DOCUMENTARY PRACTICE
IN A
PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Debates concerning the veracity, ethics and politics of the documentary form circle endlessly around the function of those who participate in it, and the meaning attributed to their participation. Great significance is attached to the way that documentary filmmakers do or do not participate in the world they seek to represent, just as great significance is attached to those subjects whose participation extends beyond playing the part of eyewitness or expert, such that they become part of the very filmmaking process itself.

This Ph.D. explores the interface between documentary practice and participatory culture by looking at how their practices, discursive fields and histories intersect, but also by looking at how participating in one might mean participating in the other. In short, the research is an examination of participatory culture through the lens of documentary practice and documentary criticism. In the process, however, this examination of participatory culture will in turn shed light on documentary thinking, especially the meaning and function of 'the participant' in contemporary documentary practice.

A number of ways of conceiving of participation in documentary practice are discussed in this research, but one of the ideas that gives purpose to that investigation is the notion that the participant in contemporary documentary practice is someone who belongs to a participatory culture in particular. Not only does this mean that those subjects who play a part in a documentary are already informed by their engagement with a range of everyday media practices *before* the documentary apparatus arrives, the audience for such films are similarly informed and engaged.

This audience have their own expectations about how they should be addressed by media producers in general, a fact that feeds back into their expectations about participatory approaches to documentary practice too.

It is the ambition of this research to get closer to understanding the relationship between participants in the audience, in documentary and ancillary media texts, as well as behind the camera, and to think about how these relationships constitute a context for the production and reception of documentary films, but also how this context might provide a model for thinking about participatory culture itself.

One way that documentary practice and participatory culture converge in this research is in the kind of participatory documentary that I call the 'Camera Movie', a narrow mode of documentary filmmaking that appeals directly to contemporary audiences' desires for innovation and participation, something that is achieved in this case by giving documentary subjects control of the camera. If there is a certain inevitability about this research having to contend with the notion of the 'participatory documentary', the 'participatory camera' also emerges strongly in this context, especially as a conduit between producer and consumer**.**

Making up the creative component of this research are two documentaries about the reality television event Band In A Bubble, and participatory media practices more broadly. The single-screen film, *Hubbub*[1], gives form to the collective intelligence and polyphonous voice of contemporary audiences who must be addressed and solicited in increasingly innovative ways. *One More Like That*[2] is a split-screen, DVD-Video with alternate audio channels selected by a user who thereby chooses who listens and who speaks in the ongoing conversation between media producers and media consumers.

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[1] *Hubbub* has been selected for inclusion on the forthcoming 2008 'Screenwork' DVD featuring practice based works by Doctoral and Post-Doctoral candidates. This refereed publication is edited by Jon Dovey and Charlotte Crofts and will be distributed with the *Journal of Media Practice* and published by Intellect Books.

It should be clear from the description above that my own practice does not extend to highly interactive, multi-authored or web-enabled practices, nor the distributed practices one might associate with social media and online collaboration. Mine is fundamentally a single authored, documentary video practice that seeks to analyse and represent participatory culture on screen, and for this reason the Ph.D. refrains from a sustained discussion of the kinds of collaborative practices listed above. This is not to say that such practices don't also represent an important intersection of documentary practice and participatory culture, they simply represent a different point of intersection. Being practice-led, this research takes its procedural cues from the nature of the practice itself, and sketches parameters that are most enabling of the idea that the practice sets the terms of its own investigation.

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[2] Both *Hubbub* and *One More Like That* were included on a DVD produced by Regurgitator about the Band In A Bubble event that features as a primary site of investigation here.

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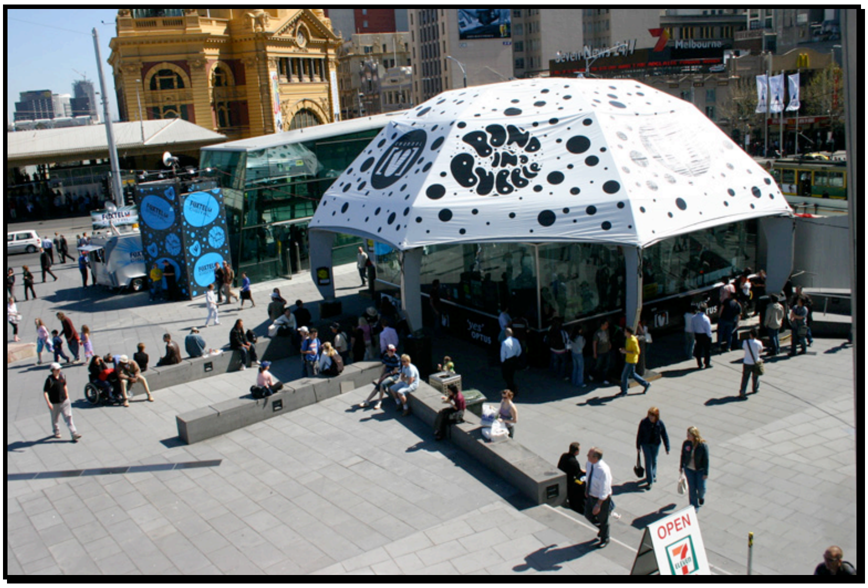

Figure 1. Band In A Bubble installed at Federation Square, Melbourne, September 2004. Produced by Regurgitator, Paul Curtis, and Channel [V].

According to estimates by Federation Square, as cited in a Channel [V] executive summary, some 470,000 people visited the bubble over the three weeks of the event — an average of more than 20,000 per day.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Although not supplied here with the Ph.D., signed waiver forms from each participant interviewed for the submitted films has been provided to the University's Research Higher Degrees Committee.

COPYRIGHT

The ownership of audio and video used in *One More Like That* corresponds, more or less, to the left and right screens. That is, footage used in the left hand screen is mine, while footage used on the right belongs to XYZ Networks (a.k.a Channel [V]). The Channel [V] material was originally screened either as part of a daily half hour show during the three weeks of the Band In A Bubble event, or as part of the 24 hour show broadcast live on Digital Channel 801.

Editing of the Channel [V] footage is largely, but not exclusively, my own. Likewise, the relation between audio and video within the Channel [V] footage is a combination of that produced by me and by Channel [V].

Permission to use this footage comes courtesy of the contractual arrangements between Regurgitator, their manager Paul Curtis, and Channel [V]. That is, Regurgitator and Paul Curtis are legally entitled to use this footage, and they have, in turn, given me permission to work with the footage on their behalf.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

"The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made."

Signature

Date

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Love and thanks to Michele Pierson for being so solid, and to her parents and mine.

CHAPTER 1:
Introduction

This practice-based research analyses and represents participatory culture on screen, through a documentary practice. But it also represents participatory culture on the page, through the lens of documentary criticism. The written component of this dissertation, therefore, is not simply a supplementary text servicing the ambitions of the practice, even if it takes its cues from that practice. Rather, both the practice and the written component constitute their own, complementary investigations that employ the lens of documentary thinking in order to uncover new ways of looking at our contemporary media culture, and in particular, the place of documentary filmmaking within it.

The questions that drive these twin investigations are threefold. Firstly, how can participatory culture be represented *and* interrogated on screen? Secondly, how does participatory culture impact upon documentary filmmakers, their subjects, and their audiences? And thirdly, what new insights can be gleaned from thinking about the intersection of participatory culture and documentary practice and criticism? Reduced to a single question, this research asks:

> *How do contemporary documentary practitioners both represent and respond to the drives of a participatory culture?*

The title of this research, “Documentary Practice in a Participatory Culture”, attempts to carve out a productive site of investigation from two broad discursive realms and the practices they describe. But in order to define that site, it is productive to consider what has been cordoned off in the process — to think about what this research is *not*. It is not, for instance, an attempt to further our sense of occupying a 'post-documentary' world. John Corner (2002: 149) uses the phrase 'post-documentary' to invoke the idea that the ubiquity of factual and reality television formats has resulted in the effective dissolution of the value of the *term* documentary, and by extension, the *values* of the documentary.[3] For Corner (2002: 150) the diversity of practices represented by documentary as entertainment is such that documentary loses "its minimum sufficient level of generic identity". Although in some respects it may look like a post-documentary world that appears before my camera — focusing as it does on a reality television event — my work is nonetheless informed by the history of documentary practice *and* criticism, as much as it is framed by the contemporary media landscape. So on the one hand my practice seeks to argue for the ongoing viability of the single authored documentary as a mode for representing our participatory culture of media convergence, while on the other recognising that the context in which documentaries are received is necessarily altered.

To take Corner's idea of the post-documentary environment beyond its remit for a moment, the success of self-publishing Web sites like YouTube[4], and the growth of citizen journalism and social media networks, all contribute in their own way to the idea of our living in a post-documentary world insofar as they privilege participation, ‘first-person’ expression (Dovey 2000), and social collaboration as cornerstones of contemporary media representation.[5] To a large extent participatory practices are themselves the new popular entertainment, not just the factual television and web forums that exploit them.

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[3] Corner (2002: 145) identifies, via Brain Winston, documentary's 'claim on the real' as a primary documentary value, alongside social functions such as the construction of an informed citizenry.

[4] YouTube is a website devoted to video posting and sharing. It claims to be the leading site of its kind (http://www.youtube.com/t/fact_sheet), and has quickly attained an iconic status. A feature article in The Observer newspaper (Wood, 2007) describes the 2008 US presidential election as "The YouTube election" in part because the main candidates developed video advertisements specifically for YouTube. But what is more significant than this take-up of YouTube by professional campaigners, is its use by various amateurs and quasi professionals to create their own unauthorised advertisements designed to either help or hinder a particular candidate. One such example deriding the Hillary Clinton campaign had been viewed

So just as this research seeks to retain some of the values learnt from the history of documentary thinking (as well as the conceptual ambitions of experimental filmmaking), so too it seeks to hold on to a notion of participation as a site of criticism and debate, rather than simply a better way of engaging with entertainment content. This research does not proceed from the idea that allowing others greater opportunities to participate in its making would have provided the best route to achieving my research aims. Finding out what kind of critical research practice might have emerged through a genuinely collaborative documentary practice played out over online forums is the domain of a different kind of research project, based on a very different kind of media practice.

Despite its concentration on audiences, this research is also not audience research in the sense that we understand it from the social sciences or media studies. It is neither statistical nor qualitative, favouring suggestion and aesthetic experiment over exposition and the evidentiary. To illustrate this with an example from the work,

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over 3.4 million times in four months, many times more than Clinton’s own contribution.

[5] It would also be an oversimplification to suggest that participatory practices are responsible for eroding documentary values. Nonetheless there is an idealism that can attend to participatory practices that this research seeks to avoid.

certain subjects in *Hubbub* get caught up in a collage of claims about how 'real' the bubble event is, claims that are almost entirely invented by me. In this way a certain liberty is taken with the documentary form. But if there is a sense that I might be making light of the idea of documentary's claim on 'the real', it is also the reality television event that is a target in these terms. And through this very process of self-reflection *Hubbub* sacrifices its status as audience research in a bid to highlight the kind of appropriative and re-combinatory practices that characterise many of our everyday engagements with contemporary media. It is the conceptual focus of my documentary practice that stipulates its aesthetic and ideological criteria, which means that *ideas* about participation are favoured over *proof* of participation.

The interviews featured in *Hubbub* are therefore not offered as documents of audience members' beliefs or consuming habits, but are simply used in the service of a representation of the productive dialogue that can exist between documentary filmmakers and their subjects, and between audiences and participatory media events like Band In A Bubble. For my purposes what these audience members say matters less than the fact they say it. And while the audience depicted on screen is the kind of audience that contributes to our sense of occupying a participatory culture, this research is interested in how my own documentary practice, situated in the midst of a participatory event, and framed by a participatory culture, both represents and solicits participation in its own, authored, way. If Band In A Bubble's audience can be seen engaging with 'post-documentary' modes of entertainment in my films, they also perform a different kind of participatory role when they stage their engagement for the benefit of my documentary camera. This research practice is fundamentally an examination of participatory culture as it comes alive in the meeting between *this* authored documentary practice and Band In A Bubble, while drawing upon the creative practices of other documentary filmmakers, and the critical practices of writers across cultural and media studies, and documentary film criticism.

Collisions and Elisions in The New Participatory Culture

So pervasive are the opportunities for audiences to play a part in all kinds of media practice today, and so seriously are these contributions treated by academics and media industries alike, that we now find ourselves in what is popularly referred to as a participatory culture. Henry Jenkins (1992) is often accorded the honour of coining the term participatory culture to describe fan activities and creative audience interventions at a time before the Internet had made such activities common place. A discussion of participatory culture is fundamentally a discussion of how media consumers engage critically and creatively with media texts. More recently Jenkins (2006c: 135) has written of the ‘new participatory culture’ and also of a ‘convergence culture’ (2006a) to describe the activities and desires of the old participatory culture considered in the light of changes brought about by new media and the corresponding convergence of previously discrete media spheres, technologies, and practices. In a recent online white paper, Jenkins (2006b: 3) suggests that in a contemporary participatory culture people become affiliated through their *media* engagements in particular. They work collaboratively to create new media forms, or to influence existing ones; and they develop a sense of self from the idea that they produce media that others consume, and consume media that others like them produce.

In response to a wide-ranging body of scholarship that is concerned with describing and analysing participatory practices (Jenkins 1992-2006; Barker 2006; Klinger

2006; Marshall 2002; Dovey 2000) and in response to the ever-proliferating media culture itself, this Ph.D. explores what happens when documentary practice takes participatory culture as its subject. Making up the creative component of this research are two documentary videos about participatory culture called *Hubbub* (26 mins) and *One More Like That* (20 mins). These are conducted in a spirit that recalls Stella Bruzzi's (2000: 7) description of the documentary enterprise. Looking to avoid the ontological impasse common to discussions of documentary — how can the truth be captured? — Bruzzi suggests that we might simply see documentary practice as a 'collision' between the documentary apparatus and the subject.

By using the metaphor of a collision, Bruzzi (2000: 7) means also to disabuse us of the idea that the camera could ever "capture life as it would have unravelled had it not interfered". Instead, this collision implies that the documentary apparatus imprints itself upon its subject, perhaps violently. But when the subject of the documentary is participatory culture, as it is in this research practice, the reverse is also true. For instance documentary practitioners, including myself, must contend with the sensibilities and demands of modern audiences who expect to be treated as the media connoisseurs they are, and who want to see their participatory practices reflected on screen. In my case, those audiences are also the subject of my film.

In a participatory media culture, audience expectations and any number of hybrid practices, rhetorical styles, or ideological conventions become imprinted upon documentary filmmakers and their films. If there is a limitation to Bruzzi's 'collision' for my particular purposes, it is that versions of documentary practice have become so embedded in the contemporary media culture that it may not be possible to imagine a collision at all. Certainly my desire to represent that culture has come out of the culture itself, just as my documentary subjects are somebody else's television and music audiences. It is simply a difficulty of this research that I have chosen to stage an encounter between documentary thinking and participatory culture when those two realms are already so entangled, layered, and mutually inflecting. But it is important for my argument that the differences between the two should not be obscured, just as it is important that my documentaries should not be seen as collapsing, as it were, into a post-documentary mode of expression. Indeed it is my ambition that the dialectical possibility inherent in the idea of a 'collision' between documentary practice and participatory culture be maintained, partly because failing to do so might mean that the values, methods, or ambitions of one could become confused with the other.

The Participant in Documentary Practice

In his discussion of the rise of 'first person media', Jon Dovey (2000) alerts us to the convergence of factual modalities that is involved when the personal sphere becomes an endless source of content for public entertainment. While the personal or domestic sphere has long been a site of interest for the documentary also, the key difference here is the ubiquity and reach of the modern media apparatus which makes each of us potential performers, willing or not, in our own not-so-private 'freakshow', to borrow Dovey's term.[6] Also, when Dovey (2000: 4) suggests that "[t]he performance and display of difference has become a driving force in our aspirations", he makes a subtle point about difference *as* performance. In the first instance he simply alerts us to the endless variety that exists, or is thought to exist, in the personal address.

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[6] A recent example (April 10, 2008) of the reach of the freakshow might be seen in Google's 'street view' application, an extension of Google Maps, where real photographs capture recognisable faces in recognisable locations to the detriment of individuals' privacy. See the Guardian article at http://tinyurl.com/5t6xwo.

Secondly, the *performance* of this difference is also a form of participation in the world and a way of adding a different *kind* of voice to the media mix. After all, difference is as much about collective identity (our difference), as it is about personal peculiarities (my difference). Finally, the notion of performed difference reminds us that when we participate in a representational economy we become different to ourselves.

One of the sites of tension in this research lies in the difference between the 'authentic' subject who is valued largely for their ability to simply be themselves in front of the camera, and those participants who strive to perform a critical or creative function beyond themselves. It is important to remember that the display of self in documentary and other media, no matter how naturalised, or personal, is both a performance and an address that must be deciphered by audiences. Consequently, when Dovey (2000: 4) suggests that "[w]e are all learning to live in the 'freakshow', it is our new public space", I want to suggest that just as important as learning how to perform in this space, is the task of learning how to read such performances. One way of understanding this research, therefore, is as an exploration of what it means to conduct a documentary practice in and about a public space where performances and technologies are endlessly refracting, and where audiences for one kind of media event can become performers or participants in another.

Filmmakers, audiences and documentary subjects contribute a range of roles to the work of representation and the construction of meaning in documentary practice, and the way we read documentary texts is greatly concerned, therefore, with trying to understand the investments and motivations of those agents and the roles they perform. Bill Nichols (2001: 61) has written that "[f]or every documentary there are at least three stories that intertwine: the filmmaker's, the film's, and the audience's." What Nichols leaves out here — in the name of a broad generalisation that is intended to hold true for all documentaries — is the human subject's story. And although Nichols (1983: 17) has certainly recognised those "witness-participants [who] step before the camera to tell their story", I would suggest that in the contemporary setting the subject's story is far too prevalent *not* to be seen as being on a par with that of the film, the filmmaker, and the audience.

Different filmmakers will of course accord greater and lesser prominence to the subject's story, but certainly in many of the films being examined here, the human subject is constructed as someone who is more participant than witness; more of an agent than a vehicle; and therefore someone with a story that rivals that of the film itself. In my own work I am of course interested in the function of subjects as participants (in the films and in media culture), but it must be said that I don't shy away from treating them as vehicles who deliver the *message* of participation. It is in this sense that one sees precisely the limitations of my documentary practice as a participatory practice, a limitation I am happy to endorse in the name of creating a film 'thesis'. In Chapter 5 I discuss the notion of the 'thesis film' (Maras, 2004) as a way of arguing that my practice should be understood as an attempt to make the films embody their own argument about the interface of participatory culture and documentary practice, rather than expecting my subjects to do so. It is one thing to treat subjects as vehicles, as I do, and deny them their subjectivity in the process, but it is quite another to argue that social actors' very subjectivity is left intact when used in the service of a filmmaker’s argument, as happens in *The War Tapes* (Deborah Scranton, USA, 2006) for instance.

So to return to Nichols’ idea of there being three stories to a documentary, and my point about the increasing importance of a fourth — the subject’s story — it need not be seen as a contradiction on my part to subordinate the subject’s story to my own. Rather, it is simply my argument that the subject’s story is of increasing importance to media producers and documentary filmmakers for a variety of reasons, and that my method for arguing it on screen is to create a productive dialogue between my practice and theirs. But the distinction should be clear — although we might collide at the site of a participatory media event, my subjects have their practices and I have mine. And although blurring these two can produce both interesting and problematic convergences, an idea discussed throughout this dissertation, my own practice tries to avoid it.

Whether there are three or four stories intersecting in any documentary there may be many more still when agents switch roles and participate differently. That is, when documentary agents transcend their nominal role by performing the role of another in documentary practice, the task of decoding their interests, and hence a film’s, becomes that much more complicated. For instance, when participation becomes an evident site of political and aesthetic investment in a documentary, the audience must play a more active part in decoding the meaning that is attributed to that choice. Furthermore, when participatory roles proliferate within a documentary text, they also proliferate in the ‘ancillary’ texts (Martin Barker, 2006) that serve to provide a context for its reception. For example, in participatory (or subject-generated) documentaries like *The War Tapes* — to be discussed at length in Chapter 3 — a significant part of the work that both documentary subjects and documentary filmmakers do occurs in ancillary media forums like Web sites, festival screenings and television appearances. And of course these are also sites of great audience investment. So not only does the meaning of a contemporary documentary need to be read across the range of these media, the role the audience itself plays in sustaining or challenging these meanings also needs investigation. When considered in the light of a contemporary participatory culture, the documentary has many stories to tell and many places to tell it.

If *The War Tapes* solicits participation from citizen-soldiers to give a first-person account of the Iraq war, a very different type of participation is at work for those actors involved in a much earlier documentary about war, Humphrey Jennings' *The Silent Village* (1943). In Jennings' day the documentary form still employed a largely didactic tone often shaped by government sponsorship, and exhibited a keen sense of performing a social function. Nonetheless, Jennings' film mobilises both its subject-participants and its audience in quite complicated ways. In *The Silent Village* Welsh villagers are asked to play the part of villagers from Lidice, Czechoslovakia, scene of a Nazi massacre the previous year. Not only are the audience asked to negotiate this elaborate conceit, but as players in Jennings' explicit propagandist mission they are also urged to become activists in the fight against Nazism.

As Jennings' call to action would attest, documentary practice is a way for filmmaker and audience alike to participate in the world: to force change, create knowledge, disseminate information, or simply imagine the world differently. But in fact when

Jennings substitutes Welsh villagers for Czech villagers, and sets his film in an uncanny, re-enacted present, it could be argued that he runs the risk of erasing the Lidice massacre by making his documentary subjects neither Czech, nor dead. Even when the spectre of extermination is raised towards the end of the film, the audience is promptly reassured that the *Welsh* villagers were not killed after all, as though they had become our primary concern, rather than the Czechs they were meant to represent.

Jennings primary concern might well have been to conjure a world where the massacre never quite happens, precisely to remind his audience of the ongoing threat of Nazism to the British, thereby making the text and the audience part of the same living, unrealised world. But in fact John Hartley (2007: 139) makes the point that the threat hanging over the Welsh actors can in turn be read as an allegory for the ongoing imperialist threat represented by the English to the Welsh. Jennings' layered text not only asks its audience to decipher the meaning of Welsh participation in *The Silent Village*, but to duly participate in the world beyond the village as well. The one thing that Jennings can't be accused of in his elaborately choreographed depiction of wartime Europe is suggesting in any way that his subject-participants are the true or authentic representatives of the world he hopes to conjure. In fact, far from falling for the kind of documentary idealism Seth Feldman (1977: 23) cautions against below, Jennings challenges his audience with a performative staging of the multiple roles documentary subjects can *play*, and the multiple meanings documentaries might produce.

The Participatory Ideal

I have already indicated that in a post-documentary world subjects are often urged to just be themselves. But this is precisely what the participant in a convergence culture is not. At least, if the notion of participation in media or documentary practice is to have any productive meaning, the participant must be understood as someone *other* than themselves; as someone capable of doing, performing and representing more. Any subject who appears before a documentary camera could be said to participate in the representation, just as anyone who writes a weblog might be called a citizen-journalist. But it is the expansion of one's everyday role that is the sign of a different kind of agency.

