, USSR.
- 1928, *Un Chien Andalou*. Directed by Luis Buñuel, France.
- 1928, *Die Brücke*. Directed by Joris Ivens, Netherlands.
- 1928, *La Zone*. Directed by Georges Lacombe, France.
- 1929, *Turksib*. Directed by Viktor Alexandrandrovitsch Turin., USSR.
- 1929, *Man with a Movie Camera*. Directed by Dziga Vertov, USSR.
- 1929, *Regen*. Directed by Joris Ivens, Netherlands.
- 1930, *Salt for Svanetia*. Directed by Mikhail K. Kalatozov, USSR.
- 1930, *À Propos De Nice*. Directed by Jean Vigo, France.
- 1931, *Enthusiasm*. Directed by Dziga Vertov, USSR.
- 1931, *Phllips Radio*. Directed by Joris Ivens, Netherlands.
- 1932, *Histoïr Du Soldat Inconnu (The History of the Unknown Soldier)*. Directed by Henri Storck, Belgium.
- 1932, *La Pomme De Terre (Prix Et Profits)*. Directed by Yves Allégret, France.
- 1932, *Ténérife*. Directed by Yves Allégret & Eli Lotar, France.
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- 1933, *Zuiderzee (New Earth)*. Directed by Joris Ivens, Netherlands.
- 1933, *Misère Au Borinage (Misery in Borinage)*. Directed by Joris Ivens & Henri Storck, Belgium
- 1935, *Housing Problems*. Directed by A. E. Anstey, Britain.

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2009, *Episode 3: 'Enjoy Poverty'*. Directed by Renzo Martens, Netherlands.

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