A different kind of agency is achieved through collective action and the 'spoiler' communities described by Jenkins (2006a). Likewise, textual poaching, slash/fandom, the customisation of media experiences, and peer-to-peer file sharing, all represent participatory practices in which the consumer exceeds their mandated, participatory function by taking things too far. Indeed, it might be said that the agency of the consumer has not been fully exercised until it comes into conflict with that of the producer, an idea that provides a salient warning for how we think about the agency of those subjects who participate in documentary practice too. What would it mean for Morgan Spurlock if, rather than boycotting McDonalds, his audience chose to boycott his next film?[7]

Thirty years ago Seth Feldman claimed that documentary had discovered its ideal before it even had a definition. Feldman (1977: 23) represents this ideal as one where

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[7] Spurlock made *Super Size Me (Morgan Spurlock, USA, 2004)* the Academy Award nominated documentary-cum-expose about McDonalds.

“the degree of truth (or, at least integrity) to be found in any one work is directly proportional to the amount of subject participation in its creation”. Although Feldman’s goal was to debunk the myth of the documentary ideal by exposing the colonialist assumptions of the 1935 Bantu Kinema Educational Experiment — which aimed to “create a cinema produced by and for the peoples of East Africa” — the ideal may actually have a greater purchase on the popular imagination today than it did then. Indeed, this research is interested in asking if the documentary ideal, far from being consigned to history, has not in fact morphed into a more pervasive ‘participatory ideal’, whose logic dictates that the more we contribute to the media we consume, the better the product, and the more authentic the experience. But when we celebrate participation as worthy in itself, we sell the very notion of participatory culture short and create an image of the participant as one defined by their integrity, rather than their agency. The notion of the participatory ideal is one small example of what it means to look at participatory culture through the lens of documentary thinking. In this case Feldman’s documentary ideal provides a preview of the sorts of assumptions one might encounter in discussions of a participatory culture, as well as offering a pointer to examining them.

Band In A Bubble

In order to represent participatory culture on screen, my two documentaries focus on the reality-television cum music-media event known as Band In A Bubble, which was produced by Australian band Regurgitator[8], their manager Paul Curtis, and the cable music broadcaster Channel [V]. This tangible, site-specific event involved

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[8] Regurgitator’s name suggests that their process more closely approximates musical recycling than creative innovation. Although this self-deprecating gesture reveals a sense of humour coupled to a veneer of humility, it also reveals creative producers who are not only invested in the idea of critical self-awareness, but who also know that there are audiences out there who want irony in their art.

Regurgitator locking themselves away for three weeks inside a transparent recording studio in the middle of Federation Square[9], Melbourne, to record a new album. This event facilitated dialogue between a band with an eye on contemporary cultural, technological and aesthetic developments, and a broad public of hybrid audiences with a diverse range of investments in the band, the bubble, the location, and the technology. The multiple media employed to facilitate this dialogue, from live television, music in the making, internet chat-rooms and the glass walls of the bubble itself, can be understood as a sign of Regurgitator's desire to communicate with as many people as possible, in as many different ways as possible.

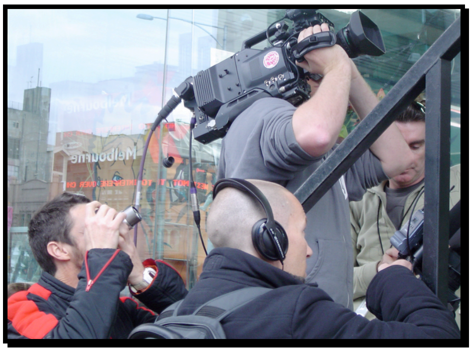

Figure 2. Cameras and sound as action.

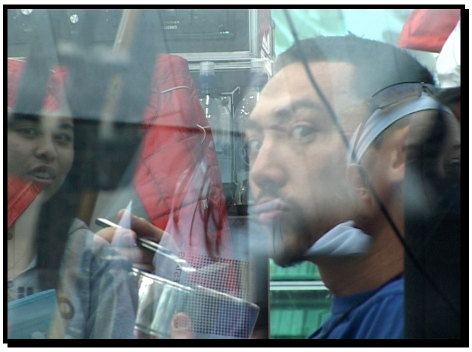

Figure 3. Lead singer of Regurgitator, Quan Yeomans, and the reflected audience.

The subject of my documentaries is not Band In A Bubble itself (which was captured and aired on Channel [V]), but participatory culture as it is made manifest in and around the event, and participatory culture as it comes alive in response to the presence of my own documentary apparatus. Just one of the ways that this research practice can be understood as apprehending participatory culture, therefore, is in the way that it conjures a vision of Band In A Bubble's audience not as a diffuse or chaotic conglomeration that eludes categorisation, but as an audience made up of the active participants of a convergence culture. Furthermore, in keeping with my interest in exploring the specific exchange between documentary practice and participatory culture, I argue that while Band In A Bubble may have brought participatory culture to the public space of Federation Square, it was my documentary practice that finally conjured it for the screen. Or if it is too bold a claim to say that participatory culture was successfully rendered on screen, nonetheless an encounter was staged whereby the energy and aesthetics of participatory culture could be channelled into my documentary practice.

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[9] Federation Square is itself a hub of artistic enterprise, with the Australian Centre For the Moving Image being its focus.

The attraction of Band In A Bubble for this research project lies in the way that it highlights many of the complexities of participation as they emerge in the dynamic relation between media production and consumption, fandom and criticism, and the blurring of media content with promotional culture. To borrow from Greg Urban (2004: 21) — whose work on 'metaculture' provides an important impetus for this research — Band In A Bubble might be understood as an example of the way in which "a cultural element can be designed to secure its own circulation." In this case, an album that hasn't even been recorded secures its circulation through culture on the back of those participant-audiences invited to share in its creation — and by extension, its promotion.

Situated in the heart of Melbourne, Band In A Bubble was a vibrant, colourful, noisy and experimental addition to the urban landscape. By bringing music recording to the public it introduced new rules about what can be seen and heard in public, projecting its sounds outwards into the city square, and inviting curious gazes in through its glass walls, externally mounted television screens and web portals. All of the bubble's sounds, including casual, performative, and technically oriented conversations were chaotically mixed with a complex aural environment made up of trams and traffic, the sound of street performers, and the palpable hubbub of an active audience. Band In A Bubble made a feature of the miss-struck chord, the failed harmony, and the endless musical loop, courtesy of the painstaking processes required in music recording. The second of the video works that make up this creative practice is called *One More Like That,* a title that quotes the bubble's resident music producer who can be heard asking the lead singer after a take: "Can I get one more like that?"

Beyond my own interest in Band In A Bubble as a conceptually framed documentary subject, the event also proved a rich subject insofar as it constituted its own aesthetic world, with its own subversive rules about the relation between sounds; between sound and image; between public and private; and between polished and not-so polished. It showed that musicians could become different, mediated versions of themselves, that audiences could be asked to play a greater range of roles in the production and dissemination of music, and that reality television itself could become 'more real', as the contributors in *Hubbub* put it. As the authors and stars of their own reality television show, Regurgitator showed how musicians and audiences alike might transcend the roles previously laid out for them.

Like much reality television, another of the defining qualities of Band In A Bubble was the way it made a spectacle of the camera. Some fifteen handheld and mounted cameras were used both inside and outside the bubble. The number of cameras was commensurate with the always-on, omniscient gaze of the programming that delivered some 500 hours of footage of the band and their cohabitant television presenter. This footage was delivered via a mixture of daily half hour shows broadcast on Channel [V], and on Channel [V]'s 24-hour subsidiary digital channel launched at the time, and promoted through the event. But while celebrities and professional session musicians who visited the bubble also made it on to television, the audience had – for all the promise of a participatory event – only minimal opportunities to get on screen in any meaningful way. This has to do with the economics of programming, of course, but also more simply with the fact that Channel [V] assumed that television audiences would be more interested in watching celebrity musicians than members of the event's audience. Taking its cues from the rhetoric, if not the reality, of participatory culture, my own practice seeks to challenge that thinking by bringing the audience to centre stage.

Band In A Bubble effectively had two producers, Regurgitator (along with their manager) and Channel [V]. Whereas the band saw itself as providing something of a critique of the reality television format, the television broadcasters had other concerns. The event may have suffered from being multi-authored in this respect. For if the band were interested in generating energy and discussion with and amongst a critically engaged audience, their television partners did not devote broadcast time to the subtler aspects of those interactions. Hence my own documentary camera was uniquely situated to take advantage of this representational gap. For not only was my documentary camera made available to the audience for extended discussion and reflection, it was there for just that reason.

Band In A Bubble was in many respects a showcase of how media convergence might be exploited for both critical and commercial ends. In an interview for this research, the band's manager, Paul Curtis, argued that by eschewing reality television conventions such as the arbitrary generation of conflict and drama, the band forced their audience to face up to the mundane, workaday routine of making music. By framing music production in this way, the Bubble invited the audience to see participation as an opportunity for reflection, and critical evaluation, rather than a chance to simply rub shoulders with celebrity musicians, or watch celebrities deal with artificial problems (beyond the obvious one of being confined to a glass room for three weeks). Band In A Bubble's critical component was part of what enabled it to rally an astute and media savvy audience to the cause of taking part in something it hadn't quite seen before. Yet another part of the event's attraction may in fact have been a certain slippage between its aims and outcomes, since slippage is precisely what makes such media events ripe for discussion and debate. There is nothing like the offer of something 'never seen before', or the promise of 'interactive television', to raise the prospect of disappointment. But disappointment is just an opportunity for another kind of participation.

Hubbub

Hubbub is a documentary made up of audience responses to Band In A Bubble that focuses its ambitions by keeping the event itself in the audio-visual background. The Bubble's participating audience is represented through an extended vox-pop rendered as conversational collage, which gives voice to a large, multifarious audience, while also giving expression to the creative and synthesising potential of editing. In this respect *Hubbub* evokes the role of the contemporary media consumer as not just a willing contributor to debate, but also like me, an editor of their media environment.

Given the many thousands of people who attended the event, and even the 135 interviewed for this film, the documentary inquiry might be described as an attempt to capture how creative media consumption has become, after Pierre Levy (1997), a 'collective' process. Band In A Bubble's audience didn't simply speak of their investments in their own voice. Rather, by doing so in public, in numbers, and to the documentary camera, they gave voice to a collective cultural force that I have in turn framed as participatory culture at work.

One of the essential problems of representing a *culture* is finding a spokesperson to testify to its form, a problem shared by ethnographic and documentary filmmaking. Eliot Weinberger suggests that while filmmakers need such spokespeople to testify to a culture's existence, they inadvertently reduce a culture to those few individuals. He proposes that "[o]ne answer is a multiplicity of voices — voices that echo, enlarge and especially contradict one another" (1996: 158). This methodological choice has the advantage of showing the contested nature of culture at the same time as allowing a diversity of embodied experiences to be represented. In the case of *Hubbub*, however, a multiplicity of voices may indeed contribute to a more diverse representation, but I would argue that participatory culture is already defined by the qualities of multiplicity, contestation, and diversity. Hence all three of these qualities are used in *Hubbub* to exemplify the din of participation, rather than as an attempt to provide a cross-section of a culture per se.

One More Like That

The second creative component of the research, *One More Like That*, is a split-screen DVD-video with two audio channels. Each audio channel corresponds to a different side of the split screen. Although only one channel is audible at a time, the user can switch between them at will using the audio button on their remote control. The two sides to this work represent the different spheres of the bubble event, brought together in a controlled collision as it were. One side represents the inside world of the band and the reality television show they star in, while the other represents the outside world of the audience. Bringing the two together offers the possibility of comparison and contrast, revealing both the enthusiasm and the ambivalence that characterises encounters between producers and consumers.

Although each audio track and each video track is charged with the responsibility of representing its particular world, both inevitably pass comment on the alternate world that each is forced into correspondence with. Put another way, the line between the two screens is literally and figuratively blurred in this work, suggesting cooperation or mutual self-interest perhaps, but not without also drawing attention to the extent to which commercial imperatives and a glass wall fundamentally keep the two spheres apart. In *One More Like That* the viewer is invited to consider how producers and consumers negotiate their mutual interests, but also to recognise the ways that identification between them can become strained.

The DVD-Video[10] format has been utilised in this practice in part because of the central role that new media plays in facilitating participatory culture. DVD extras have increasingly become a site of scholarly investigation because of the ways that multiple viewing formats address producers' and consumers' converging interests and desires. However, one could also argue that the conventions of the DVD-video format have settled too readily into the 'feature film plus extras' configuration, a configuration that in fact maintains an unnecessarily rigid separation between the finished, authoritative text, and the ongoing engagement of audiences with extras and ancillary material. Notwithstanding the technological limitations of the format, *One More Like That* is an attempt to bring greater interactivity to the DVD-Video format and to explore its possibilities for teasing out the participation of documentary audiences.

It has been remarked upon by many scholars, including Lev Manovich (2001) and Marsha Kinder (2002), that the work of avant-garde filmmakers offers important insights into the aesthetic challenges faced by contemporary artists working in digital media environments. In that vein, Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls* (1966) offers a reference point for *One More Like That* because it not only features two films projected side by side, but was originally[11] screened in such a way that the projectionist was in charge of deciding on the levels for the two films' sound tracks (Morris, 2002). This means the projectionist was put in a similar position to the audience for *One More Like That* insofar as they shaped the relationship between audio and vision.

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[10] DVD-Video is a format distinct from DVD-Rom. Where the latter is simply a digital storage medium, and could therefore store any number of technological forms, DVD-Video is a format in itself, which supports multiple streams of video and audio, and allows for interactive menus. It is not possible to alter this format, only the uses it is put to.

[11] Contemporary screenings of *Chelsea Girls* are screened according to a script, as per the instructions of its distributor, and as witnessed at the BFI's 2007 Andy Warhol retrospective.

Although *One More Like That* doesn't eschew linear montage the way *Chelsea Girls* does with its reel-length shots, Warhol's film does serve as a model for thinking about the relationship between linear editing and the spectatorial experience of sitting in front of two screens. For when confronted by two screens, the audience become responsible for much of the visual 'editing' as they scan simultaneous images. As Julie Talen (2002) puts it, "[t]he single-channel film is the visual art form of the gaze; multichannel is the art form of the glimpse." Certainly Band In A Bubble is the sort of multimedia event that trades in multiplicity, fragmentation and glimpses of celebrity; it was also an exercise in duration. With all this in mind I have endeavoured to maintain an editing procedure that allows my audience sufficient time to scan both images, to reconcile their dialectical relationship, and to contend with the influence of competing sound streams. Yet even this desire to produce a sympathetic pacing has had to contend with the editing choices already contained in the videos appropriated from Channel [V].

Amie Siegel, creator of the much-celebrated split-screen, found footage installation, *Berlin Remake* (Siegel, Germany, 2005) claims to "have been at war with montage as cinema's main mode of expression and [has] been in search of other more accumulative and architectural modes of structuring film" (cited in Kaufman 2008). *One More Like That* likewise offers a very simple architectural response to an architectural event, as a way of highlighting the communication and audio-visual connections between agents on different sides of a metaphorical, but also industrial, divide. It was an important consideration in the crafting of *One More Like That* that its architectural and spatial editing procedure should not be unduly compromised by the demands of temporal montage, especially given that the viewer would be asked to engage with relationships composed on a more horizontal plane of meaning.

Chapter Structure

Chapter 2 of this thesis offers a detailed discussion of how the term 'participation' has been used within and across three broad cultural and analytical contexts. Firstly I will look at examples of its use within contemporary cultural and media studies, including discussions of the expanded textual sphere that sustains it. This will involve a discussion of metaculture and its relation to the creative producer who addresses participants in the audience in particular, focusing on some key cultural sites like Dogma 95, Band In A Bubble, and the documentary 'blockbuster'.

Secondly I will look at the intersecting histories of documentary, experimental and ethnographic film practice as a way of historicizing the relationship between participation, authorship, and spectatorship. This will focus on discussion of the 'participatory camera', the idea of 'feedback' in documentary practice, and the ethics and aesthetics of audience-text relations in films by Agnes Varda and Paul Poet. Finally I will look at the relationship between new media technologies and filmmaking, including the use of DVD-Video to expand the role of the audience in documentary spectatorship.

Chapter 3 looks at a form of participatory documentary that I call the 'Camera Movie'. These films all involve their directors handing multiple cameras over to subjects who might otherwise have appeared in front of them. The idea for this chapter came out of my experience of conducting a documentary practice in the midst of a participatory event that was dominated by cameras, and whose meaning was written across a near endless array of remediating texts. This experience revealed the *instrumentality* of the documentary camera — both its ability to facilitate participation in the audience, but also its function as a symbol for participatory culture itself. By analysing the production and reception of the four documentaries in question — *Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That!* (Hörnblowér, 2006); *Chain Camera* (Dick, 2001); *Voices of Iraq* (The People Of Iraq, 2004); and *The War Tapes* (Scranton, 2006) — it is possible to draw important connections between participation as it appears on screen, participation as it is enacted by audiences, and participation as something designed by contemporary media producers.

Chapter 4 details the techniques employed in *Hubbub* and *One More Like That* to represent audience participation on screen. Although this chapter offers the most detailed explanation of the creative choices made, it is no less concerned with how those choices emerge from very specific creative and theoretical contexts, including that branch of documentary filmmaking known as the essay film. Although the voice of the essay film is most often one we associate with that of the self-reflexive filmmaker, it can also be expressed, as Steven Maras (2004: 95) argues, through "the position of subjects as representatives of discourse." *Hubbub* might be thought of as having a doubled voice in that regard, since it utilises its subjects as representatives of a participatory discourse, but it also tries to enact that discourse itself. The technique that goes some way towards achieving this is an editing procedure designed to create filmic 'conversations'.

Although the use of ‘conversational style’ as a signifier of interactive modes of spectatorship in popular media warrants a certain scepticism according to John Durham Peters (2006: 119), nonetheless this chapter looks at how it might still function as a site of creative investigation. For instance in *Hubbub*, the conversation that is created is perhaps closer to *contestation*. This contest involves subjects who not only compete with each other for the right to be heard, but also involves the film itself competing with the many voices of its subjects, as indicated above. And while the organisation of *One More Like That* is suggestive of a conversation between producer and consumer, it starkly reveals how when one side speaks, the other falls silent. One of the advantages of following up Peters’ critique of a ‘conversational’ rhetoric through creative practice in particular is that the opportunity arises to demonstrate practical alternatives. It is an ambition of this chapter to demonstrate the work that the practice itself is able to do.

Chapter 4 also investigates the relationship between found footage filmmaking, filmmaking practices that self-consciously frame the filmmaker as an editor of their environment, and contemporary media practices that confront the challenges and opportunities represented by the increasing mediation and archiving of everyday life. My own practice is illuminated by these various discussions because it appropriates television footage, it repurposes the audience’s voice, it regards the contemporary media environment with a conceptual, reflective gaze, and it sets out to represent public media space.

The conclusion to this dissertation, Chapter 5, develops earlier discussions about the essay film in order to examine the ‘thesis-film’. Maras’ (2004) identification and analysis of the thesis-film offers another way of thinking about how an audio-visual work can both argue and embody a thesis, without giving up its aspirations to be persuasive as an aesthetic work. This discussion serves three functions. In the first instance it allows me to situate my practice more precisely in relation to genre. Secondly, it provides a framework for reading my own practice and for thinking about the kinds of arguments that it is possible to make on screen. And finally, it suggests a way of negotiating the relationship between the creative and theoretical components of my work. It is because the written and creative components of this research do similar kinds of ‘documentary thinking’ in order to build a cohesive, complementary argument about the importance of reading documentary practice in relation to participatory culture, that the thesis-film offers such a productive point of reference. As Maras (2004: 88) says “the thesis-film can be seen as part of a new approach to writing for the screen”. This Ph.D. represents an attempt to write its thesis simultaneously on the screen and on the page.

CHAPTER 2:
Participatory Cultures & Documentary Practices

In his influential book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins analysed the dynamic activities of fan cultures and revealed the great lengths audiences were prepared to go to in order to personalise their consumption of media. As a result of his analysis Jenkins concluded that consumption itself had to be re-thought as a kind of media production. Fifteen years later Jenkins is still analysing these activities and the cultures they have spawned. But in his latest book he introduces the trope of *convergence culture,* a term that describes the conjunction of participatory culture and media convergence*,* the latter functioning as a catch-all description of the cultural and technological conditions of contemporary media production and consumption. However, when Jenkins (2006a: 182) says that "[w]ithin convergence culture, everyone's a participant", it is important to note that he is not being triumphalist, or suggesting that all consumers now conduct themselves in the manner of the fan communities he discussed previously. He can just as readily be understood as flagging the extent to which 'big media', as he calls it, might usurp, rather than bolster, the participatory drive. For Jenkins it is an open question as to whether people are participating more or less meaningfully than they were before the entertainment industries began courting consumers across a range of media platforms as a matter of course.

This question is also a central preoccupation of the present research, which, in the context of examining Band In A Bubble, seeks to identify the variety of ways that consumers are invited to reflect upon their own participation, but also the ways in which they attempt to create their own forms of participation. We might ask, for example, what types of cultural knowledge and expertise these participants drew upon to formulate their own judgements about the merits of this public art cum multimedia event. As I noted in the introduction, the creators of Band In A Bubble saw the event as a creative and critical enterprise designed to generate discussion about a whole range of topics: from the music industry and celebrity culture, to reality television and public art. Did the audience play their part in that regard? Did they in fact exceed their allotted role, perhaps bringing them into conflict with the producers of the event?

This chapter examines a range of ways of thinking about participation in media practice by drawing on film, media, and cultural studies scholarship, while refracting these through the lens of documentary practice and criticism in particular. Scholars across these fields have been concerned with identifying the nature of participation by audiences under various economic, technological, and aesthetic conditions, often in order to make judgements about how such conditions are exploited and by whom. For instance work by Jenkins and Barbara Klinger (2006) describes the ways in which new media has facilitated more integrated — i.e. trans-media, highly branded, and user-oriented — forms of media production and consumption. Who does this integration benefit and what new reading and writing practices does it spawn?

At the same time as it analyses strategies developed by the entertainment industries to give consumers a sense of control over the media they choose to engage with, this work also identifies some of the creative, unsanctioned, and even critical media practices that consumers themselves have developed for their own satisfaction. One of the defining qualities of a new media-enabled culture of convergence is that new networks and forums for communication are creating new kinds of cultures and ways of imagining community. If online forums like Face Book and MySpace are indicative of new kinds of community, how would documentary practice have to adapt to represent them? Or is documentary practice simply redundant in the face of such forums insofar as they are already their own form of participant-driven documentation and representation?

Media Convergence and Expanded Texts

Jenkins' analysis of convergence culture identifies a range of commercial/industrial strategies and contemporary media formats that aim to facilitate increased audience participation. These include reality television formats, cross platform storytelling and marketing, and research on consumer voting habits. This work goes a long way towards making sense of an event like Band In A Bubble, which is in many respects a quintessential product of media convergence. Jenkins (2006a: 2) describes convergence as content flowing "across multiple-media platforms [involving] cooperation between multiple media industries [and] media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experience they want." Band In A Bubble could be seen as a model of media convergence because it involves collaboration across media industries, and it functions as a hub that offers a variety of entertainment experiences that audiences would otherwise have to go in search of themselves. Crucially, of course, it offers the sorts of participatory opportunities that we expect of sites of media convergence.

Borrowing from Levy (1997), another of Jenkins' key tropes for describing the form that participation takes in a convergence culture is the figure of 'the collective'.

Focusing on reality television programmes like *Survivor* (CBS, 2000) and *American Idol* (FOX, 2002), Jenkins (2006a) analyses 'spoiler' activities whereby participants strive to discover the secret locations and outcomes of *Survivor*, or influence the results of *American Idol* through collective effort. This kind of participation can be understood as an effort to beat the game as it were, and prove that the people have the power to outsmart the media corporations. Jenkins' (2006a: 4) analysis focuses on the fact that no single audience member could do the work necessary to spoil a program like *Survivor*, and must rely instead on the audience's 'collective intelligence' in order to make the most of all the information and people power available to them.

A similar collective force is directed at *American Idol* in the form of a "Vote For The Worst"[12] website which aims to influence audience voting patterns in order to effect the outcome of the show. The aim of 'Vote For The Worst' is to make the show as entertaining as possible — by retaining amusingly bad performers — and to counteract what these viewers perceive to be producers' strategies for smoothing a path for those they would most like to see win. Spoiler communities like these reveal participation to be a collaborative effort, but they also show how consumers can subvert the sort of participation that media producers want them to engage in.

Promotional and Ancillary Media

Another way of thinking about participation in a convergence culture involves the use of ancillary texts. Barbara Klinger's (1989) analysis of the relationship between participation and media convergence focuses on the relation between promotional culture and audiences' 'digressive' responses to cinematic texts. Klinger attributes these digressive responses — e.g. discussing Brad Pitt while watching a movie, or swooning over a special effect at the expense of narrative immersion — to audiences' encounters with the ancillary texts that orbit an object of mass cultural appeal. These texts organise audiences' knowledge about cinema so that they feel themselves to be, not just consumers, but fans or connoisseurs with quite particular areas of expertise. By fostering a sense of expertise producers thereby create new audiences for subsequent ancillary texts and meta-discourse in general.

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[12] http://www.votefortheworst.com/

According to Klinger (1989: 5), "certain types of textual response are motivated by forms directly associated with defining the text as a product", which she points out, includes "the making of its 'consumable' identity" (1989: 9). Such a process ensures that films are ultimately received in what P. David Marshall (2002: 69) describes as "an elaborate intertextual matrix" of ancillary media, which functions as scaffolding for a variety of interactions with a film over time, and which also provides multiple points of entry for audience participation. Band In A Bubble can certainly be understood in these terms, for it too constitutes an elaborate matrix of ancillary media designed to create not just a consumable identity for the band and their music, but also an identity for the consumer — namely, that of the interactive audience member who played their part and perhaps even left their mark. Of course it is what active audiences do with intertexts and ancillary media that makes participatory culture an unpredictable sphere, and ensures that as carefully crafted as a consumable identity might be, it is not an identity in that sense, until it has been consumed. And as various spoiler and fan communities show, in a participatory culture consumption changes things.

The term intertextual, as used by Marshall, does not simply describe the way one film references another, through genre or citation. For Marshall, intertextuality also describes the way that a film references its ancillary media in a cultural/industrial context. This might include the way that a film frames its ‘star’ personae, or the way a special effect references the documentary/magazine/website detailing how it was made. The idea that an intertextual matrix underpins popular film reception is not new, but it does take on a new significance when it is combined with the accelerative force of new media.

It also takes on new significance when it is taken up in the specific context of the documentary. Documentaries are not promoted the way fiction films are, most obviously because fewer ancillary texts are attached to their consumption. In fact, because documentaries reference the historical world, the texts that feed into their reception may be less creatively promotional, and more simply contextual and actual. A film about human rights abuses in China, for instance, might benefit from being released on the same night as the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony.

One of the arguments taken up in more detail in Chapter 3 is that participatory culture is itself a dense, intertextual field offering a “contextual life-support system” (Klinger 1989: 13) for media texts. This life-support system privileges certain types of media practice more than others and informs our reading of them in the process. In this sense, any documentary practice that can make itself understood as belonging to the participatory realm finds a ready-made promotional vehicle there. This returns us to the notion of a ‘participatory ideal’ insofar as audiences are inclined to celebrate those texts that appear to value the kind of work that they (participatory audiences) do.

Although documentaries don't reference ancillary texts the way fiction films do, this doesn't mean they aren't still part of a broader media culture in which intertextuality is a powerful regulator of production and consumption. In a recent review of the contemporary documentary field, Ruby Rich (2006) describes the success of 'stunt documentaries', which include what she calls the 'box-office hit'. Citing *Super Size Me* (Spurlock, 2004) and *Grizzly Man* (Herzog, 2005) as examples, Rich (2006: 110) claims that such documentaries "strategically capitalize on the viewer investments already mobilised by reality television and deploy it in more interesting directions". Hence the ancillary media that support the construction of a consumable identity for these documentaries are found in the historical world itself, a world already laden with media texts, television formats and promotional campaigns. So while *Super Size Me* plays on our concerns about obesity and corporate power, and *Grizzly Man* on our fear of, and for, the environment, these films also address themselves to audiences already invested in reality television, home movies, activist video, and found footage filmmaking. Although there may be a sense that *Super Size Me* loses some if its documentary value to the extent that it appears to borrow from factual entertainment formats, like many of Michael Moore's films its intertextual relation to the media sphere is such that it also offers a critique of media culture, as though hollowing it out from within.

If the success of *Super Size Me* and Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) need explaining, one need look no further than the fact that both feature individuals taking on the world, showing that anyone with a documentary camera can make a difference. As it happens, *Grizzly Man* reveals the folly of this thinking, but it nonetheless retains the appeal of the noble failure, along with Herzog's ultimate, redemptive success. The point is that these stunt documentaries have a ready-made audience in a participatory culture that seeks evidence to bolster its own enthusiasms, but whose participants also see limitations in the realities of the distribution of media power. Deane Williams (2007: 3) ponders the possibility that in an age of YouTube and MySpace, we "no longer look for others to represent us [because] we are all capable of representing ourselves". Of course representing oneself is not the same thing as rallying a mass audience to action. For that, we can always use spokespeople and documentary auteurs with a little extra sway.

In fact, such has been the success of his own documentary persona that Michael Moore claims to have recognised a need to change his approach. Discussing his latest film, *Sicko* (2007), Moore says:

> I started to think about the whole conceit about the audience living vicariously through someone on screen, this film is a call to action. It is not for Michael Moore to do it, but for the American people to do it. (cited in Thorpe, 2007)

This quote is a sign that Moore recognizes that it is no longer viable to cast himself as the participant, but that he nonetheless wants to maintain a connection with that ethos — perhaps for its promotional, as much as its political, value. By saying it is 'not for Michael Moore to do it', Moore nonetheless casts himself as a person who has previously participated actively in media culture, rallied the people, and made a difference. And Moore's creation of what Dovey calls a 'klutz' persona can also be seen as an attempt to say that, despite his celebrity, he is just one of us after all, a citizen of a mediatised world who knows what it means to struggle to be heard, but who now asks that others take up that struggle.[13] What a discussion of the documentary blockbuster reveals is that despite their success and their mainstream promotional campaigns, these films are still able to situate themselves as genuinely participatory enterprises. In part they achieve this, as Rich indicates, by tapping into the life support system that is reality television. Which is perhaps also a way of saying that despite their singular authorial voice, they are able to pass themselves off as thoroughly contemporary productions exploiting a vast web of ancillary media, both invented and real.

Metaculture

The idea that effectively inaugurated this research, and which I argue offers the most pertinent framework for understanding the creation of participatory opportunities like those afforded by Band In A Bubble, can be seen in Greg Urban's (2001: 4) notion of 'metaculture'. This is also a more productive term for describing Band In A Bubble's particular appeal to its audiences, who were perhaps less 'collectively intelligent' than they were simply drawn to a common hub of activity. Which is also to say, as illuminating as Jenkins' work in *Convergence Culture* is for our understanding of contemporary participatory culture, he is much more interested there in the kinds of practices he has always been interested in, namely fan activities, transmedia texts, and social networking, whereas my research is more interested in the idea of the producer who tries to engage new audiences through critical meta-texts in particular.

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[13] This klutz persona can also be discerned in Paul Arthur's discussion of how an "aesthetics of failure" is at work in *Roger and Me*. "In truth, it is precisely Moore's confection of an ineffectual, uncertain journalistic self that lends an Everyman quality to his social analysis." (Arthur, 1993: 128).

Metaculture involves those meta-critical practices like film reviewing and manifesto writing which, as Urban says, “impart an accelerative force to culture.” According to Urban, metaculture “aids culture and its motion through time and space. It gives a boost to the culture that it is about, helping to propel it on its journey”. As important as Urban is, however, it is the way the Danish film scholar Mette Hjort (2003) has taken up the idea of metaculture to illuminate the phenomenon of Dogma 95, that I want to focus on here.

As is well known, Dogma 95 is the Danish film movement started by Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg in response to the difficulties that filmmakers from small nations often have in finding audiences, both at home and abroad. Hjort (2003: 135) points out that the novelty of the Dogma group’s approach is that they eschewed the kind of time-worn appeals to a ‘shared culture’ (or ‘inertial culture’ as Urban calls it), typified by the idea of a national cinema. Hjort (2003: 135) continues: “[o]ne standard approach to audience-building in the area of film focuses on the need to develop cinematic narratives that reflect (at the level of story content, iconography or setting) viewers’ prior cultural investments and attachments.” But instead of appealing to audiences through recognizable signifiers of cultural heritage, the Dogma filmmakers took measures to imagine and address audiences in new ways, thereby opening up the possibility of reaching new audiences.

The Dogma manifesto sought to strip filmmaking of its artifice. It championed a low-budget, DIY ethos that gave Dogma films a consumable identity based on shared technique rather than shared culture, and ensured that they got talked about in the process. Most importantly, the manifesto ensured that Dogma films had a high degree of international mobility, since according to the ethos, anyone could make a Dogma film if they just followed the rules spelled out in the ‘Vow of Chastity’.[14]

While Dogma’s DIY ethos might have obvious appeal for would-be filmmakers, the thing that it asked both filmmakers *and* audiences to do was interpret and disseminate the Dogma *manifesto*. In such a context, participation means taking part in a critical debate about the past and future of film culture, while perhaps entertaining the possibility of belonging to an emergent film movement. This in turn creates the ideal, densely intertextual setting for the yet-to-be-produced films to be received and circulated. An important difference here, between ancillary texts that enable a consumable identity in a mass market, and the pre-emptive texts of Dogma, or Band In A Bubble, is that these pre-emptive texts are not produced by a marketing department, but by the filmmakers and musicians themselves.

In the case of both the Dogma manifesto and Band In A Bubble, ‘to consume’ is to first take part in a performative discourse designed to facilitate specifically critical, interrogative forms of identification and interaction with the production process. Only after engaging in that process does the audience turn to buying a product. Dogma also asks audiences to do more than join the dots — i.e. you’ve read the manifesto, now see the film. It asks that audiences adopt a meta-cinematic stance in relation to Dogma films, but also cinema more broadly. For although urging people to see one Dogma film in the light of another may have favourable economic outcomes for the films’ producers, it also creates audiences who understand themselves to be participating in a dialogue with those producers, with the films, and with each other. This is the realm of metaculture, where participation involves an active engagement with how cultural artifacts might be disseminated, rather than simply which cultural artifacts should be disseminated.

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[14] To view the ten rules of the Vow Of Chastity go to http://www.dogme95.dk/the_vow/vow.html. Accessed 14/07/2008.

B(r)and In A Bubble

Because Band In A Bubble was a collaborative venture, it was also a site of tension and conflict. Whereas the cable television broadcaster wanted to sell the event as a ‘World First *Television* Event’, Regurgitator wanted it to be understood as a hybrid event that simply included television among its various manifestations. This conflict can also be understood along lines already discussed in relation to metaculture. That is, the television broadcaster can be seen as wanting to secure an audience by drawing upon the ‘prior cultural investments and attachments’ of reality television audiences. The problem with this approach is that it risks producing an inert cultural form produced for the benefit of known audiences, rather than opening up new audiences. It is tempting to resort to a simple dichotomy here, one where the cable channel is responsible for turning the band into a commodity — a brand in a bubble — while the band itself is seen as widening participation in music culture. But such a narrative fails to account for the kinds of convergence already at work in a participatory culture.

In the case of Dogma, the fact that the artists themselves were responsible for the way their films were framed and distributed demonstrates that any ‘conflict’ between commodification and participation is not one *between* interested parties, but within them. Similarly, if Regurgitator endured a conflict between their interests and Channel [V]’s, this conflict is no more than the conflict any artist or producer encounters when they engage with the distribution of their work, something that they increasingly do in a new media enabled participatory culture. Furthermore, it was clearly part of Regurgitator's ambition to raise the spectre of their own commodification (this is a band whose most infamous song lyric claims "I sucked a lot of cock to get where I am"). Both Channel [V] and Regurgitator made multiple media available to their hybrid audiences in order to give them the greatest possible opportunity to encounter, and engage with, the event. But while new media platforms are particularly efficient at making content available to audiences and giving audiences new opportunities to customize their experience, they also make audiences available to producers.

The nature of an audience member's participation in an event like Band In A Bubble depends on their relation to the event, and to the band. Long-term fans of Regurgitator will respond differently to those who only know the band from the bubble, because those with an appreciation of the band's self-reflexive and ironic self-presentation will likely see both of those qualities at work in what may otherwise look like nothing more than a bald marketing stunt. One of the lessons of Jenkins' work is that it is not just fans that have the capacity for a more nuanced understanding of contemporary cultural consumption. Insofar as the new participatory culture invites a range of consumers to engage in activities previously reserved for fan cultures, it is the connoisseur of media consumption itself that producers increasingly seek to address.

In Band In A Bubble, the combination of online chat-rooms, streaming media, and a 24-hour digital television broadcast were all part of the event's consumable spectacle, employed in part to promote a range of consumer technologies, from X-

Box games, to Optus mobile phones, and Channel [V]’s own newly launched digital channel. Audience members were continually photographed by Optus employees with phones to sell, and these photos were automatically uploaded to a website, ostensibly for sharing, but largely as a demonstration of what the phones could do. This was coupled to an Optus competition called “Show Us Your Lyrics” in which people were invited to submit their suggestions for song lyrics via text message. Likewise, X-Box launched its latest game, *Halo*, in the bubble, in order that the audience might peer enviously through the glass at band members playing the game in their downtime.

At moments like these one could be forgiven for mistaking the glass of the bubble with that of a store window. Indeed, for that reason and more, Band In A Bubble recalls another group of performance artists called the Urban Dream Capsule (Thomas, 1995) who have installed themselves in department store windows around the world since 1995. Although that group may have sought to make its audience aware of certain correspondences between art and consumption, theirs was a performance less obviously beholden to commercial outcomes, even as they were often funded by the department stores in question (unlike Regurgitator they had nothing to sell). Regurgitator, however, were not afraid to link their own performance and experimentation with explicitly commercial concerns and promotional campaigns.

Following in the footsteps of the Urban Dream Capsule and Dogma 95, Band In A Bubble gives us a glimpse of the media producer as an entrepreneur who specialises in the demands of the creative consumer. But crucial to all three is an idea of this consumer as a consumer of critical ideas in particular. What follows is a discussion that situates more concretely a particular audience member's encounter with the metacultural event that is Band In A Bubble; one that appears to both challenge his sense of the shifting terrain of the producer in a participatory culture, but one that also reveals how such a challenge can itself create the opportunity for audiences to become more critically engaged in what participatory culture is, rather than what it can offer.

The Most Significant Part Of The Process

One of *Hubbub*'s participant-subjects can be heard remarking early in the film that they thought Regurgitator was "the least significant part of the process". The obvious way to read this is as a critique of the veritable media circus that sustained the event. In other words, the technological and corporate apparatus was seen as diminishing Regurgitator's role in the event and swamping whatever artistic ambitions they might have had for it. But this media apparatus was key to the band's ability to address the assembled audience and to give them the opportunity to participate in interesting ways. My own argument is that the *audience* were the most significant part of the event, but only because the band concocted an elaborate media apparatus to bring them into view. From this perspective, the band's contribution to the event is not so much diminished, as it is *realised* through the audience to whom they momentarily yield the stage.

Barker's (2006) discussion of ancillary culture is again pertinent here, for he stresses that the 'performative' quality of our participation in culture ensures that there can be no proper response to a singular film text. For this reason he takes issue with Klinger's (1989) use of the word 'digressive' to describe audience responses in the cinema to ancillary concerns, because digression implies for him that a relatively pure, unmediated text exists that is otherwise capable of enthralling an audience. If some film viewers 'digress' in their viewing practice, others presumably don't — which for Barker is a fallacy.

When the subject above deems the band the least significant part of the process, he identifies the band's performance of their own celebrity to be 'digressive', which endangers the audience in turn who are diverted from the 'proper' music text. However in the process of doing so, this critic in the audience performs his *own* importance in a process where the meaning generated by the event depends on multiple types of engagement across multiple texts and media, including my own documentary. In fact, given the diverse interests, genres, and media at play, it is perhaps *only* in the audience that a sense of consolidation occurs. Therefore it is possible to understand the interview subject's statement not as a naïve misreading of the event, but as an exemplification of the idea that the responses of a sometimes-wary audience are the most significant part of the event after all. This is also the single most important principle of *Hubbub*: the idea that it is the talk, prompted by the band, but generated in the audience, that is the proper subject of a documentary about Band In A Bubble, especially when that metacultural event is framed as an exemplar of participatory culture in action.

In the first half of this chapter I have described the way that participatory culture can be understood as the more or less critical and creative responses of audiences to the ancillary texts created by media producers; but also the more or less critical and creative ways that producers have employed the ancillary sphere to imagine new, and newly capable, audiences. Band In A Bubble is a graphic example of the way that media producers can extend the scope of their creativity and authorship at the very same moment that they extend the audience's opportunities for participation, or even co-authorship. But it is worth highlighting here that it is a discussion of 'metaculture' that illuminates best the critical work that producers can do for, and ask of, their audience. In discussion of metaculture, emphasis is placed on prior cultural productions (manifestos for instance) that create an appetite in audiences for preliminary, formative texts. Discussion of ancillary media on the other hand involves seeing texts more simply in their (often popular) cultural context; their intertextual matrix. This kind of analysis is more closely associated with a consumable identity that attaches to, and appeals to, known audiences; fans of a particular franchise, star, or genre for instance. By contrast metaculture, like the Dogma manifesto, is anti-genre. It seeks to create new conventions rather than appeal to existing ones. And while participatory culture might look authentic, collaborative and anti-conventional, it quickly adopts conventions in much the same way that Paul Arthur (1993: 109) suggests 'jargons of authenticity' become the institutionally accepted face of documentary practices ostensibly founded on notions of radical disruption from the in-authentic past.

In the remainder of this chapter I will shift my attention from the way that participatory culture has been theorised within the context of contemporary film, media and cultural studies, and concentrate instead on documentary practice and the kinds of participation that are particular to it. This warrants an examination of different ways of conceiving of the 'participatory documentary' alongside the 'participatory camera'. I will also compare the very different depictions of the audience implied by the address of Paul Poet's *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's Container* (2002) on the one hand, and Agnes Varda's *The Gleaners and I* (2000) and its sequel, *The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later* (Varda, 2002), on the other. This comparison is principally concerned with the ethical implications of these films' address to participatory audiences and their employment of participant-subjects. But I am also interested in the way these filmmakers employ their documentary cameras to solicit participation in public arenas, because this bears directly on my understanding of the function of my own camera in the space of Federation Square.

Participatory Documentary

In the context of a participatory culture, what does it mean to speak of the 'participatory documentary'? For there is as much disagreement over what this phrase means, and what its implications are, as there is agreement. In broad terms it might mean anything from a 'subject-generated' documentary, to a documentary designed to widen participation by marginal subjects in mainstream media production, or a documentary involving the filmmaker's active intervention in the world being represented (this latter coming via anthropology's notion of participant observation). Given this diversity, and given the interests of my research project, the 'participatory documentary' might also be treated as a conjugation of terms that facilitates a range of discussions about the relation between documentary practice, subject participation in documentary practice, and participatory culture more broadly.

Nichols, of course, (2001) offers his own definition of the 'participatory documentary' via his typology of documentary modes. Having revised his (Nichols, 1991) earlier typology, where he referred instead to the 'interactive documentary mode', Nichols' (2001) 'participatory documentary' is one where the filmmaker interacts with his or her subjects through interviews; participates openly in their world; and is generally up-front about his or her influence over the scenarios that evolve before the camera. For Nichols (1991: 44) the argument that the film puts forward is a product of the interaction between filmmaker and subject and signals a shift in "[t]extual authority… toward the social actors recruited."

Although Nichols wants to make the subject of the participatory documentary an indispensable part of the filmmaking dialogue here, the filmmaker is still his starting point, in part because of his desire to distinguish the participatory mode from an earlier, author-centred approach. For example, Nichols (1991: 44) begins a discussion of the interactive/participatory documentary with a question: "What if the filmmaker does intervene or interact?" In other words, Nichols starts from the perspective that the filmmaker might somehow *not intervene.* This is an example of what Bruzzi (2000: 2) means when she accuses Nichols of enacting a 'false chronology' through his documentary typology, favouring as it does the trajectory from an author-centred, to a subject-centred, approach to participation.

Nichols' use of the term 'participatory documentary' may even seem out of date in the contemporary context insofar as its starting point is the participation of the filmmaker. But at the same time it would perhaps be naïve and idealistic to imagine that it could be otherwise. Certainly Nichols' formulation has a resonance for my own practice because it describes a process where the filmmaker retains a significant amount of control over an encounter that is nonetheless designed to generate an argument the filmmaker could not make alone.

The filmmaker as participant is an important concern for this research partly because my own authorial voice and methodological approach are part of the investigation, but also because I was a participant among many in the Band In A Bubble event, and because I am a subject informed by participatory culture more broadly. The figure of the participant-filmmaker also helps us to understand the appeal of filmmakers like Nick Broomfield, Michael Moore and Morgan Spurlock, who increasingly construct themselves as the concerned citizens and agents of a participatory culture, the latter two in particular soliciting the participation of their audiences in turn. But to say that these filmmakers create their films in the 'participatory mode' because they interact with their subjects would be to say very little about them. It certainly does not account for the range of ways participation is deployed in the films, or is deployed to describe the films.

Rather than think of a filmmaker like Broomfield as a 'participant' we might do better to take on board Bruzzi's (2006: 208) description of him as a 'performer-director'. This designation evokes Nichols' (2001) newest documentary mode, the 'performative documentary', where the filmmaker is at the very centre of the film's project and story, much as he is in Moore's and Spurlock's films. In the performative mode a great deal of interaction may happen between filmmaker and subject, but most often it is the filmmaker him/herself that steals the show. One question this raises is to what extent the performative documentary (a largely contemporary phenomenon) actually subdues the subject's story in a fashion that would appear to betray a participatory ethos? Nichols (1991: 71) describes a similar conflict in his discussion of *Roger and Me* (Moore, 1989): "the risk is that other characters will fall into the narrative slots reserved for donors, helpers, and villains. Social actors (people) will be subordinated to the narrative trajectory of the filmmaker as protagonist."

Although Nichols' formulation of the participatory documentary mode is a useful way of describing the interaction between filmmaker and subject that is so common in contemporary practice, the performative mode alerts us to the way in which an increased presence on screen for the performer-director does not necessarily lead to an increase in negotiation between such a filmmaker and his or her on screen participants. Interaction may be more obvious, but less negotiated. Any discussion of the 'participatory documentary' must therefore contend with the diverse mix of documentary agents and ancillary media that give a contemporary text its meaning, as well as with the history of discourse and practice that has sought to chart ideological and aesthetic shifts in the past. To that end, it no longer seems adequate to persist with descriptions of the 'participatory documentary' that *don't* take into account what it means to think about documentary practice in a contemporary participatory culture.

Experimental Ethnography

Hubbub and *One More Like That* draw on strategies and techniques that have been developed within traditions of documentary practice inclined towards experimental processes and aesthetics, including those that have sought to problematise the power dynamics involved in the encounter between filmmaker and subject, and between filmmaker and audience. The characteristics of a broadly experimental approach to documentary that distinguish it from more sociological and ethnographic approaches, are a greater emphasis on *abstraction* (both conceptual and aesthetic) and *self-reflexivity*, and markedly less investment in narrative and biography.

Yet in *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (1999), Catherine Russell argues that it is more illuminating to consider these two modes of practice side by side, than it is to pit one against the other. In terms of this mutual illumination, Russell writes (1999: xii): “on the experimental side, ethnography provides a critical framework for shifting the focus from formal concerns to a recognition of avant-garde filmmakers’ cultural investments and positioning.” Conversely, she accords experimental filmmaking with developing the sorts of innovations necessary for not only exposing some of the myths and ideological limitations of the ethnographic and documentary modes, but also for challenging the primacy of narrative, along with conventional understandings of the role of audiences, and even the function of cinema itself. Of course, as soon as the *social* investments of a filmmaker are engaged with critically by the filmmaker, this is likely to impact on a film’s *formal* organisation. So ethnographic filmmaking can be understood as constituting its own kind of experimental practice when it critically examines its social functions and assumptions, much as it does in the work of Jean Rouch for instance.

In the realm of experimental ethnography the work of the French filmmaker Jean Rouch, is exemplary. And it is instructive for this research that participation is central to Rouch’s thinking. As a conceptual framework, ‘participation’ also forces us to consider how the social imperative so often attached to it is necessarily tied up with questions of process and aesthetics, and is as critical a concern as it is possible to have in the filmmaking realm — even as this is not always fully appreciated by those who deploy it. The contribution of ethnography to the experimental filmmaking realm could be summed up, according to the terms of this research, as an historical engagement with the participation and interaction of filmmakers and their subjects, along with the formal and social implications of such engagement. Conversely, the experimental field may be seen as the filmmaking realm that gives the greatest credence to the participation of the *audience* in the construction of a text's meaning.

The Participatory Camera

Jean Rouch is a filmmaker who has worked across ethnographic, documentary and experimental modalities. Spanning more than fifty years, Rouch's work is concerned with the ethical and aesthetic issues raised by the attempt to treat his subjects as co-collaborators in the filmmaking process, while never losing sight of the fundamentally performative aspect of life in front of the camera, nor the fundamentally disruptive nature of what goes on behind the camera. Rouch (2003: 45) has described his work as "shared anthropology" and "participatory ethnography", and sees himself following in the footsteps of Robert Flaherty, whom he saw as an early innovator in collaborative filmmaking, working like Rouch, across documentary and ethnographic modes.

A central trope in the collaborative method, as understood by Rouch (2003: 32), has been that of the 'participatory camera'. This figure describes two different, but related ideas. The first emerges in response to Flaherty's system of 'feedback', and the second in Rouch's own experience of the filmmaking process. Flaherty took great pains to be able to process and project his film rushes to his subjects while making *Nanook Of The North* (Flaherty, 1922). This, he hoped, would enable them to contribute to the representation of their world more knowingly and independently. According to Eliot Weinberger (1996: 143), it was not until Rouch's own efforts some thirty years after Flaherty, that this practice of feedback was considered worth pursuing again. For Rouch, the participatory camera represents this process of feedback because it facilitates the participation of its subjects.

The second meaning that Rouch (2003: 39) evokes when using the term participatory camera describes his experience of being immersed in the act of filmmaking, an experience that would sometimes approach that of a 'cine trance'. This kind of description of the relation between 'man' and camera is explicitly connected to Vertov's notion of the 'ciné-eye' articulated in his Kinoks-Revolution Manifesto. This understanding of the participatory camera casts the director as a participant both in the world s/he seeks to understand and in the process of its representation. The filmmaker participates *through* the camera.

At the end of Rouch's best-known film, *Chronique d'un été* [Chronicle of a Summer] (Rouch and Morin, 1961), we see an extension of Flaherty's feedback in a scene shot in a cinema immediately after the film has been screened for its subject-participants. The subjects' responses to the almost finished film are recorded on camera, and ultimately incorporated into the final film. This too offers a nod to Vertov's incorporation of the audience into the text of *Man With A Movie Camera*. Not only do Rouch and Morin take part in the group discussion conducted in the cinema, they are then shown together in a follow-up scene reflecting on the previous feedback, and discussing its implications for the film, and for their practice.

One of the things that typically separates directors of participatory documentaries from their participant-subjects is precisely the inability of participant-subjects to escape the director's control and speak unhindered. In *Chronique d'un été*, however, a crucial line of communication is opened up between filmmaker and subjects which, if it doesn't overturn this power imbalance, at least gives participants the opportunity to address it. And it is striking that by reflecting on their own contributions the filmmakers align themselves with their subjects by showing us the subjective, embodied status of their own ruminations and participation. The participatory camera emerges here in both of its forms: firstly it can be seen in the process of feedback that incorporates the responses of the subjects; and secondly, it can be seen in the revelation of the filmmakers' process as it emerges in their final reflections.

The Audience and I

One of Rouch's contemporaries is the film essayist Agnes Varda. Her film, *The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later* (Varda, 2002), takes 'feedback' one step further by dedicating an entire film to feedback and reflection. Her original film, *The Gleaners and I* (Varda, 2000) prompted so much correspondence (letters, photos, objects) from audiences that Varda felt obliged to honour their feedback with yet another film reflecting on the reception of the first.

Varda is an important figure for thinking not just about the filmmaker as participant, but also about the participating audience. In *The Gleaners And I,* her own filmmaking is both linked and likened to the gleaning activities of her subjects. These subjects, the gleaners of the film's title, are people who collect and consume whatever is left over after others have discarded what is surplus to their everyday needs. From food, to trinkets, to building materials, gleaners gather up the detritus and excess of modern living. This collecting activity constitutes a small, but productive intervention on both the politics and aesthetics of consumption. In the process, the gleaners also crucially provide the material for Varda's own collection of images.

With her lightweight digital camera in hand, Varda gleans images from the world around her as readily as others might glean potatoes from a field. In this respect *The Gleaners and I* highlights both the convenience of a compact digital camera, and the fact that in recording material on video for a collection of thematically linked vignettes, there is so little imperative to turn the camera off that Varda might simply record it all. There is, after all, always the possibility that she might find some other purpose for the surplus images not used in her film, an idea borne out by her decision to make a sequel.

Attempting to describe the responsibility of the filmmaker, Dziga Vertov's brother Mikhail Kaufman (cited in Manovich, 2001 p.240) writes: "the man with a movie camera is infused with the particular thought that he is actually seeing the world for other people." Varda offers a somewhat different picture, however. *The Gleaners and I* suggests that as much as it is Varda who reveals the world of gleaning to her audience, it is the gleaners who 'see' the world first, for her. That is, the gleaning method of her subjects is framed as an inspiration for the gleaning filmmaker. This structure is repeated when the torrent of gifts and letters sent to Varda by gleaners and would-be gleaners in the audience is held up as the instigating force that triggers yet another cycle of production two years later. Unlike the cine-eye of the man with his movie camera, Varda sees the world *through* others, as much as she does *for* others.[15]

But it is not just the world that Varda sees through others. She also sees herself, an idea that is evidenced by her interaction with a subject who comments on the signs of ageing on her skin. Some time after this encounter Varda returns to the subject of her skin and her own ageing, as if confronting it for the first time, through the lens of another's gaze. The best essayists have the ability to see the world while reflecting on how the world sees them, which is not the same thing as looking at the world while looking at oneself. Although Varda's participatory camera is uniquely constituted through her relation to the audience, not all invitations to the audience are issued with the same reciprocity in mind.

Capturing The Audience Unawares

Given just how much has been written about television and film audiences over the years, it is perhaps surprising that so few documentaries have actually been made about them. One exception is *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's Container*. Like my own focus on Band In A Bubble, *Foreigners Out!* is about an event called 'Schlingensief's Container' that was conceived as an art installation about reality television. In an arch reworking of the *Big Brother* reality television format, this event urged Austrians to vote their least favourite asylum seeker out of the artist's shipping container, and out of the country. The event was intended to function as a satirical stab at both contemporary media consumption and right wing extremism. In the process, however, the audience for the art-installation came off very poorly, exposing either their own racism (through their enthusiasm for evicting asylum seekers), or their own naivety (by protesting against the bigotry of an event they took to be real). Although Schlingensief's Container was staged in order to draw attention to the ubiquitous nature of both racism and reality television, in the process it left very little room for imagining its audience-participants as worthy of fuller consideration or enquiry.

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[15] And as much as I represent myself as turning the work of my subjects to my own ends, in playing their part in both Band In A Bubble and my documentaries, these subjects allowed me to see the relationship between those two enterprises differently and to understand much better the convergence of these participatory spheres in particular.

Although there are some obvious similarities between *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's Container* and my own documentaries it is the differences between them that make the comparison most useful. Where *Foreigners Out* is a documentary about a fiction — a mock reality television event — my own work is about a somewhat more transparent reality television and music event. Whereas the audience for Schlingensief's Container were deliberately kept in the dark about the fictional status of that event, the audience for Band In A Bubble were never in any doubt that they were watching a band recording an album, and were free to make up their own minds about the value of the enterprise. Needless to say, the respective documentaries about these differently situated audiences were bound, from the outset, to produce very different portraits of their audiences.

The fact that Schlingensief's Container can reasonably claim to be engaged in political, satirical work, doesn't change the fact that its relation to its audience was one of entrapment. Both the event and the film of the event therefore raise important ethical concerns with respect to the treatment of their respective audiences. After all, it is no trifle in documentary practice when a filmmaker shores up the beliefs of himself and his audience, at the expense of his subjects.

Of course this is just one way of reading the exposure of the installation audience to the critical gaze of the documentary audience. An alternative reading of the film might maintain that the documentary audience is not expected to feel bolstered by the inadequacies of the people they see represented on screen, as much as they are perhaps urged to reflect on their own complicity in the media's exploitation of race and nationalism. The reflective audience might ask what they would do in the same situation for instance. In that respect *Foreigners Out!* can be seen as documenting a highly charged political event while posing political challenges for its audience. But because of the deceit behind the event, the film also risks exploiting its subjects, flattering its audience, and painting a picture of the documentary filmmaker as one who is above the fray. While *Foreigners Out!* can be seen as deriding the ethics of a post-documentary, reality television milieu, and of critiquing the value of consumerist modes of participation, it is compelled to affect an anti-ethical stance to achieve its ends. If documentary values are lost in the move to a post-documentary world, then a documentary filmmaker wanting to make that argument should be wary of compromising those values in the process.

Ultimately Poet uses the spectacle and allure of Schlingensief's Container to draw subjects to his camera, just as I have done with Band In A Bubble. But Poet's camera offers neither feedback to his subjects (in fact it exploits the opacity of Schlingensief's purpose), nor does it function in a way that enables the filmmaker to become a participant in the world before the camera. In fact there is no true world for the documentary filmmaker to participate in, only a fictional one. What emerges here is a vision of the documentary camera as a disembodied tool of surveillance, which could not be less enabling of either a participatory culture or a participatory documentary. If Vertov's brother saw their task as "seeing the world for other people", Poet, via Schlingensief, seeks rather to expose the people. This is a very different take on Vertov's idea of 'capturing life unawares'.

While persisting with the notion of surveillance, I want to also turn from questions of ethics to what it means to edit our media environment — a vast database of opportunities that it is. In Chapter 4 I will analyse in greater depth the relationship between filmmaking and a notion of the filmmaker as editor, and argue that filmmaking in a participatory culture owes much to the values and techniques seen in our everyday editing practices and our habitual gleaning of the media sphere. The analysis in Chapter 4 is especially concerned with my own encounter with the database of opportunities represented by Band In A Bubble and its array of media content. I argue in that chapter that both *Hubbub* and *One More Like That* employ an aesthetics of the database as a way of indicating the polyphony of voices at work in a participatory culture, but also to describe my process of amassing material, both filmed and found, in anticipation of a deferred stage of editing that echoes the idea that media producers are also involved in ongoing processes of recombination and remediation. This in turn is articulated to surveillance as a name we might give to the kinds of filmmaking conducted in public space where participation may or may not be a site of negotiation; to the institutionalised and habitual mediation of our public image; and to those forms beloved of reality television, including Band In A Bubble, where we perform in our own personal freakshow.

The Database

Dziga Vertov was also concerned with surveillance, and presciently anticipated a future where cameras would be so ubiquitous that they would no longer cause the sort of consternation and acting out that prevented him from capturing life 'as it is'. Until such time, Vertov settled for 'capturing life unawares', his phrase for people's responses to being caught out by, or becoming suddenly aware of, the camera. Although we live in an age in which the video/mobile phone camera is indeed ubiquitous, people haven't stopped mugging for the camera or balking at its presence. Rather, the notion of capturing life as it is must simply be understood as one that now involves capturing people with cameras either in hand or in their face.

Vertov remains an important figure for my work for two reasons. Firstly, his *Man With A Movie Camera* demonstrates how important the rhythm and pace of editing are for documentaries that eschew conventional narrative plotting and character development. Indeed, in repeated attempts to get the editing right in *Hubbub*, it was when a concern for narrative and semantics compromised the rhythm, tone, sound, and pace of the work that it began to labour. This need to prioritise aesthetic concerns had implications for sense and drama, but problems arising in that respect were largely alleviated by grouping snatches of interviews into thematic units such as 'politics', 'reality television', and 'performance'. These units were in a sense *Hubbub*'s surface narrative, but for some viewers they may in fact mask the film's ambition to show debate itself, rather than content, which can only be inferred through the editing anyway.

The second reason Vertov is important here is summed up by Lev Manovich (2001: 239), who describes Vertov as "a major 'database filmmaker' of the twentieth century.” Although Manovich (2001 p.237) argues that, to some extent, all filmmaking exists at the intersection between database (which might be thought of as all the footage that gets shot for a film in its raw, unedited state) and narrative (which is the end result of a process of selection and combination in which editing plays a major part), he reserves the term database cinema for those films that draw *attention* to the fact that their organisation draws from a much larger database of images and sounds. The figure of the gleaner can similarly be understood as one who scours a database of content looking for ways to create connections and to make sense of an excess of data.

From the constructivists to the structural-materialists, and re-emerging in the aesthetic and formal properties of new media, we see repeated attempts in film history to imagine a rival to the ideological and mimetic strictures of narrative and the much derided ‘dream factory’ of fiction filmmaking. According to Vlada Petric (1996: 278), Vertov “wanted to prevent the film viewer’s full identification with the diegetic world on the screen.” This disruption of illusion is seen as a way of forcing the audience to engage with the cinematic text in a different way. In particular, it holds the possibility of encouraging audiences to adopt the same kind of analytical eye that is required of a filmmaker/editor who appraises images in terms of their use value as much as their semantic content. The database aesthetic described by Manovich and illustrated through Vertov’s documentary practice provides a model for representing a participatory culture in which multiplicity and mutability are already to the fore, and where the audience is engaged in their own everyday evaluation of the use value of the images they encounter.

The Archive

Although Manovich's and Marsha Kinder's writing on the database has been both influential and highly visible, in much of this dissertation I will be referring to the 'archive', rather than the database. The database is certainly an apt metaphor for our contemporary media environment, especially since databases literally make our mediatised world function. And the database has been especially valuable as a link between film and new media, where the computer is primary. But the value of the archive as a term of enquiry is that it evokes a notion of shared cultural memory, which is important for understanding the sociability of a participatory culture, not just its techno-aesthetics. This is certainly evident in Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006), which flaunts its large cast of characters and foregrounds repetition to create a sense of emphatic testament that both constitutes and draws upon a diverse, collective memory. In the case of online social media, forums like Flickr and MySpace are more accurately described as living archives of activity and shared media, than they are self-conscious responses to the possibilities of narrative representation in such environments.

The archive also has a much longer association with experimental and documentary film practices than does the database. Indeed a great deal of the most visible experimental films of the last ten years could be described as a meeting between experimental and documentary film practice conducted on the common ground of the film archive.[16] In addition to these, there are also explorations by essayists like Chris Marker who treat their own film making as an encounter with archives of filmed and found material ripe with possibility on the one hand, but also burdened with intertextual associations (cultural memory) and infinite regress on the other. For the purposes of this research, I will refer to my own use of a database *aesthetic* to represent participatory culture, while thinking about the archive as a site of collected media and collective cultural memory where everyday media practice and consumption can be both conducted and examined. As flagged earlier, I will develop this idea further in Chapter 4 under the rubric of the 'articulate archive'.

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[16] One thinks of filmmakers like Bill Morrison, Martin Arnold, Peter Tscherkassky and Gustav Deutsch as exemplary.

Narrative Mapping

Although the modes of audience participation set in motion by *The Gleaners and I* take a material, as much as intellectual form, typically it is interactive new media, rather than cinema, that offers the greater opportunities for physical exchange. Although these distinctions might seem self-evident, in a convergence culture it can no longer be taken for granted that cinema spectatorship occurs in isolation from those modes of engagement afforded by new media. DVD-Video, to offer just one example, opens up the expanded film text, or database, to closer inspection and manipulation. The hidden feature, or 'Easter egg', invites viewers to experience film consumption as a form of game-play, an idea that takes on even greater significance in films that reflect, in plot and aesthetics, a culture increasingly accessed through game-like interactions and database-style exploration.

In their use of expanded media and global connectivity, but also in their ability to render three-dimensional worlds, contemporary new media works increase our sense of having to navigate information and stories in quite physical, spatial ways.[17] Although a film may still not be navigable in the way that even a DVD-Video is, contemporary cinema knows itself to be shaped by an increasingly virtual and fragmented information environment that threatens to alienate those without the experience to navigate it. This sensibility is easy to identify in *Memento* (Nolan 2000), a film that seamlessly blends a narrative about memory loss with a database aesthetic and the need for a narrative 'map'.

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[17] Jeffrey Shaw's "The Legible City" offers a graphic example of a navigable, three-dimensional space where narrative and database collide. See: http://www.jeffrey-shaw.net/html_main/show_work.php3?record_id=83

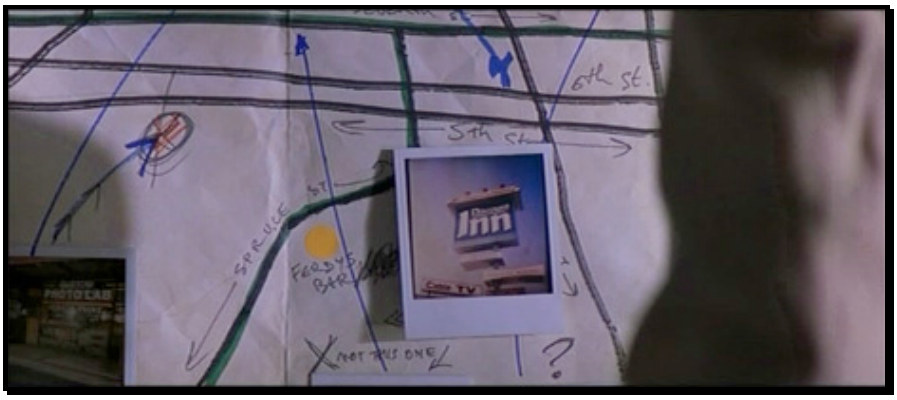

Figure 4. Still from *Memento* (Nolan, 2002). Character maps his disordered world in order that it should make narrative sense.

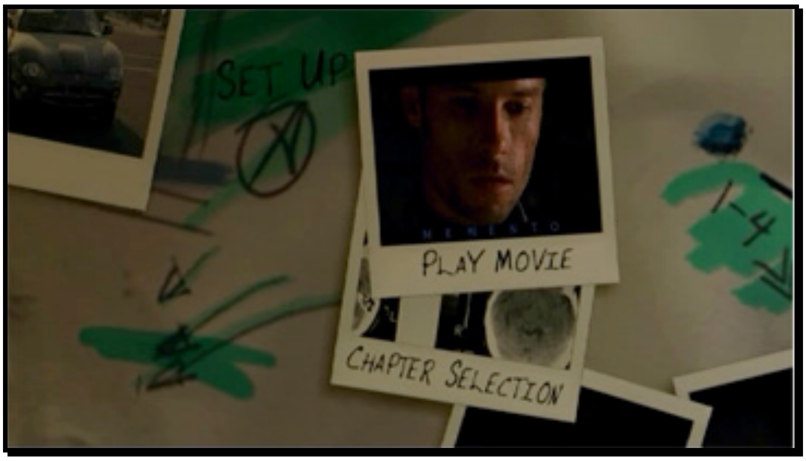

Figure 5. DVD Menu Design for *Memento*. Users navigate the narrative world much as the protagonist navigates his own.

Stephen Mamber's essay on "Narrative Mapping" (2003: 151) describes the sort of critical and conceptual visualisations that audiences, equipped with increasingly sophisticated tools, must imagine as they encounter an ever expanding range of narrative, or representational, forms. Narrative mapping is a name for the processes by which we make sense of our media environments, as well as an aid to contemporary film viewing. In *Memento* a map is required by an audience confronted with a radically distorted ‘multiform plot’ (McMahan, 1999), and by a protagonist who shares the audience’s disorientation. Not only does the protagonist — deprived of any recent memory — continually photograph his environment and arrange this on a wall as a navigable map of his life (Fig. 4), so too does the interface to the DVD arrange chapter selections with a similar diegetically-inspired map (Fig. 5). What one ends up with on the DVD is an encounter with the contents of the database (the collection of all scenes) arranged as mnemonic devices. This reflects the struggles of the protagonist who, like the audience, seeks to find causality amidst the narrative chaos.

The DVD presentation of *Capturing the Friedmans* (Jarecki, 2003) provides an example of how a documentary filmmaker in particular might respond to the opportunities opened up by the expanded format of DVD, while reflecting on what it means to live in the glare of ubiquitous recording technologies. *Capturing the Friedmans* explores sexual abuse in a family that captured itself in photographic and home movie portraits. This home-mode media was in turn ‘captured’ by the police and used as evidence of family members’ pedophilic activities; it was taken up again by television and newspaper media; before finally being captured once more by the documentary filmmakers. Like the feedback described in Rouch’s *Chronicle of a Summer*, the DVD of *Capturing the Friedmans* also features responses to the film from festival audiences immediately after a screening. The various interfaces for the two hours of extra material provided with the DVD explicitly draw attention to the fact that viewers’ choices entail selecting from the various forms of media that provide ‘documentary’ evidence of family members’ activities (e.g. video cameras, tape recorders, photo albums, scrapbooks, and police reports).

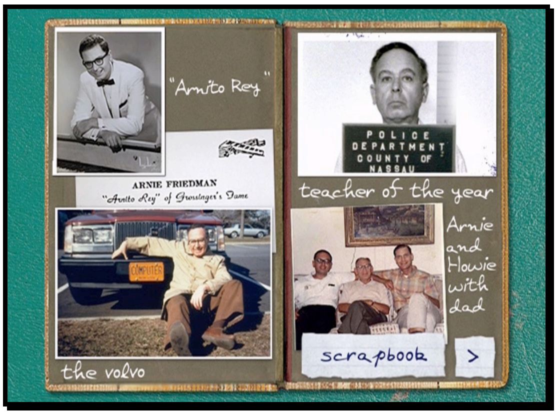
"Arnito Rey"
ARNIE FRIEDMAN
"Arnito Rey" of Grossinger's Fame
COMPUTER
the volvo
POLICE DEPARTMENT COUNTY OF NASSAU
teacher of the year
Arnie and Howie with dad
scrapbook
>

Figure 6. Interface screen from *Capturing the Friedmans* DVD.

In this DVD-Video viewers encounter a ‘multiform narrative’ that is more expansive and exploratory than is possible in the cinema, providing for an even greater examination of the multiple and competing truth claims that the theatrical version of the film sought to explore. For example, one behind-the-scenes feature on the DVD enables viewers to access police photographs of a suspect’s room. Each of the three photographs displayed is accompanied by voice over narration from the suspect/family member concerned. He describes (as we view) photographs of *Playboy* magazines lying in the bottom drawer of a chest in his room; shots of cameras on a shelf in the closet; and finally a photo of the same magazines now lying on the floor amongst cameras, film rolls, and computer disks, with pages ripped out and scattered about. What were once discrete and unrelated photographs suddenly become part of a visual narrative about the production of child pornography; a narrative constructed from a database of evidence by the investigating officers.

As Nichols observes of *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris, 1988), that film also exposes the way that police processes rely on their own form of re-enactment in order to arrive at a narrative that purports to tell the truth. Nichols (1993: 180) writes, “Morris shows how policemen and prosecutors, those accused and those accusing others, construct the past they need, burdening it with all the specificity of detail and motivational logic that customarily serves as a guarantor of judicial certainty.” In the realm of the documentary especially, DVD extras provide audiences with opportunities that go beyond film consumption and buff-ish devotion, to the kind of critical investigation that is at the heart of the documentary mode itself. Documentaries published on DVD increasingly open up for investigation the question of how people’s experiences of the world are narrativised and made true or compelling through documentary practice. This idea is covered in more detail in the next chapter’s discussion of the use of DVD extras in *Chain Camera* to grant an ongoing participatory role for that film’s young subjects.

By putting viewers in a position where they play a role in the construction of evidentiary narratives, the DVD version of *Capturing The Friedmans* becomes more explicitly critical of the police investigation than the film alone was. In this respect, the DVD might also claim to be more self-reflexive about its own dramatisations. Although one film reviewer accused *Capturing the Friedmans* of being a ‘Long Island Rashomon’ (Nathan 2003) — implying that the film treats all points of view as equally laudable and equally contestable — the DVD captures a sense of the *responsibility* that goes along with participating in the construction and manipulation of images for public viewing. My own use of the DVD format, including the ways that I employ multiplicity and simultaneity to augment the text and to encourage a critical disposition in the user, is explored in Chapter 4.

Conclusion to Chapter 2

In this chapter I have shown a range of ways that audiences and subjects are imagined by documentary and other media producers, but also the ways that these agents exceed or subvert the ambitions of producers. I have shown how the installation audience is made to look *unaware* of the effects of the media in *Foreigners Out*, while the audience for the film is placed in a position of greater knowledge, the implications of which they must negotiate for themselves. In Agnes Varda's documentaries about gleaners, audience members not only see the world for the filmmaker, their engagement shows them to be pre-emptive with respect to the sequel.

The sort of feedback that Flaherty and Rouch sought to give their subjects, in the name of collaboration, is increasingly factored in to the authoring of DVDs like *Capturing The Friedmans,* as well as in online discussion forums and promotional campaigns. Indeed, the extent to which promotion and content creation are increasingly integrated in a new media context is such that not only one can no longer expect to read a film text in isolation from its ancillary texts, but one might need a narrative map to negotiate their relation.

The thread running through all these concerns is the figure of the participant — filmmaker, subject, and audience member — who contributes across media platforms in myriad ways. But rather than promote an idealised version of each kind of participant, this research is primarily concerned with how these participants are addressed by contemporary producers, and how the idea of participation is *deployed* in a participatory environment. Taking up that theme, Chapter 3 examines the way that handing the camera over to documentary subjects can have very different consequences depending on how those cameras, and how those subjects, are deployed. But in each of the films discussed, it is clear that this participatory documentary approach is used to address the members of a participatory culture in particular.

CHAPTER 3:
Camera Movies (Awesome, I Fuckin' Shot Them!)

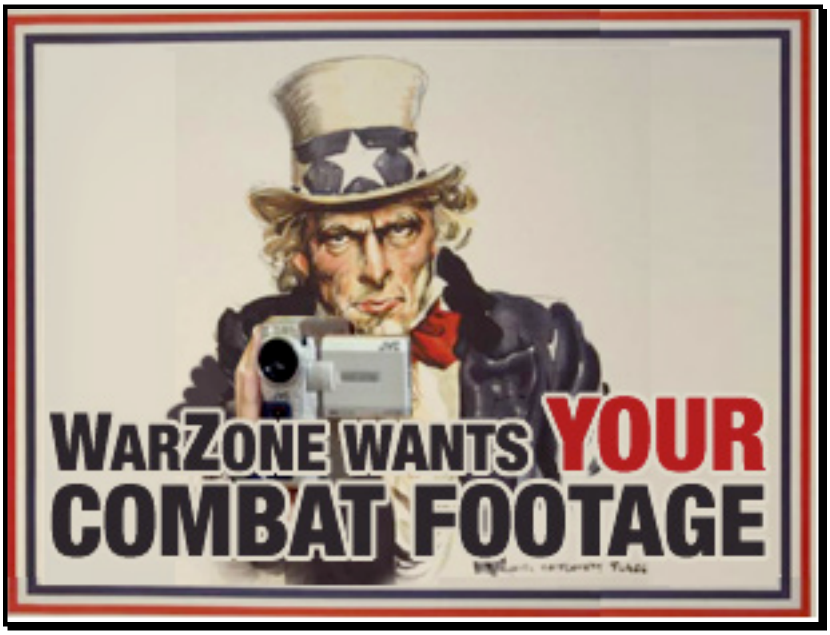

Figure 7. Promotional Poster for Ifilm Movies — 'Sam With A Movie Camera'

What does it mean to make a participatory documentary in a contemporary participatory culture? In order to find out, this chapter examines four, 21st century participatory documentaries, looking especially at how they frame participation, how they address themselves to the active audience in a participatory culture, and how they make use of an expanded sphere of ancillary media texts to do both of those things.

All the films under review are feature-length American productions, and are participatory in the narrow sense that they involve a filmmaker handing multiple cameras over to subjects who would otherwise be expected to play their role in front of the camera. Camera movies are not, in that sense, subject initiated, and therefore contrast with other participatory modes of filmmaking where activists, amateurs, or other independent practitioners take up cameras of their own accord. This latter type of participatory filmmaking involves participating in the world through documentary practice, whereas camera movies involve participation in documentary practice at the express invitation of another.

You only have to look at the titles of the documentaries under investigation here to identify the extent to which the camera (and its proxies) has been accorded a quite particular significance. *The War Tapes* (Scranton, 2006) gives US soldiers in Iraq a turn behind the camera; *Voices of Iraq* (The People Of Iraq, 2004) claims there are many, many sides to that story; *Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That!* (Hörnblowér, 2006) gives fifty Beastie Boys fans a go, and *Chain Camera* (Dick, 2001) boasts 'No Lights. No crew. No rules'.

Camera movies are not simply documentary texts then, but veritable media campaigns. They are designed in advance to exploit the 'ancillary' media of film culture, and to thereby generate a 'metaculture' of critical interest and creative activity. So while the authorial camera feigns to make way for the participatory camera in these films, nonetheless the director's ingenuity makes such a splash in the broader media sphere that there is little chance of the audience forgetting whose camera it really is. The figure of the 'camera movie' is designed to capture this paradox, and to suggest that a certain cultural, commercial and technological fetishism attends to those film practices that get framed as participatory. For although the participatory camera can be understood as a symbol of the democratisation of media production, it also represents a pointed appeal to audiences known to be responsive to the extra-textual provocations and invitations of the contemporary media producer.

The paradox of the camera movie is not new, but is in fact a modern version of the paradox identified by Feldman (1977: 35) when he writes of the 'subject-generated' documentary: "information comes most readily through an identification with the benevolent forces which let the subject appear to make the film." In other words, it is not the perspective of the participant-subject that frames the world for an audience, but the filmmaker's. And it is perhaps not even the world that is being framed, but a fantasy world that can only be captured by those inside it — an 'other' world.

Although Feldman's essay is only three decades old, the films he discusses are older still, dating back to the Bantu Kinema Educational Experiment of 1935, which aimed to "create a cinema produced by and for the peoples of East Africa" (Feldman 1977: 23). Hence the audiences and filmmakers he describes operate in a very different cultural context to contemporary audiences and filmmakers. But it is the extent to which participatory culture *is* different that justifies returning to Feldman's critique. For instance, a participatory culture is rife with subject-generated media production and criticism, it propagates many more myths about participation, and it exploits previously unseen technological developments to produce new expressive forms and forums. The participatory ideal referred to earlier is intended to facilitate a re-examination of the documentary ideal in light of this contemporary cultural and technological context.

A Fourth American Moment

Paul Arthur's (1993) "Jargons of Authenticity (Three American Moments)" also provides a valuable point of reference for this chapter, providing as it does an historical account of the documentary and its relationship to an aesthetics and politics of authenticity. Looking at filmmaking that emerges roughly in the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s, Arthur discusses the way authenticity gets mapped onto different practices at different times, but also how different techniques develop in response to prevailing mores, political crises, or even the film industry itself. Arthur (1993: 109) identifies the state-sponsored films known as New Deal documentaries of the 1930s as an authentic riposte to Hollywood fictions, for instance. Similarly, he points out, "[d]irect cinema and its theatrical offshoots emerged with the sovereignty of prime-time television, while the recent wave of documentary releases follows the precipitous rise of home video and cable TV and is contemporaneous with an onslaught of 'reality-based' programming" (Arthur 1993: 109).

Each of these responses and reactions can be read, according to Arthur, as an attempt to "discover a truth untainted by institutional forms of rhetoric… [employing]… figures through which to signify the spontaneous, the anticonventional, the refusal of mediating process." In its focus on participatory documentaries that revel in participatory culture's techno-spontaneity, and in its anti-institutional, anti-authorial processes, this chapter can be read as investigating a fourth American documentary moment, and its attendant jargons of authenticity.

One of the questions that Arthur's essay prompts for the current investigation is the extent to which the authenticity of camera movies derives from their *adherence* to the prevailing wisdom, rather than their refusal of it. For instance, camera movies can certainly be seen as reactions *against* certain aspects of mainstream media production, including news broadcasting, ‘embedded’ war journalism and reality television, as well as more conventionally authored documentaries. The two Iraq war films in particular are represented by their creators not as reactions against the war, but certainly as reactions against a ‘media’ incapable of adequately rendering it.

What camera movies don’t do, by and large, is eschew the prevailing culture’s desire for an authentic brand of media production; they simply seek to do it better. Witness the director of *The War Tapes*, Deborah Scranton (2006 a), proclaiming that her film is an ‘experiment in authenticity’. There is clearly a desire for something new being expressed in this reference to experiment, but the attachment to authenticity reveals it to be a formal tinkering at best, rather than an overhaul of documentary idealism. Indeed one can read Arthur as debunking the very idea of an overhaul when it comes to the documentary. In his conclusion he states that for better or worse, “the quiddity of the form… will continue to pivot on historically specific legitimations of authenticity” (Arthur 1993: 134).

In this sense Arthur’s American moments may simply be read, not as reactions against their time, but as a synthesis of their times and technologies, enacting, as he puts it, “historical and cultural assumptions about appropriate expressions of truth” (Arthur 1993: 133). For instance Direct Cinema quickly inaugurates its own institutional rhetoric in its reliance on jargons of authenticity (transparency, the personal and particular, observation) to articulate its dissatisfaction with the world and with existing methods for representing it. Likewise, in the context of participatory culture, the participatory documentary makes much ado about an authentic mode of representation that is in fact culturally prescribed and economically sanctioned. The participatory documentary is not the proper expression of a participatory culture, it is only the most predictable.

Camera Movie Operators

Although camera movies seem patently of their time, what this chapter seeks to do is show exactly how they interface with a contemporary media culture, what meanings they derive from that relationship, and how they can shed new light on the relationship between those who participate in documentary practice, and those who participate in media practice more broadly. The number of cameras handed over in these films varies from 10 to 150, often with cameras being passed on to yet more participants, so that a film such as *Voices of Iraq* can ostensibly boast 'thousands' of points of view.

The sheer number of participants, cameras and video tapes involved in this form of filmmaking is part of what it makes it a contemporary phenomenon. The availability of cheap, lightweight cameras is clearly central to the process, as are the digital technologies used to manage the vast archives of material being acquired, edited and transmitted. Furthermore, in the case of *The War Tapes*, the filmmaker, situated in the USA, used Instant Messaging to communicate with and instruct her citizen-soldier participant-subjects while they filmed their tour of duty in Iraq. But it may be less significant that the Internet was used to direct soldiers on the other side of the world, than is the manner in which it was deployed to take advantage of new reception contexts and distribution practices. Like many contemporary films, *The War Tapes* used the Internet as a key platform in its dissemination and independent distribution. But it is the way that it writes its participatory credentials upon and through the ancillary texts of the contemporary media sphere that says as much about its relation to participatory culture, as does any deployment of a participant-subject behind the camera.

When a documentary filmmaker hands the camera over to participant-subjects we should recognize this as both a response to the culture, but also as a targeted appeal to audiences who expect to be engaged across multiple media formats in increasingly novel ways. It is by specifically targeting this kind of audience that the filmmakers in question strike their most authoritative, authorial pose. This is no less the case when these same authors are defined by their strategic exits from the pro-filmic scene. Or more to the point, it is their strategic exits that make these filmmakers the exemplary authors of the participatory realm, because it is the exit itself that reappears in the expanded sphere of ancillary film texts as a point of discussion and debate.

In order to reveal the way camera movies appeal to audiences one has to map the relationship between the participant-subject in the text, and those participants in the audience — bloggers, reviewers, festival audiences, amateur filmmakers, film fans — who respond. The former plays the part of producer/filmmaker, and the latter plays the part of informed and active consumer. But as Feldman would remind us, although audiences may identify with their participant cousins behind the camera, they are just as likely to respond to, and identify their role in, the director’s benevolent, methodological provocation — a provocation that seems to address them directly. Conversely, the participant-subject might see something of themselves in the activities of the audience, while also having every reason to identify with the director who entrusts them with the camera. Hence the director is effectively the hinge that brings together participant-subjects and audience-participants, making him or her a veritable auteur of the participatory realm.

But so too, according to Barbara Klinger, is the filmmaker who knows how to exploit the potential of DVD-Video to the satisfaction of ever more demanding consumers. Writing about the particular address entailed in DVD extras, behind the scenes ‘secrets’ and special edition collector sets, Klinger (2006: 72) writes of the construction of an ‘insider’ status for film consumers that parallels the way that the camera movie director addresses their audience-participants. In both cases this ‘insider’ is an insider because they participate in — and demand — a certain kind of knowledge economy where consumer expertise is rewarded with a sense of belonging and an opportunity for identification. It is the ability of a filmmaker to satisfy this growing expectation for participation and identification — whether through methodological novelty in DVD authorship, or by handing out fifty video cameras — that makes them auteurs of a participatory culture in particular: that is, masters of a discourse that stimulates and flatters the audience, while simultaneously ensuring the ongoing primacy of their own role in that process. But just as there are two kinds of participant, there are two kinds of insider.

The Unproblematic Subject

In their desire to innovate and excite, camera movie directors do sometimes over-reach. They might claim, for instance, a greater *novelty* for their approach than is due; a *righteousness* about handing the camera over that can be self-serving; and most problematically of all, by claiming an *immediacy* of method that looks contemporary in its technological, cultural, and aesthetic manifestations, but can end up positively retrograde in its reclamation of authenticity and documentary truth.

And central to this reclamation of documentary truth is not simply a celebration of the participant-subject (and hence, the documentary ideal) but a reclamation of the subject itself.

Having accepted the limits of the 'objective' documentary mode, filmmakers have long pursued a variety of explicitly subjective documentary modalities, and exposed the mechanics of authorship in the process. But as Michael Renov's (2004) work in this area demonstrates, it was not only the author that was exposed by these new documentary practices, the subject itself was shown to be contingent, hybrid and unreliable. Yet turning a blind eye to this history, not only do camera movies tend to claim for themselves an even-handed objectivity, they use a subjective point of view to achieve it, and produce an ostensibly coherent (uncomplicated) subject in the process. The key to this coherent subject is their status as 'insiders' who occupy a world only they can know — an idea inherent in the decision to hand the camera over. What is also inherent in this idea is that if it is impossible for 'us' to know 'their' world, we also cannot know them. In other words we cannot discern any contradictions or inconsistencies in them as subjects.

This insider subject differs qualitatively from those audience-participants described by Klinger who exist inside a participatory culture, and who are 'in the know' with respect to an authorial address that bestows upon them a sense of expertise and recognition, and a relatively complex subjectivity. Unlike participant-subjects then, who are typically valued because they belong to *another* culture, the participants in the audience are valued because they belong to the *same* culture as the filmmaker. Of course this is a conclusion that is well rehearsed throughout the history of ethnographic and documentary filmmaking, but it is one that remains productive here given the need to distinguish between the different kinds of participants involved in the production and reception of camera movies, and the different places they might occupy in a contemporary participatory culture. Indeed it is the participant-insiders more closely aligned with the *reception* of camera movies, rather than their production, who enjoy the greater agency and more complex subjectivity in a participatory culture.

Meta Textuality And Camera Movie Fictions

Before examining the role of the director in camera movies, I want to first turn to two films that might be thought of as their fictional, participatory cousins, in order to provide a broader context for thinking about how contemporary filmmakers address audiences. Both *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) and its much younger sibling *Cloverfield*, (Matt Reeves, 2008) are faux-found footage documentaries that purport to represent a world captured by amateurs, but are in fact known for the ingenuity of their directors (whose camera it really is). Part of the reason audiences are responsive to this kind of directorial 'ingenuity' is because it reflects back to them an image of themselves as participants.

On the one hand the extension of the directorial role into the broader metacultural sphere can be seen as a response to demands for methodological novelty in an increasingly media-savvy world, while on the other hand it is increasingly part of the process that produces such demand. *The Blair Witch Project* is an example of a film that both propelled and responded to the participant audience, and thereby managed to produce for itself a consumable identity that tapped into the zeitgeist. This story is well told by J.P. Telotte (2001) in his essay on the relation between film and the

Internet. Telotte (2001: 32) says, the film's official web site "frame[s] the narrative within a context designed to condition our viewing, or 'reading' of it… [i]t can also effectively tell the 'story' of the film, that is, as the film's makers and/or distributors see it and want it to be understood." The 'story' Telotte refers to is in one sense the back story, or mythology, about the student filmmakers and their encounter with witches. This invented context explains where the film comes from and why it looks the way it does. In *Cloverfield*'s updating of this mythology the film's characters are even given their own MySpace pages to provide the sort of background to their lives that the film, with its restricted first-person point of view cannot.

As Telotte (2001: 23) says of *The Blair Witch Project*, when the audience takes part in the construction of the film's narrative mythology via the official website, they contribute to another mythology about the film's viral, grass-roots marketing campaign, and their own indispensability to that process. That is, although much of the film's appeal and mythological power comes from the ingenuity behind its dissemination, this was substantially bolstered, as Telotte (2001: 23) points out, by a conventional marketing campaign. This somewhat undermines claims made for the ingenuity of the online campaign and its participatory credentials, but the enduring image of *The Blair Witch Project* is nonetheless one of an organic, audience-led campaign.

If *Cloverfield* exploits the ground established by *The Blair Witch Project* nine years earlier, it is tempting to see it as being more responsive to a participatory culture than a catalyst for it. Of greater interest here is the fact that *Cloverfield* taps into the same intertextual matrix that gave *The Blair Witch Project* its consumable identity, an idea that is evidenced most simply in the fact that film reviews and commentary are so quick to highlight that lineage.[18] And although it is common to see one film try to replicate the success of another by mimicking its stylistic patterning, and even its promotional campaign, here we see one film mimicking another's appeal to the active audience in particular. In other words, *Cloverfield* doesn't just seek to draw in audiences previously attracted by *The Blair Witch Project*, it seeks to give those audiences the same range of activities (and more) that they have enjoyed previously, and to appeal to the critic, filmmaker and media savvy explorer in each of us.

Like *The Blair Witch Project*, and even *The Matrix*'s "What Is The Matrix?" teaser, *Cloverfield* trades on the mystery of what kind of a cultural object it is, rather than simply what kind of world or character it is about. By going nameless throughout much of its promotional campaign, *Cloverfield*'s consumable identity was very much a mystery, and therefore a participatory work-in-progress. Curiously, the tagline for the film states rather prosaically that "Something Has Found Us". At first glance this might read as an underwhelming attempt at sparking that sense of fear or foreboding typical of the thriller or monster movie genre. But it also has a knowing, self-referentiality about it that not only describes the monster finding the characters, but also the fact that the videotape is ostensibly a 'found' object. Furthermore, when we find the tape we find the characters as well. But what this tagline ultimately alerts us to is the idea that the film itself must be found by its target audience, an audience that will do the work asked of them in viral marketing campaigns that constitute their own narrative mystery. The tagline is therefore a coded message to the active, target audience. If you can understand the code, then you have found the film *as it is meant to be read*. But of course the film's authors have also found their audience in that instant.

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[18] See the synopsis on Rotten Tomatoes:
http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/m/cloverfield/#synopsis
http://www.slashfilm.com/2008/01/16/cloverfield-review/
"Blair Witch used the first person idea as a gimmick. Cloverfield takes the idea, and uses it to tell a story."
See also Timeout: http://www.timeout.com/film/reviews/85013/cloverfield.html
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2008/01/25/bfclover125.xml
"Abrams says that he pitched the movie to the film studio Paramount as 'a Cameron Crowe movie meets Godzilla meets Blair Witch Project', and certainly not since Blair Witch has the internet hosted such concentrated film-related debate."

Returning to the world of documentary now, it is worth reiterating that *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* only pretend to be based on footage gleaned from the historical world, and so the fantasies they project about participatory culture, whether on the big screen or the computer screen, constitute a relatively benign mix of fact and fiction. And unlike camera movies where the audience *could* be in the film and *could* shoot the film, *Cloverfield*'s monster and *The Blair Witch Project*'s witches indicate those worlds are not as accessible to audiences as they claim. What emerges from this comparison between camera movies and their fictional counterparts is that while it is one thing to produce a participatory mythology in the service of disseminating a story about the disappearance of student filmmakers in occult circumstances in *The Blair Witch Project*, it is quite another thing to propagate a similar mythology in the name of documentaries shot by participant-subjects in contemporary Iraq, where students go missing daily, in demonstrably non-occult circumstances.

Extras: Read All About It

In camera movies, a director deploys participation as a strategy, and thereby frames both that participation and its outputs. Furthermore, what filmmakers and subjects say about their participation in meta-textual forums constitutes a big part of what audiences consume, and contributes greatly to the way audiences' identifications are formed. Beyond the structural tensions inherent in the relation between filmmaker and participant-subject, these agents may come from very different socio-cultural backgrounds, or simply hold antagonistic points of view on matters being represented. Insofar as camera movies are voiced by many, therefore, but fall short of achieving what David MacDougall (1989: 121) calls a 'genuinely polythetic' voice, it is in the ancillary textual sphere that some of these tensions can be explored.

The role played by the director in camera movies is almost invariably the first topic of conversation in reviews of such films. The director of *Chain Camera* (2001), Kirby Dick, describes in DVD extras of having to defend his director credit against critics who claimed he couldn't be the director if he wasn't present during filming. Conversely, the producers of *Voices of Iraq* (2004) chose to credit 'The People Of Iraq' for the direction of that film, while Deborah Scranton (Currey 2006) says of *The War Tapes*: "I didn't want my ideas intruding. If I were in-theatre, I'd be the 'director,' shaping the story, even if unconsciously." Although the notion of the absent director may be a fallacy, one of the reasons it persists in discussions of camera movies is that it chimes so perfectly with our fantasies and hopes for a more democratic media sphere.

Chain Camera stands apart in this discussion because it contains no professional footage and is made up of video diaries strung end to end. The film involves ten students in a Los Angeles high school being given their own Hi 8 video cameras with which to film themselves for a week, before passing the cameras onto ten more students, and so on for a year. According to the producers, 4192 students took part. Only 16 students are featured in the documentary, however, with each being allotted about six minutes of screen time. Because of the video diary format and the age of the participants, there are hints of exploitation about the film, such as when a student films his drunken mother apparently passed out on the bed. Some scenes show students taking drugs or discussing race, while another scene features a male and female student conducting a mock, oral sex exhibition with a banana. If *Chain Camera* occasionally challenges its audience with its representation of teenagers, its participatory methodology makes further demands still.

Kirby Dick and the producer of *Chain Camera,* Eddie Schmidt, provide commentary on the DVD, offering background information about the film censors who deemed it unacceptable that the banana should enter the woman's mouth in the mock sex scene described above. The filmmakers can also be heard responding to the criticism that certain students revealed themselves in the film to hold racist views. Dick argues that discussion of race is not only inevitable in a high school where students come from forty-one different ethnic backgrounds, but that discussion of racial stereotypes represents a much less racist approach than does that of the person who cannot admit their own racism. Dick thereby uses the DVD extras to expand upon the context in which the student's views should be understood, while also offering a relatively authoritative, adult voice that is necessarily absent from the film.

On four occasions in the DVD's extras, students join in the commentary about their particular scenes, from which we learn, among other things, that some went to Sundance for the film's premiere. If there is a tendency to see participant-subjects as text-bound, their appearance on DVD extras and at festival screenings suggests otherwise. In this case the participant-subject is not only an insider-witness to their own culture, they are granted a more fulsome look at what it is like to be inside a filmmaking culture as well. So by treating their participant-subjects as agents in the expanded textual sphere, the filmmakers enable them to become a more likely site of identification for audiences as well.

It should not be understood from this brief description of *Chain Camera* that I am arguing that directors might simply undo exploitation on the big screen through the careful manipulation of extras accompanying a DVD. But where a director hands the camera over, and thereby deliberately skews the means by which their personal view of the world might be articulated — and where a methodology is employed that gives subjects enough rope to hang themselves — it is important to take into account the full range of media that the contemporary documentarian is utilising to get their message across. This is especially the case when those media are also made available to subject-participants for further elaboration of, and reflection upon, their previous participation.

Roy Grundmann's writing on the role of the 'emcee', or Master of Ceremonies, in the expanded cinema experiments of the 60s also offers a touchstone for this discussion. He writes of the need for artists such as Witney, Warhol and Vanderbeek to insert themselves into their expanded cinematic performances at a time when new computer and video processing technologies, along with corporate sponsorship, threatened to overshadow their own creative roles. Grundmann (2004: 50) notes that:

> [i]t is in the nature of his pitch and showmanship that he sets the stage and mood for the potential uncontrollability of the upcoming spectacle—its anything-can-happen character—while also exercising a certain measure of control over the scene… He knows that the success of the overall presentation depends on him easing himself in and out of the show with skill—his entrances are as self-conscious as his exits.

This emcee figure provides an historical precedent for the directors of camera movies whose work is also transformed by production methodologies and new technologies that might appear to undermine their authorial control, but which also afford a peculiar kind of visibility to these auteurs who strategically enter and exit the expanded textual performance to create spaces of possibility and intrigue, but also plausible deniability. An example of this 'deniability' is at work when Scranton implies above that only if she were 'in-theatre' (the theatre of war) would she be the 'director', and only then would she be capable of 'shaping the story, even if unconsciously.' The thing that Scranton denies here is that in camera movies the director is more, not less responsible, and more, not less visible. And as long as the director's exits are strategic, her influence will never be 'unconscious'.

Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That!

In *Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That!*, subject participation begins and ends with the capturing of raw footage that is then handed over to a director-editor-producer team. This film of a Beastie Boys concert involved giving Hi 8 video cameras to fifty fans to shoot their particular view of the concert, before handing the cameras back at the end of the show. The resulting film is a collage-like concert documentary described as 'an authorized bootleg', further augmented with some professionally recorded footage. In this case not only are the participants quite restricted in terms of their input, they are also not the film's subjects — the band is. But the film is nonetheless a highly visible example of a desire to hand the camera over, and it is this quality, more than any other, that has been the focus of its promotion and reception. Furthermore, it is precisely because of this extreme 'camera visibility' that the very question of who the subject of the documentary is, becomes unstable.

As the film's title states, 'I' shot that. So not only does this suggest that the film is partly about who shot it, it is also about the fan that *proclaims* they shot it. In other words, *Awesome* anticipates and produces a life for itself beyond the cinema, by invoking the ongoing investment of fans who will mimic the film's titular declaration by proclaiming that they, or someone like them, did indeed shoot the film, before debating what this means for fans, and documentary filmmaking generally. Indeed, the director, Nathaniel Hörnblowér (a.k.a band member Adam Yauch) states that the idea for The Beastie Boys film came from a fan's camera phone movie recorded at a gig and posted on the band's website. In this case it is not just that the participant-subject is asked to embody a point of view that is framed in turn by a benevolent filmmaker, the participant fan actually frames the whole enterprise in advance.

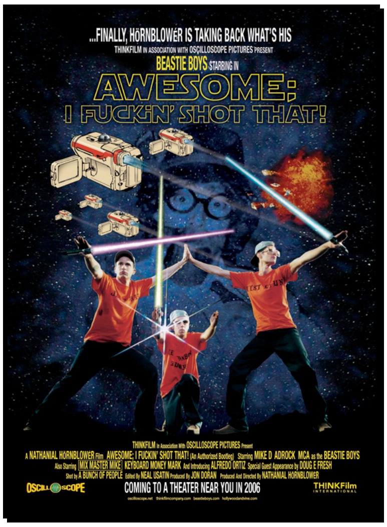
...FINALLY, HÖRNBLOWÉR IS TAKING BACK WHAT'S HIS
THINKFILM IN ASSOCIATION WITH OSCILLOSCOPE PICTURES PRESENT
BEASTIE BOYS STARRING IN
AWESOME;
I FUCKIN' SHOT THAT!
THINKFILM In Association With OSCILLOSCOPE PICTURES Present
A NATHANIAL HÖRNBLOWÉR Film AWESOME; I FUCKIN' SHOT THAT! (An Authorized Bootleg) Starring MIKE D ADROCK MCA as the BEASTIE BOYS
Also Starring MIX MASTER MIKE KEYBOARD MONEY MARK And Introducing ALFREDO ORTIZ Special Guest Appearance by DOUG E FRESH
Shot by A BUNCH OF PEOPLE Edited By NEAL USATIN Produced By JON DORAN Produced And Directed By NATHANIAL HÖRNBLOWER
OSCILLOSCOPE
COMING TO A THEATER NEAR YOU IN 2006
THINKFilm INTERNATIONAL
oscilloscope.net thinkfilmcompany.com beastieboys.com hollywoodandvine.com

Figure 8. Promotional poster for *Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That!*

The promotional poster[19] (Fig. 8) for the film further bears out this relationship between band and fans, featuring as it does a *Star Wars*-themed (Lucas, 1977) universe where the band wield light sabres, and space ships take the form of video cameras. The beauty of this image lies in the way that it sets up the band as the stars of their film, while invoking in the process an image of *Star Wars* fandom married to the participatory camera and fan re-enactment. In other words, the band are simultaneously represented as stars and fans, and the poster suggests that like the *Star Wars* films, The Beastie Boys must make way for the indomitable cultural force of the fan universe. In the expanded universe of *Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That!*, fan culture is represented as productive and pre-emptive, rather than simply reactionary, and it is fan *culture* that joins the band on the metaphorical stage, not simply fan subjects. This is a film that lets you know its participants were participants all along, and were not made so through the benevolent decision to hand the camera over.

Another quality that stands out about the *Awesome* universe is its self-reflexivity. For example, the film poster declares: 'Finally Hörnblowér is taking back what's his.' This reference to reclaiming the video cameras handed out to fans contains a subtle unmasking of the paternalism that so easily befalls the camera movie director. Not only does it admit that the cameras belonged to the director all along, it performs a mock cynicism that the other camera movies dare not. Of course this is a film with much less at stake than the war films to be discussed below, which partly explains the freedom it evidently enjoys. Nonetheless its self-reflexivity means that it actually offers a quite valuable commentary on the power and politics of camera movies and highlights a lack of self-awareness in *The War Tapes* and *Voices of Iraq*. Unlike those texts, *Awesome: I Fuckin' Shot That* eschews opportunities to festishize its own benevolence; it more openly acknowledges the benefits that accrue to the person handing the camera over (who also takes it back); and it uses ancillary texts to push a vision of cultural production as one where ideas and processes are endlessly recycled and exchanged.

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[19] See the image online at http://www.oscilloscope.net/images/BB-WEB-Space-Poster.jpg

Another quality that stands out about the *Awesome* universe is its self-reflexivity. For example, the film poster declares: "Finally Hörnblowér is taking back what's his." This reference to reclaiming the video cameras handed out to fans contains a subtle unmasking of the paternalism that so easily befalls the camera movie director. Not only does it admit that the cameras belonged to the director all along, it performs a mock cynicism that the other camera movies dare not. Of course this is a film with much less at stake than the war films to be discussed below, which partly explains the freedom it evidently enjoys. Nonetheless its self-reflexivity means that it offers a valuable commentary on the power and politics of camera movies, and highlights a lack of self-awareness in similar discussions surrounding *The War Tapes*, or *Voices of Iraq*. Unlike those texts, the *Awesome* universe eschews opportunities to festishize its own benevolence; it more openly acknowledges the benefits that accrue to the person handing the camera over (who also takes it back); and it uses ancillary texts to promote a vision of cultural production as a process of endless borrowing and exchange between fans and media producers.

War And The First-Person Shooter

Deborah Scranton's award winning film[20], *The War Tapes*, is a documentary in which five US National Guard soldiers record their twelve-month tour of duty in Iraq. This footage is cut with professionally recorded interviews conducted back home with family members, and with the soldiers upon their return. Scranton (2006 c) claims that the film has an 'unseen collaborator' in the form of 'the Internet'. An advocate of citizen journalism, she also alerts us to:

> the intimate power of the Internet exploding on the movie screen. Without instant messaging, the soldiers could never have become filmmakers – without email and cheap video, they soldiers [sic] could never have told their stories as they happened. (Scranton 2006 c)

Certainly modern telecommunications technologies were crucial to Scranton's ability to direct from the US, a film shot by soldiers in Iraq. But more importantly, by tapping into a community of soldiers and military bloggers; their families and friends; and a public in need of a narrative about the war they could be proud of, Scranton has produced a 'War Tapes' web site (www.thewartapes.com) that is large, triumphant, community minded, and a testament to just how embedded in media culture a cinematic text can become in a very short time. What a website like this also enables is a certain amount of myth making, not unlike that used to frame audiences' readings of *The Blair Witch Project* or *Cloverfield*, both of which construct explicit relationships between the ostensibly real worlds of their characters and the online forums employed to give audiences a way into those worlds.

In the case of *The War Tapes*, the web site allowed for word of the film to spread; for preferred readings of the film to gather steam and congeal into conventional wisdom;

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[20] Best Documentary, Tribecca Film Festival, 2006. Best International Documentary at the 2006 BritDoc Festival.

and for an independent voice to emerge that could claim to be free of bias from ‘the media’. As Zac Bazzi, one of the camera-carrying soldiers writes in a blog entry on the site:

> this started as a grassroots movie (a few thousand dollars and 10 cameras) and its going to be distributed as a grassroots movie -- because of you. If you can blogroll us or link to us, if you can send out a few of the clips from our site to a friend, that's how we're going to be distributed, through word of mouth. Thank you. Posted on May 7, 2006 07:40 AM by Z (Bazzi 2006)

Although Scranton chose to distribute *The War Tapes* through ‘word of mouth’, this too can be seen as a way of tapping into the zeitgeist, less an obstacle to be overcome, than a call to arms that says the people themselves can make and distribute movies. In this respect it also recalls the distribution approach employed by Robert Greenwald, producer and director of documentaries such as *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price* (2005) and *Iraq For Sale: The War Profiteers* (2006). Greenwald’s approach to distribution, discussed in a recent interview entitled ‘Documentary as Political Activism’ (Haynes, 2007), involves connecting with established community, church and protest groups as a way of promoting the sort of change the film argues for. In the process, of course, it also functions as a way of getting the film out to the biggest audience possible. Greenwald (in Haynes 2007: 26) suggests that his interest in this type of distribution came about because he wanted to get his films out quickly in order that the problems they addressed could likewise be tackled in a ‘timely’ manner, something traditional distribution approaches don’t allow for.

Online groups and communities provide documentary filmmakers — but especially filmmakers advocating a participatory ethos — with new distribution channels and new ways of framing a film’s function. When they exploit these opportunities, and the Internet in general, filmmakers give the audience a role to perform (debate and dissemination), and extend the role of participant-subjects, like Zac Bazzi, into the ancillary sphere. In the case of activist filmmaking the filmmaker, the target audience, and on-screen participants act as one in a common cause. In *The War Tapes* there is also a distinct sense of the activist mentality at work, although neither the film nor the soldiers argue for an end to the war as such.[21] There are certainly no pleas to the government, or appeals to the audience to fight for change. What the film and the soldiers do advocate is the importance of the soldier's point of view, claiming that it is more truthful and more authentic than any that has come before. This in turn gets picked up by journalists such as Tobi Elkin (2006) who writes: "[f]orget about embedding journalists in Iraq or other war zones — a soldier's truth is infinitely more real and compelling."

It is not enough to simply celebrate the fact that audiences and subjects might write themselves into a film's ancillary texts, or contribute to their promotion and distribution. To do so would be to extend the logic of the documentary ideal into the realm of the participatory ideal. One has to enquire about what exactly is being said or claimed by participants, and how any meaning produced in the ancillary sphere impacts upon our reading of the film. Likewise, the filmmaker, who might claim to have stepped back from that process by which arguments are made, or activism inspired, must also be called to account for what they *don't* say — that is, what others say on their behalf.

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[21] Zac Bazzi says at one point in the film: 'Let's just leave it alone and leave. Fuck the oil, man. Fuck that. Not worth it. I'll walk everywhere in the US.' This can be viewed online at: http://www.thewartapes.com/2006/03/asscrack.shtml

In camera movies there is sometimes a tendency to overstate the level of a subject's participation, as happens most explicitly in the case of the director credit for *Voices Of Iraq* (The People Of Iraq, 2004). As Joshua Land (2004) writes, 'any film that credits itself as "filmed and directed by the people of Iraq" deserves to be regarded with skepticism.' In a similar vein we might regard with suspicion the previously cited claim by Deborah Scranton (2006 a) that *The War Tapes* is an 'experiment in authenticity'. For when she says so, neither Scranton, nor her film conveys any sense of experiment as an unmasking or debunking of authenticity, but rather, as a way of uncovering new and convincing techniques for creating it.

One such technique employed by the soldiers in *The War Tapes* involves taking their cameras into battle and attaching them to their vehicles, guns and helmets. On the one hand this does produce a visceral and alarming sense of being there, but it also evokes the familiar first-person shooter perspective of video games and disturbingly blurs two meanings of the phrase 'I Fuckin' Shot That!' In this case, the people who are shot not only die, they are also filmed being eaten by dogs. And although these images are apparently the only ones censored by the army, their content is nonetheless narrated in a to-camera piece by the soldier who shot the footage. The story thereby becomes one about censorship (what I shot), rather than violence (who I shot). In the process it rather too-neatly offers its own jargon of authenticity as a riposte to political correctness and cultural sensitivities.

Views Of Conflict, Conflicted Views

Even if one were to grant that a contemporary director might treat the limitations of the camera movie with sensitivity, and refrain from claiming too much in its name, there is still the matter of what it means to empower one participant-subject over another. As Jay Ruby (1991: 53) points out, “it should not be assumed that any one group has a privileged insight into its own history… No particular group of people has the corner on being self-serving or adjusting the past to fit the needs of the present.” Likewise, no single group of people to whom you might give a camera is beyond telling a story that suits you, or them… but not another.

When watching *The War Tapes* one might ask why the Iraqis don’t have cameras for instance. Which is where *Voices Of Iraq*, with its 150 cameras and 2000 points of view comes in, showing us what Iraq looks like from the perspective of those who live there. But as if to prove Ruby’s point all over again, the extraordinary thing about *Voices Of Iraq* is that it has much the same ideological impact as *The War Tapes*. That is, both films encourage identification with their participant-subjects through their deployment of the participant camera, and both films represent their subjects as victims of the same war; a war which, on the whole, they either welcome as a necessary step towards peace and prosperity, or accept as an inevitability.

After watching these films together then, one resorts to asking: ‘but where’s the conflict?’ This is not meant to belittle the suffering of either party, which is evident enough, but is intended to draw attention to the way these films hold up the apolitical, individual story, not only as a possibility in a time of war, but as an ideal. As a result, audiences of *The War Tapes* are confronted with sentiments such as those of the camera-carrying soldier, Michael Moriarty, who says to camera:

> [s]o let’s all stop crying about whether we had reason to go in there or not because we can fight about that forever. It’s a done deal. We’re in Iraq. Support what it takes to make this thing work, or shut-up!

For a (hyper) text that purports to embody the participatory ethos of the Internet, to promote citizen journalism, and give a voice to the voiceless, it is fortuitous that *The War Tapes* can produce a voice to say what it really wants to say: support this war or shut up. In as much as *The War Tapes* is about the right of soldiers to be heard, it very clearly asks its participants in the audience to confine their own engagement to promotional rather than critical activities. It also reveals that when the benevolent filmmaker gives a voice to one, she silences another.

It will come as no surprise that films like *The War Tapes* and *Voices of Iraq* find advocates in the mainstream press and on various web forums declaring them to be above and beyond politics. Nonetheless, some details are worth a closer look. For example, in an article about the liberal persuasion of recent documentaries, and the apparent response of conservatives to those films in the form of a wave of right-wing documentaries, *Washington Times* correspondent Scott Galupo (2004) suggests that:

> 'Voices' is neither partisan nor conservative in any meaningful sense of the word. However, as an attempt to get behind the filter of the mainstream media — as a picture of reality unmediated by editorial commentary — it's a more potent negation of Michael Moore, Craig Unger, Noam Chomsky and Co. than the documentaries mentioned above.

It is a little curious that even in an article about a conservative riposte to a wave of liberal documentaries, that *Voices Of Iraq* should be held up as exemplary of this riposte, but nonetheless escape being labelled conservative or partisan because its 'politics' are not deemed explicit. Others are not as convinced of course, and a veritable conspiracy theory emerged about the interests behind *Voices Of Iraq*, the implication being that you don't have to wield the camera to get the story you want.

This conspiracy was nurtured by Eartha Melzer (2004) in an article called 'A Dubious Doc', and can be read alongside a lengthy response by one of the film's producers in the 'extended discussion' area of the responses posted at the end of Melzer's article. Another respondent to the article, Randy, offers this criticism: "[a]ccording to a U.S. government poll (done by Bremer's CPA), only 2% of Iraqis see the U.S. as 'liberating' their country. Yet this movie just somehow manages to exclusively give a voice to that 2%." It is clear that not all discussion of camera movies need be naïve or politically conservative. But discussion about camera movies will almost inevitably turn to their politics, precisely because they are so often held up by producers and audiences alike, as being outside of politics; as being nothing more complicated than a person with a point of view and a camera.

The Festival Scene And The Case Of The Saluting Soldier

The myth making potential of camera movies is commensurate with the range of forums they exploit and the integrated nature of their message. What I want to discuss here is a spectacular example of concerted mythmaking conducted wholly in the ancillary sphere, in order to show how the ostensibly unmediated visions of participant-subjects are framed, and framed again, to do ideological and promotional work.

To set the scene, consider how the director of *The War Tapes* has described herself and her background. In one interview Scranton (2006 b) says "I'm not a liberal", and on the film's official website she (2006 c) says she "has a journalism background and a passion for the infantry (her last documentary was about WWII vets)". These read as reliable, unsurprising, and frank descriptions that help the audience to situate the director in relation to the world depicted in the film. But other statements seem less reliable. Keeping in mind that Scranton's CV (2006 d), also posted on the film's official website, boasts a degree in semiotics from Brown University, consider what could well be her own rendering of the myth of the black saluting soldier on the cover of Paris-Match[22], as famously discussed by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* (1972). In Barthes' (1972: 116) analysis of that image he reveals that while the image explicitly propagandises for the French military, it ultimately functions in an undeclared way as propaganda for a white colonial institution whose benevolence and honour is recorded in the evident gratitude of its black subjects.

Scranton does something similar when she describes a scene at the 2006 Tribecca film festival:

> At the very end, came one moment that will forever be etched in my memory (and I'm sure everyone else's who was there). In fact, it came after the end – after Mike Pride had closed the questioning and the final applause had died away. People began to stand up and talk among themselves, then just as the crowd's chatter swelled, it paused and diminished to quiet again as a very powerfully built man with short hair came to the microphone in the right hand aisle. The entire crowd hushed all the way down to silence. Everyone was still, all eyes in the room looked at him. The man identified himself only as a Marine and explained that Marines don't follow the same rules as everyone else. The Marine said he had only one thing to say to the soldiers on stage and he stood to attention, and drew his right hand to his brow in a salute. After holding the salute for what seemed an eternity, he crisply turned and walked back up the aisle and melted into the crowd. I went to look for him, but he was gone. (Scranton: 2006 e)

Camera movies readily fall into colonialist traps. There is no shaking the sense that they ultimately seek to capture an insider's view of 'their' world that will be seen as less mediated by, and from the perspective of, 'our' outside world. In their claims of immediacy, they deny their function as the initial expression of a myth, and by letting the insider speak they naturalize both them and us. The marine at Tribecca represents himself as one who speaks a language peculiar to marines, which frees us of the burden of understanding him, but also deters us from enquiring further about what he does mean, let alone what Scranton means in re-presenting him. But his speech, though ostensibly directed at other marines, nonetheless constitutes a performative and mythmaking address to the festival audience, thereby mirroring the address of the soldiers on film. For they too know themselves to be addressing two audiences: other military personnel who evidently won't talk, and a civilian audience that can't possibly grasp the lives they are being shown and who should therefore remain silent.

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[22] See the image online at http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/~os0tmc/art/saulte.jpg

What Scranton appears to be so taken by here is the idea that her filmmaking methodology not only fostered a dialogue between marines that wouldn't have happened otherwise, but also that this performative salute is the ultimate vindication of her methodology, proving as it does that marines think different, *The War Tapes* knows it, and now crucially, so do we. Although Scranton would have us believe that the information she portrays in her anecdote comes naturally from her festival participant, nonetheless she is the willful disseminator of a second, or third-order, myth. By posting this information online Scranton also fixes it, with much rhetorical flair, as 'pure information', even though among the myths being propagated is one that reveals her as the agent who gives a voice to the voiceless, and another that casts US marines as the voiceless among us.

It would be wrong to suggest that this festival scene can simply be mapped onto the filmic text, as though both texts put forward the same myths in the same way. Certainly the soldiers in *The War Tapes* are at turns engaging, funny, and surprisingly self-reflexive; and in common parlance they debunk the odd myth. But in fact the Arabic speaking, Lebanese born soldier Zac Bazzi, the most articulate of the film's participants, is a veritable coup for the film insofar as he substantiates the myth of the US military's moral superiority and ethnic diversity, much as the black French soldier could be understood as a celebration of the benefits of French colonialism. Bazzi also provides a crucial site of identification for the civilian audience, in a way that the other soldiers do not; something his numerous media appearances would attest to.

Of course while soldiers like Bazzi may narrate their war experiences with self-consciousness and insight, they also function as part of an imperialist occupying force, doing the ideological work of a benevolent director who is in the employ of The New Hampshire National Guard. Each of these institutional frameworks, it scarcely needs to be said, adds another mediating layer to the film's narrative world in a way that gives the lie to the film's self-proclaimed spontaneity, and the anti-institutional and anti-authorial jargon that accompanies it. In her representation of *The War Tapes* Scranton willfully devolves as a critical subject herself, winding the clock back to a simpler time, before her college semiotics classes, when a saluting soldier and an illiberal filmmaker could simply be taken at face value.

Conclusion to Chapter 3: 'I'm not the media dammit'

Puffed up with a belief in their own immediacy, both *Voices of Iraq* and *The War Tapes* take aim at 'the media' who invariably get it wrong. Having said that it is curious to see just how prominently *Voices of Iraq* features an authorial voice — in the form of intertitles — that narrativises the film's own project. For instance, in a scene where a military vehicle is blown up, we watch and wait as the vehicle burns, while titles announce:

> TITLE: ‘After the car bombing, protesters wait for journalists to arrive with their armored escorts.’
>
> Protesters start throwing rocks at burning humvee.
>
> TITLE: ‘As soon as the media leave the protesters disband.’

The story being told here is the one about the media influencing the scene they are trying to record. Yet because there is still a camera present to record the moment when the rock throwing stops, this participatory camera proves itself to *not* be a part of the media apparatus that motivates the dissenters into action in the first place. In this case, although there appears to be a sensitivity to the mediating impact of cameras being conveyed, clearly it is a narrative restricted in its scope, and one that does not extend to reflecting on the impact of the cameras used in the documentary itself.

A scene with similar implications is shown early on in *The War Tapes*, as well as being included in the downloadable trailer.[23]

> TITLE: ‘BARRACKS: PREPARING TO DEPLOY TO IRAQ'
>
> Soldier 1 points his video camera at soldier 2
>
> Soldier 2: ‘I’m not supposed to talk to the media’.
>
> Soldier 1: ‘I’m not the media dammit!’

What does soldier 2 know that soldier 1 doesn’t? That by the time the film, the festival audience, the citizen-journalists, and the citizen-soldiers have done their job, they will indeed cohere into an example of the contemporary media text, complete with institutional trimmings and a culturally sanctioned rhetoric that warrants all the critical attention accorded its predecessors.

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[23] http://thewartapes.com/trailer/

The four films discussed in this chapter fall into two groups. *Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That!* and *Chain Camera* imagine their subjects as the active members of a participatory culture, much like their audience. The two war movies, by contrast, contrive to exploit the visibility and legitimacy of the insider participant-subject in a way that aims at a kind of diegetic truth, but which denies full expression to the kind of audience participation that might offer a more contested view of that truth. Of course, the participant-subject who sees him or herself as a kind of activist, or an advocate for a voiceless group, is unlikely to be pleased by the kind of criticism that we might associate with healthy debate, simply because they are called upon to embody that which is under review. This is a key drawback of the war documentaries in particular, which stand for dialogue and democracy, but ultimately are forced to choose between the principle of participation, and their participant-subjects (Support these participant soldiers, who 'don't follow the same rules as everyone else', or shut up!) But if the audience is to be treated as more than a cog in the promotional machine, they must be free to challenge the image of participation they are being sold. As a reflection both of, and upon, participatory culture, camera movies focus our attention on the fact of participation, but also its representation and take-up within their expansive frames. It is the way these documentary campaigns condition our reading of the filmic text that tells us most about the value they place on participation, and about the role they envisage for the audience in a participatory culture.

CHAPTER 4:
Finding, Filming and Documenting (The Articulate Archive)

This chapter is about the ways that *Hubbub* and *One More Like That* attribute their own value to the participant in a convergence culture by giving (and not giving) a voice to those agents, and constructing a representational space within which those participants can be seen to function. This chapter is also about how my practice is informed by two cultural contexts: namely, the techno-cultural context that is participatory culture, and the context represented by practice-based research conducted in a higher education setting. And because of that latter context, this chapter will continue to frame its analysis by referencing traditions of filmmaking and film criticism, including such forms as the essay film, and found footage filmmaking, each of which performs its own kind of criticism through film practice.

The title of this chapter points to the way in which my practice is hybrid in its form and process. Such hybridity is also typical of the trajectory of the consumer turned producer in a ‘cut and paste’ culture. In such a culture, consumers play with media, they discover the limits of their ability to acquire and repurpose media, and they very often find themselves attaining the role of producer in their use of media technology. Axel Bruns (2005) uses the figure of the ‘produser’ to describe this conflation of roles, especially as it occurs in online social media and collaborative environments, where the use of a cultural object may be indistinguishable from its production. For my purposes, the produser can be understood as someone who exploits, contributes to, and helps maintain a shared archive of media culled from the much larger database that is the mediatised world.

By collecting together the ideas of finding, filming and documenting, this chapter seeks to situate my documentary practice in relation to the hybrid world it springs from and to consider a range of film practices that might give weight to the notion of what I will call the 'articulate archive'. The articulate archive is one with a discernible voice, despite its voice being rendered through collective, but also contested, activity. The archives assembled on YouTube and Flickr, for instance, might be understood as articulating a desire for sharing, technological connectivity, and sociability. The archive of video material that went into making *Chain Camera* can be understood as articulating an idea of authentic and exhaustive first-person expression from which an image of multicultural, teenage existence in Los Angeles is derived. The reason for employing this metaphor is that it provides a narrative thread linking a diverse range of film practices and discussions that nonetheless share an investment in multiplicity, collaborative processes, and collective, often public, expression.

The articulate archive is also a figure that captures the way in which filmmaking in the digital age must contend with new modes of acquiring, editing and screening audio-visual media. Camera movies are just one instantiation of these new modalities where the filmmaker-as-editor honours more or less the voices of their subjects, and the polyphony of the collective voice in particular. The articulate archive is a figure that helps us understand notions like David MacDougall's (1989: 121) 'polythetic voice' (to be discussed below), as well as filmmakers like Agnes Varda who set out to represent the desires of people who are themselves collectors and members of a loose collective. Finally, the articulate archive offers a way to trace my own efforts to represent an articulate public expressing themselves through the shared multimedia database of a convergence culture. This includes thinking about how my practice is made articulate through its intervention upon this public database, but more particularly with the much smaller collection of material gleaned by filming, finding and documenting audience responses to Band In A Bubble.

I began this chapter by saying that both the essay film and the found footage film perform criticism through film practice. My ultimate ambition is to arrive at some conclusions about the ways that the films submitted here perform their own brand of film criticism. Just one way of thinking about the critical component of my documentaries is to see them not only as an engagement with ancillary media, but also to see them *as* ancillary media.

Compared to many of the feature-length films discussed in this research, my own documentaries could be seen as ancillary to Band In A Bubble (much as *Foreigners Out!* is ancillary to 'Schlingensief's Container' for instance). They could be read as part of an ongoing audience response to Band In A Bubble, as well as a part of the ongoing production of the event (represented by their inclusion on the band's own DVD about the event). With respect to Regurgitator's own practice, the entire bubble event can be seen as ancillary to their album, and a digression from their normal music practice, albeit a digression that is informed by their engagement with arts practice in an age of reality television. The point I would make here is that the proliferation of ancillary texts around Band In A Bubble is testament to the way that it facilitated a more critical mode of engagement with media culture, just as thinking about the event itself as an ancillary text highlights the band's interest in fan cultures and critical cultural consumption.

A different kind of critical intervention upon the bubble event can be seen in the actions of a man who invaded the bubble by scaling a perimeter wall, before walking in the back door and sitting down next to the unsuspecting lead singer. This can be seen as a response to the event prompted by similar efforts in the past to surreptitiously enter various 'Big Brother'[24] houses. But it also represents a reconfiguration of the opportunities presented to the bubble's audience, and can therefore be seen, like my own documentaries, as an attempt to make the audience's role more prominent. To stress Barker's (2006) point, this kind of activity should be seen less as a digression from the authored text, than a development of the participant's role in the realisation of contemporary media productions.

Filmed and Found

Because *One More Like That* utilises television footage shot by Channel [V], which it then reconfigures and recontextualises, it falls within a broad tradition of found footage filmmaking. And in its use of a split-screen format where found footage is placed alongside newly filmed footage, it structurally recalls Amie Siegel's split-screen, found footage installation, *Berlin Remake* (Siegel, Germany, 2005). In both cases found footage filmmaking is shown to be a hybrid, rather than pure form, where found and filmed footage are brought together for the purposes of experiment and analysis. In Siegel's case the two types of footage are filmed many years apart, which means that she has the opportunity to recreate the original found footage, in her newly filmed footage, and this forms the basis of her analysis. In my case the two types of footage are produced contemporaneously which means that the analysis — the construction of a dialectical relationship — is largely confined to editing and post-production.

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[24] Surveillance themed reality television format where audiences vote to evict contestants from a 'Big Brother' house.

As I have already indicated, contemporary found footage filmmaking must be seen in the context of a convergence culture where so much media consumption is about reconfiguring existing media texts. It must deal, in other words, with the cooptation of its own appropriative process. And while there are good reasons for making distinctions between found footage filmmaking and what consumers do with media, there are also reasons for thinking about their convergence. Catherine Russell (1999: xvi) makes an interesting point about the potential of convergence when she writes that "[i]t cannot be true that video is replacing cinema, when digital technologies are enabling us to see so much more cinema." The point Russell is making is that film practice must be seen through the lens of digital technologies like DVD, home cinema and video streaming, rather than be seen as something ossified in a pre-digital reality. The same goes for found footage filmmaking, which is also being enabled by digital technologies.

Adrian Danks (2006: 244) points out that found footage filmmaking is not just about investigating the meaning of images in different contexts, it also constitutes "the expression of a degree of personal and cultural empowerment through the reappropriation of images and sounds produced by dominant or mainstream culture". This kind of empowerment through appropriation is typical of how we understand the workings of a participatory culture as well. But perhaps the apotheosis of the empowerment Danks speaks of can be seen in the idea that certain found footage films seek to create the conditions under which ‘mainstream’ films might actually expose their own failings and disempowerment — that is, their barely repressed desires and fears. What’s so empowering here is not just the idea that independent practitioners are in a position to control their engagement with mainstream culture, but that mainstream media producers should prove to be unable to control their own. This is another version of the articulate archive, one that is exploited by filmmakers like Martin Arnold and Peter Tscherkassky who perform a kind of psychoanalysis on found films by encouraging them to reveal all.

There is also a tendency in experimental film practice, and the essayistic tradition in particular, to think of certain types of production as bearing upon our understanding of found footage filmmaking even when the material being used is not, in fact, found. One can also see in the case of camera movies that the filmmaker comes into possession of a filmed, rather than found archive, by virtue of having others produce the material required. There are, therefore, three senses in which I shall be referring to found footage filmmaking to illuminate my practice and to develop the notion of the articulate archive. First of all, there is the fact that I have used footage shot by another in the right hand screen of *One More Like That*. The second sense is the idea that contemporary media consumption is a kind of remediating, collage-like practice not unlike found footage filmmaking, which is concerned with empowerment and exchange. When Jenkins (2006: 2) says that consumers “will go anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experience they want,” the implication is that consumers don’t just find entertainment, they find media to turn into entertainment. The third sense in which I shall be discussing found footage is where footage is simply treated as found even when it is not. In the following case study I will discuss a particularly vivid example of contemporary filmmaking that brings together all three of these ideas, and reveals an articulate public making the most of a shared media database.

The Public Image

The Media Shed group (http://mediashed.org/) are a UK based, not-for-profit organisation who encourage artists and others to make use of free software, free materials and free media gleaned from their everyday environment, thus promoting participation and sustainable media practices. They have previously garnered Arts Council of England funding for their Gearbox project which consists of a 'Free Media Toolkit' designed to help people make films cheaply. One part of the toolkit includes instructions on 'Video Sniffin', which is the practice of intercepting and recording CCTV footage transmitted wirelessly. As they say on the website, "Why bother to buy a camera when there are so many already within the environment?"

The Video Sniffin' project has been extended by Media Shed to include other practices, and has resulted in two projects that are pertinent here. The first involved young people from the local YMCA identifying wireless CCTV hotspots, and then asking those shop owners who owned the CCTV cameras for the right to perform to the cameras, and then for the right to record the images using their Video Sniffin' technology. This material was then edited into a short film.

An elaboration of this project commissioned by Futuresonic[25] was called *The Duellists* (Valentine, 2007)[26]. This film involved two young people performing a choreographed version of an acrobatic, urban dance form known as Parkour, or free-running, inside a Manchester shopping mall after hours (with permission). Utilising the complex's 160 CCTV cameras, and controlling them from the central control room, the filmmakers recorded the performance and edited it into the final six and a half minute film, along with a soundtrack "created entirely from the foundsounds and noises recorded during the performance."[27] This was subsequently screened on the shopping complex's plasma screens and in 11 of its stores as part of an exhibition called 'Art for Shopping Centres'. (See Fig. 9)

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[25] Annual Arts and Music festival held In Manchester: http://futuresonic.com
[26] Download the film at http://www.mongrelx.org/duellists

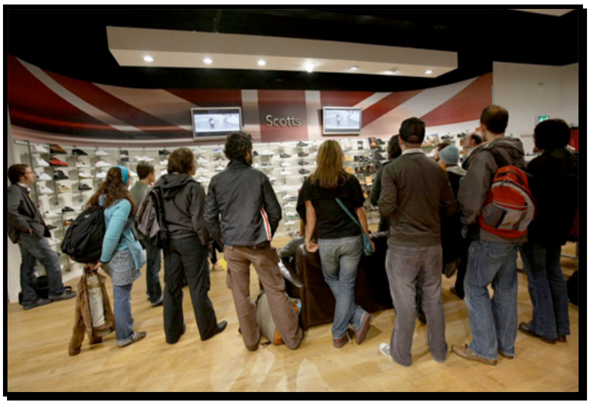

Figure 9. Shoppers watching the film unfold.

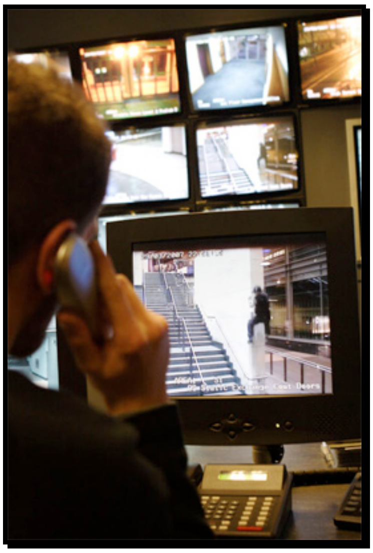

Figure 10. A depiction of the filmmaking method as a breach of security.

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[27] http://www.mongrelx.org/?q=duellists

By utilising both found filmmaking technology and found screening facilities — and bearing in mind this project's origins in the Video Sniffin' project which poaches security video from thin air — what emerges in this practice is the distinct image of filmed footage as found footage. For not only could such footage have been found, audiences might reasonably anticipate that it could *only* have been found, since the CCTV security apparatus is normally off limits. And by making otherwise proscribed media available to audiences, the film performatively reconfigures the dominant media apparatus, and re-writes its master narrative. This faux-illicit re-writing is an idea also hinted at in a promotional image (Fig. 10) which appears to show a security officer in front of his bank of monitors phoning for a response to the apparent breach of security picked up by the CCTV cameras.

The Duellists frames filmed footage as found footage in a move that has precedents in experimental filmmaking, but which more immediately evokes hacking culture and the cut and paste aesthetics of media consumption in a hyper-mediated world. The film promotes a found footage sensibility and exemplifies the notion of empowerment through participation in media culture, in part because surveillance represents dis-empowerment and alienation. The film also raises the spectre of surveillance technologies as a medium capable of providing the raw material for a nascent mode of database filmmaking, and thereby conjures an image of countless found footage films that are just waiting to be realised through editing.

By evoking this database of surveillance media, *The Duellists* also invites audiences to consider a tension that is inherent in such media. For instance, one of the ambitions behind security cameras is that they should reveal the identity of individuals, yet they are notoriously limited in their ability to do so. What they often reveal quite effectively, however, is an anonymous and numerous public. By situating its subjects within such a representational space, *The Duellists* reverses that tendency in non-fiction filmmaking to reduce a culture to those few individuals prepared to act as spokespeople. In this case the film could be read, not as one that reduces contemporary youth culture to two specific individuals, but one that *reproduces* these individuals in the guise of an infinitely multiplied and anonymous public circulating within an equally vast and impersonal database.

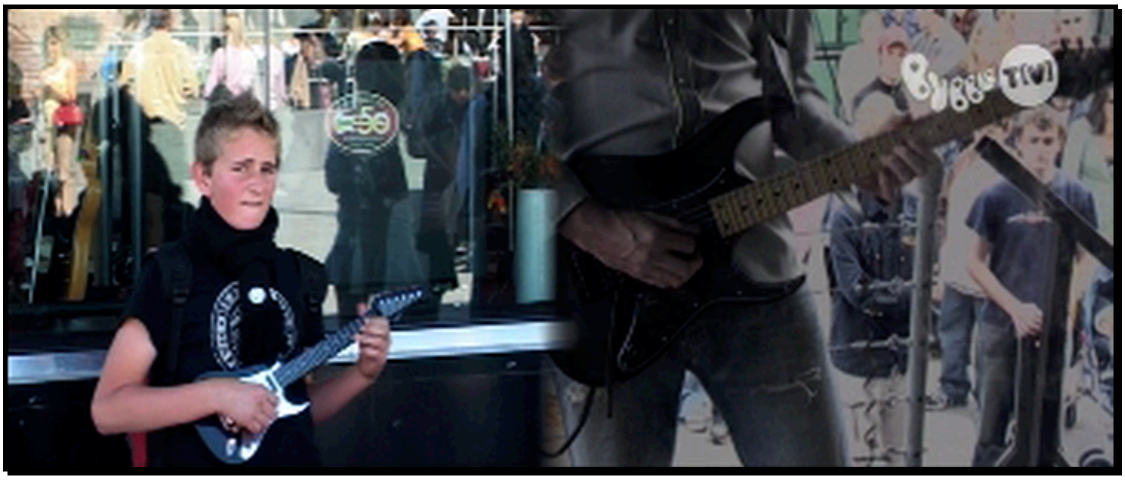

Figure 11. Guitarists, both Filmed and Found

Both *Hubbub* and *One More Like That* confront similar challenges to those above, as they construct a relation between individual and collective modes of participation conducted in public, but also conducted *as* the public. As Dovey (2000: 159) says, "[t]he media text *is* public space". Hence the media we consume is in so many respects the public we consume, and vice versa. The image on the left in Figure 11, of a young boy with a plastic guitar, can be read in a variety of ways: as a response to the invitation of the band, the invitation of my camera, and the presence of a public audience. But it is also staged in *One More Like That* as though it were a response to the image on the right, an image that features a contestant competing for the right to have their guitar part included on the album. The image on the right is also a representation, therefore, of what the participating public looks like from the perspective of Channel [V]. The point here is that my documentary camera was part of an endlessly mediated public space where one camera fed another, and each performance elicited another. In such an environment one can't help but engage with the images and performances produced by others because there would be no public event — and no public image — without them.

The Duellists reminds us of the very many ways that found footage can be mobilised as a critical and creative site of tension and empowerment, whilst also highlighting the power inherent in the image making apparatus, including its power to watch over us. What this also means is that far from romanticising the process of image acquisition and empowerment, the film reminds us instead of the enormous labour and capital required to generate any depiction of the public, let alone the effort required to create an alternative, or counter-public,[28] without the benefit of such capital. *The Duellists* manifests a political intervention rendered in aesthetic form. What is particularly interesting for this research is that it does so, not by revealing an actual archive of surveillance images, but by revealing and repurposing the archival machine itself. And although our everyday acts of media manipulation are not the same thing as a critical found footage practice, *The Duellists* reminds us that they can be. It also reminds us that the very notion of what constitutes a found footage practice can be prised apart in the process of working it over.

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[28] See Michael Warner's book, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 2002, for a discussion of the notion of a counterpublic as a subordinate, but determinedly alternate vision of what the public can be.

The Participant-Subject in a Participatory World

Although my own videos are not participatory in the way that camera movies are, one of the qualities they do share with those films is the use of multiple, subjective points of view to create a portrait of a culture at large. The subjective 'point of view' in *Hubbub* is revealed in front of the camera as testimony, however, rather than behind the camera. And while *One More Like That* does not offer the polyphony of voices that *Hubbub* does, by juxtaposing two broad perspectives side by side (media producers and media consumers) it does offer a visual demonstration of the idea that one's view of culture is always framed and situated — framed by the culture itself, as much as by the documentary apparatus. *One More Like That* therefore offers a depiction of participatory culture that is more institutional and 'architectural', to borrow Siegel's term, than that offered by *Hubbub*, and is also more reminiscent of a film like *The Duellists* as a result.

Unlike three of the four films discussed in the last chapter, my own films are explicitly, and singularly, about participation in a media culture. Of those four, *Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That!* is the film most like mine because it is also situated in the audience, and understands that audience to be engaged in participatory practices long before the participatory documentary apparatus is made available to them. However, *Awesome* was also produced by the musicians themselves, and gives much more consideration to the band as a result. In effect, it offers a vision of the band as seen by the audience, whereas my films seek to reveal the audience through the metacultural project of the band.

In the attempt to represent a culture, participatory documentaries must negotiate the complex relationship between two subjects: the world being depicted, and the participant-subject who is asked to represent or embody it. In *Awesome* this relationship is handled with much intelligence, in part because there is very little between the two. And although Ruby and Feldman both point out the limitations of granting too much authority to the participant-subject, there is much less risk in doing so when the filmmaker is *not* using their own claims about participation to bolster some other claim about the world. Like the Beastie Boys, if I grant my participant-subjects a special status, it is as agents engaged in participatory media activity in particular. This is a very different scenario to one where a filmmaker argues that a participatory mode of documentary filmmaking offers special insights into the truth about war for instance. It is not at all clear that war is a story best told by those who also prosecute its violent ambitions. Or if it is, then the danger is that war becomes just another media practice.

The participants in my documentaries were members of Band In A Bubble's audience first of all, and they took part in various ways in that event, in more or less constructive and visible ways. But by offering their own critical and creative appraisal of the event for the benefit of my documentary, this audience also stepped outside of the event to some extent, and contributed to a broader media sphere in a way that transcended their function as interacting audience. My subjects and I were therefore involved in a form of labour performed in the name of a collaboratively produced vision of a participating public. And by focusing on the work that goes into participating meaningfully in media culture this research retains a sense of the complexity of the relation between a participatory culture and its participant-witnesses, as opposed to the overly simple expectation that participants can embody, and therefore stand in for, their world.

Subjectivity and the World: The Essay Film

Although multiple perspectives are frequently used in participatory documentaries in the name of diversity, it is typically the filmmaker who chooses *which* people should function as representatives of a particular culture, and *how* their views should be communicated. The high shooting ratios associated with documentary filmmaking generally are a consequence of the widespread practice both of deferring the selection of participants from a much larger pool, and of the need to construct a framing argument or narrative. In this sense, the real filmmaking begins after the participant's work is done, and a store of rushes has been amassed.

If this process more or less describes the greater part of documentary filmmaking, it has been given its most reflexive treatment in experimental documentary practice. In fact it is the self-reflexive treatment of such processes that distinguishes an experimental from a more socially-minded approach to documentary, even as a figure like Jean Rouch amply shows that the two modes need not be seen as mutually exclusive. But where Rouch may draw our attention to power relations in documentary and ethnographic filmmaking, and highlight the performative extremities of the documentary mode, it is in the database aesthetic of Vertov, but also the essay films of Jonas Mekas and Chris Marker, that we become most aware of the relation between what is shown (the film) and what is not shown (the audio-visual archive). With respect to Vertov for instance, Masha Enzensberger writes that his approach to filmmaking involved the creation of:

> stores of documentary films in which raw material, the product of enormous labour, would be kept catalogued according to chronology and subject matter. Unused film is not waste — it is the artist's raw material for future films. (Enzensberger, 1973: 99)

For Vertov then, just as it was for Andy Warhol, the archive is not exhausted by a single edit, but continues to be a source of ongoing analysis, experimentation and production.

In the case of Jonas Mekas's practice,[29] some 26 years elapsed before footage shot by him in 1949 made it into *Lost, Lost, Lost* in 1975. In an interview with Scott MacDonald (1984: 82), Mekas describes how he came to record footage of life as an émigré in New York in 1949 but "couldn't deal with it until then [1975]. I couldn't figure out how to edit the early footage." He goes on to say: "I was collecting, documenting, without a clear plan or purpose, the activities of displaced persons" (cited in MacDonald, 1984: 85). Part of what Mekas seems to want to articulate here is the idea that as an immigrant himself, he lacked the emotional and cultural grounding in his new home (New York) to know what to do with an experience of displacement that was still so palpably his own. In this case, only the passing of time would provide the circumstances in which the social dimensions of experience so deeply embodied by the filmmaker could become the stuff of abstraction and reflective re-composition.

The essay form favoured by Mekas is a genre of experimental filmmaking that takes up the challenge of representing the social as both lived experience and a product of the representational drive. That is, because of their privileging of the authorial voice, film essayists encounter their own sociability through the processes of abstraction and representation required of a filmmaker. Personal experience is thereby turned into something more aesthetically and politically motivated, as opposed to something blankly lived, or experienced.

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[29] One of the founders of Anthology Film Archives, a museum and cinema dedicated to preserving and screening avant-garde and American independent cinema.

For Michael Renov (2004: 71), the features that characterise the essay film are its freeform structure, explicitly subjective (yet unstable) point of view, and open ended-ness. But Renov (2004: 73) is keen to situate the essay film in relation to both experimental and documentary filmmaking traditions, an idea that can be seen is his observation that the essay film is “notable for its enmeshing of two registers of interrogation — of subjectivity and of the world.” But unlike some involved in participatory documentary filmmaking, the essayist never loses sight of their own implicated-ness in the world they depict, nor in the way that encounter shapes the self they project through their filmmaking.

Editing the Archive

Jonas Mekas (cited in Frye, 2007) has referred to himself as a ‘filmer’ rather than a filmmaker, in a bid to capture the sense of being in the moment with the camera, rather than anticipating a process of editing and film-*making*. The filmer shoots without any kind of script, or specific outcome in mind. Similarly, the filmmaker Chris Strand (cited in Wees, 1993: 93) writes:

> [w]hen I’m editing I sort of view all footage as found footage. I like to distance myself from the footage I take. Editing is a whole different thing from the emotional involvement you get, or I get, when I’m filming people doing things.

Terrence Rafferty (1996: 243) suggests that with *Sans Soleil* (1983) “what Marker means to communicate to us is the solitude of the film editor at his machinery.” This solitude is not only the result of an editor working alone, however, but of an editor dramatically displaced from the self that recorded the footage. In the case of *Sans*

Soleil, as much as 18 years has passed between the recording of the earliest footage and the film's completion in 1982. Marker's practice is complicated further by the fact that not only does he *appear* to treat his own footage as though it were found footage (in the manner that Strand describes), but, as Catherine Lupton (2005: 156) points out, a small amount of the footage *is* found footage.

In contrast to camera movies then, which tend to smooth over the obvious discontinuities that their method of filmmaking entails, essay films make a virtue of the distance between filmmaker and editor, and turn deferral and discontinuity into a mechanism for self-reflection, and an opportunity for thinking about the store of images available to them as an archive of creative potential. This idea is famously captured by Marker at the beginning of *Sans Soleil*, when he stages his own struggle to find a fitting image to follow his image of happiness (three young children walking along a road in Iceland). In this way Marker makes us aware not only of the archive of images that remain (mostly) off screen, but also the work that goes into giving them meaning, and the subjective nature of their evaluation. When filmmakers become editors, as they do in found footage filmmaking, or when they simply disarticulate the self that films from the self that edits, as certain essayists are wont to do, they provide a model for how we can maintain a critical perspective on the circulation of images in a mediatised world.

Movers and Makers: The Audience As Cultural Disseminators

The most downloaded movie from The Prelinger Archives[30] — an online database of digitized film — almost doubling the downloads of the second most popular[31], is the

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[30] http://www.archive.org/details/prelinger

1951 "Duck and Cover" Civil Defense film that advises on the safety precautions to be taken in the event of a nuclear attack on the United States. Anyone familiar with the compilation film *Atomic Café* (Kevin Rafferty et al, 1982) couldn't help but notice the correspondence between the popularity of this specific download and its prominent use in *Atomic Café*. On the face of it, this suggests that not only are people making use of the world's digitized film archives, but that they are doing so in such a way that follows in the footsteps of their avant-garde forebears. But this is not so surprising when, as Patrik Sjöberg (2001: 75) points out, found footage films borrow from each other as much as from source archives, leading to his conclusion that the origin of a fragment of film "before it entered the compilation film is subordinated to its *use-value* in a montage context."

Duck and Cover can therefore be understood as The Prelinger Archive's most downloaded fragment of film *culture*, rather than just a piece of popular, or accessible media. The distinction here is that audiences, amateurs, and other new media users who manipulate the ever-proliferating store of images available to them, don't simply interact with texts, they take part in cultural processes that are no longer the sole preserve of experimental or documentary filmmakers. What this also means, however, is that although anyone who edits found footage might be understood as a filmmaker of sorts, to the extent that they rely on the specific meanings conferred upon a piece of film by found footage filmmakers before them, they may also be seen as contributing to a process that is closer to *dissemination*, than it is to film production.

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[31] http://www.archive.org/details/prelinger *Duck and Cover* (1951, Archer Productions, Inc) 338,849 downloads as at 27/11/2007. This, compared to the mere 166,262 downloads of the second most sought after film.

But after Urban, even this notion of dissemination is more complicated that it may look. Urban uses the term ‘dissemination’ to contrast with cultural ‘replication’. For him, culture is replicated, and therefore inert, when it is simply promoted or distributed, just as it is when it is borne by various cultural *traditions*. Dissemination, by contrast, is a more digested process involving the sort of critical appraisal asked of audiences of the Dogma films. A good film review, for instance, doesn’t tell us which films to see (thereby circulating the culture contained within them), but what to see in films (to see how a film, but also its analysis, might move film culture forward).

Just as Danks (2006: 242) writes of a ‘dispersive spirit’ at work in contemporary found footage filmmaking, the amateur media manipulator who mimics the practices of a found footage filmmaker is doing more than replicating images, or even other people’s critical treatment of those images. They are contributing to the visibility of a type of filmmaking practice, and sustaining a cultural process that is precisely about *not* letting media or its meaning stand, and *not* letting culture become inert. When coupled with Urban’s notion of cultural dissemination, the dispersive spirit not only describes our very social desire to share media, but also to leave our mark on the ideas contained within them.

Participatory culture is about the movement of media, some of that movement amounting to cultural replication, some of it involving dissemination and transformation. But regardless of who is responsible for causing a media text to appear, or re-appear in the culture — professional producer or creative consumer —

it is when their engagement with a text makes others stop and notice, that they encourage a metacultural stance. Both Band In A Bubble and Schlingensief's Container disseminate the culture of reality television in such a way that transforms it, and both thereby demand their own audience. Of course these projects don't just demand an audience, they simply cannot disseminate their ideas about reality television or participatory culture without them. My founding hypothesis is that if these metacultural events are transformative in the way they disseminate culture via the participatory activities of audiences, then those very audiences deserve yet another audience to bear witness to their critical and creative labour.

Shooting the Archive

The documentaries submitted here have been informed by my encounters with essayists like Marker and Varda, but also found footage and database filmmaking. Hence in approaching the task of representing public engagement with a three week long, reality television event, it seemed evident to me that the nature and shape of the finished documentaries would: bear the trace of their having been substantially created in the editing suite; would bear the trace of their having been conceived and conducted in a media-laden, and mobile information environment; and would bear the trace of their having to negotiate repetition and duration. In the process I endeavoured to convey a sense of my own media production as a kind of consumption that involved the self-conscious appropriation, dissemination and *re-production* of that environment's media, and its public utterances.

Unlike more narratively driven documentaries, mine were not plotted or shot with a specific trajectory in mind, nor was I interested in revealing character psychology, or biographical details.[32] Rather, I saw myself working within a milieu where audio-visual media are mobile and accessible, and available for use in the kind of collage that befitted an event defined by its multiple interfaces and its promise of recombinant media. These qualities will be apparent in the interactive piece *One More Like That*, which uses found footage and filmed footage side by side in a bid to show how the members of a participatory culture exploit the opportunities presented to them, but also how they make of those opportunities something unforeseen by those furnishing the invitation. It does not have to be true that Channel [V]'s footage was as accessible to the public as my use of it might imply, any more than the security cameras were available for hijacking in *The Duellists*. What matters is that an image of a participating public is created by recourse to a body of images that is itself made to look publicly accessible in the process.

Part of what makes the images and sounds of Band In A Bubble appear accessible is their mobility throughout the environment in which the event was installed. For instance, an orchestrated audience cheer recorded by the band on one day of the event, turned up days later on a single released while the band were still in the bubble. Similarly, cries of excitement delivered by young fans into the bubble's intercom would be screened live on the web and via digital television broadcast, before reappearing in my own documentaries, Channel [V] highlight reels, and news coverage of the event. But there is a mobility at work here that is not just the mobility one might associate with media convergence for instance, flowing across platforms, practices, and contexts. Audio and video were also mobile, each in relation to the other.

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[32] Indeed this lack of biographical detail makes *Hubbub* closer to a 'portrait' of the participant, than a documentary about people's lives. See Paul Arthur on the portrait film (2003).

Audio-Vision in 'One More Like That'

Michel Chion (1994) treats the relation between sound and vision in cinema as metaphorical (as a play of difference), rather than metonymic (based on similarity and co-extensiveness). Needless to say, any treatment of found images and sounds works in similar ways, since one of the ambitions of found footage filmmaking is to investigate audio-visual conventions and their relation to certain representational regimes.

The first audio-visual convention that users are asked to confront in *One More Like That* is the expectation that each screen has its proper audio accompaniment — Chion would describe this convention in terms of an 'audio-visual contract'. But the relation between audio and vision is complicated further by the fact that there is always a second, alternate image that accompanies any sound channel, as well as a second muted audio channel that might accompany an image. So even if users understand themselves to be observing a particular audio-visual configuration, or relationship, they are forever keeping at bay an alternative audio-visual arrangement. One of the qualities that defines media convergence is the idea that media no longer have a single ideal, or even 'authoritative' form, but are instead hybrid, contested, and reworked. It is this quality that my use of the interactive split-screen aims to put into play.

The audio-visual contract in *One More Like That* is complicated still further by the fact that the audio-visual design takes its cues from the radical disruption of the audio-visual environment caused by the Band In A Bubble event. Consequently, an audio channel that appears to be connected to one subject, may suddenly appear, whether through a metaphorical or real world (dis)connection, to belong to the alternate image. In the image with the pair of guitarists above (Figure 11), it might appear that the young boy is miming to the sound of the guitar produced by the man on the right. But in fact, the guitar sound is coming from inside the bubble, and this too might be emanating live, or as playback from an earlier recording. In another scene we hear someone responding wildly to an intruder, plaintively asking "Who the fuck is that?" At that moment we see on the left-hand screen a football mascot peering into the lens of the camera. Although correlations like these represent aesthetic choices on my part, they are very much inspired by the challenge of that event to the audio-visual contract, but also to the contract private individuals have with the public. In an example that highlights the breaking of a certain public-private contract, my father expressed incredulity that a band member would use the 'F' word inside the bubble when it could be plainly heard by the public outside.

The point I want to make about the audio-visual contract is that in *One More Like That* the user is free to choose an audio channel, not only for the access it provides to a particular screen image, but for the discordant potential inherent in the 'alternate' image, as well as for the way that a sound might appear to activate *both* screens simultaneously. By engaging with the relationship between sound and both screens, the user is invited to imagine the quality of the multimedia space itself, and to engage with a new set of audio-visual rules written specifically for encounters between producers and consumers conducted in public media space.

Another quality of *One More Like That*'s audio and interaction design is that users, whether they recognise it as such, or not, are also compelled to render certain subjects mute. What looks like an inclusive *visual* system (deploying simultaneity and symmetry) is, from this perspective, revealed to be a politically ambiguous, even exclusive, *audio*-visual system. This film therefore deploys interactivity to grant users a sense of flexibility and control over the media environment, but also to engage them in thinking about the extent to which participation in media processes is always embedded in relations of power — in this case, deciding who speaks and who doesn't.

It is a feature of the split-screen video that the two screens can be understood as offering distinct perspectives on a convergence culture. But they can also be read as showing how a convergence culture is both a clash and a negotiation between its various agents. Furthermore, by incorporating the subjectivity of the user into the selective process by which knowledge is produced in this instance, *One More Like That* invites its audience to confront the ways that representational strategies are embodied, but also embedded in audio-visual conventions. By reckoning with these conventions the audience is thereby reminded that their identifications and loyalties may shift between the roles of producer and consumer, and that identification in a participatory culture is mobile.

This mobility is a pointer to the way in which *One More Like That* is an experiment in interactivity that seeks to reproduce the complex and even ambivalent process of engaging with contemporary media culture, by putting viewers in the position to make decisions about how they want to experience the work. Furthermore, as soon as the audience for this interactive film is asked to make a selection between producer and consumer, they become involved in just that kind of ‘work’ that renders the difference between the two unstable. In other words, interaction in this case reveals the imbricated quality of the roles of producer and consumer in a participatory culture.

Another factor that reveals the interdependence of the producer and consumer in *One More Like That* occurs at the level of process. Where the left hand screen is made up of my own footage captured with a single camera outside the bubble, the right hand screen features professionally produced television footage created by Channel [V] that is almost omniscient in its scope. But because this footage has subsequently been employed as ‘found footage’ in my alternate, remediating practice, the division between professional, independent and amateur practice is shown to be unstable.

In a similar vein the audience is confronted by the pairing of reality television footage and an approach that echoes the activities of spoiler communities insofar as it claims the limelight for the participants, rather than the celebrities, or producers, of reality television. I should reiterate that the band saw themselves as being involved in their own subversion of reality television conventions by doing mundane ‘work’, rather than simply ‘dramatising’ their life in a bubble. My own intervention takes this a step further however, by giving the audience equal billing in *One More Like That*, while framing them out of *Hubbub* altogether.

Hubbub: Conversational Style And The Polythetic Voice

In his discussion of the ‘Subjective Voice in Ethnographic Film’, David MacDougall, like Weinberger cited earlier, addresses the problem of how to balance the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative approaches to representing culture. But where Weinberger speaks of the need to celebrate multiple and even contradictory voices, MacDougall explicitly invokes the notion of the ‘thesis’. He writes:

> [i]n recent years one sees a movement away from monologue toward—not even polysemic or polyvocal expression—but polythesis: an understanding that comes out of the interplay of voices rather than merely their copresentation. (MacDougall 1989: 121)

In *Hubbub* I have sought to create an ‘interplay of voices’ through editing, and to argue that such interplay is typical of the audience’s response to Band In A Bubble, and of audiences more broadly in a participatory culture. And as with those filmmakers who seek to evoke a sense of the rich archive of images *not* selected in their work (but which are understood as imminent nonetheless), the interplay of voices in *Hubbub* is intended to communicate the idea that every utterance heard is testimony to the *struggle* to be heard, rather than the semantics of the utterance itself.

One of the measures taken in *Hubbub* to project a polythetic voice is to make each speaker and each argument appear vulnerable to the forces around them — forces both in the public space and in the audio-visual archive — so that the film doesn’t simply end up layering proof upon proof of the audience’s willingness to talk. Instead of representing participation as conversation, I have depicted it instead as argument and *contestation*. As John Durham Peters (2006: 119) points out, broadcast media have long employed a ‘conversational’ style and a falsely intimate address to silence audiences and effectively colonise public discourse. He goes on to describe the way in which broadcast media appeal to their diasporic audiences — audiences isolated in their homes — by constructing an imaginary conversation between the producers and their audience, but also between audience members themselves. Peters (2006: 117) rhetorically asks: "[i]s there something pathological about conversations in which the participants cannot hear each other talk or even know of each other's existence"?

As an illustration of the limitations of the conversational style, consider the response of the following interviewee (a Regurgitator fan) when asked if he would be inclined to participate in the bubble's online chat room. "Sure, as long as those guys [Regurgitator] are in the room. I'm not too fussed about everyone else."[33] Understandably, as long as the band is present the conversation most worth having is with them. After all, the audience can talk amongst themselves any time, but only rarely do they have an opportunity to communicate directly with professional musicians.

Yet it is worth noting that although this respondent was interested in communicating with the band, but not the audience, he did find fifteen minutes to speak with me on camera. It seems fair to say that if others were also more inclined to talk to a stranger *with* a camera, than one without, that this could be put down to an event that promised interaction with an accessible media, and the fact that the line between the event and my own media production may not have always been clear, at first, to the people I approached for an interview. In other words, if the spectacular display of broadcast cameras both inside and outside the bubble prompted audiences to at least entertain the prospect of making their own contribution to media representations of the event, then my own camera can be understood as offering some compensation to those who were let down by the realisation that such opportunities were not as forthcoming as they might have been.

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[33] Justin Plews was interviewed on camera for *Hubbub,* recorded September, 2004, Federation Square, Melbourne.

The pathology that Peters describes — of imagined, impossible conversations — is a pathology happily indulged by *Hubbub*, conjuring fantasy conversations, as it does, among people who didn't actually talk to each other. But of course the audience did also talk among themselves, so these fantasy conversations can also be seen as the 'creative treatment' of what actually took place. And as much as we might value the analytical or political efficacy of being able to draw on a notion like 'participatory culture', this research reminds us that the term itself can be understood as a creative treatment of actual practices and potentialities that may not appear as vividly as they do when they have a conceptual lens trained upon them. Documentary practice has a role to play in sustaining the energy and creativity that a participatory culture needs to thrive. But when conducted as research, it is capable of enlivening participatory culture as a term of analysis in academic discourse as well.

CHAPTER 5:
Conclusion (The Thesis Film)

A conceptually driven practice such as this one occupies the more experimental and critical end of documentary practice, where the essay film has been so important. But the essay is not an entirely adequate term for describing my films because they lack the narrating, personal voice that is so common to the form. One of the concerns of this conclusion is to explore the idea that the two works presented here can be illuminated by Maras' notion of the 'thesis-film'. This has an obvious resonance in the context of practice-based research, but the thesis-film is not a film submitted as part of a thesis. It is a film with an argument. But crucially for Maras (2004: 93), the film doesn't 'transmit' its argument, it exemplifies its argument through its formal structures and aesthetic choices.

> The film is the thesis or, in other words, the mode of expression of that thesis forms a part of the conceptual practice of the film… [it] engender[s] a way of reading that opens up a conceptual field particular to the work that the film is trying to do. (Maras, 2004: 87)

The idea that a film submitted as practice-based research could exemplify rather than deliver its thesis is something I want to explore further, in part because *Hubbub*'s reliance on words makes it susceptible to the criticism that it works on the plane of semantics, rather than on more aesthetic or metaphorical planes.

In the introduction to this dissertation I introduced Maras's idea that it is not necessarily the essayist's use of an embodied, authorial voice that defines it. To reiterate, although the essay film highlights the issue of speaking position, that speaking position might be, according to him (2004: 95): "either the position of the filmmaker in relation to the frame of film-making, *or the position of subjects as* *representatives of discourse* [my emphasis].” According to this logic, *Hubbub* would qualify as an essay film since it clearly deploys its subjects as the representatives of a discourse about the bubble event and its place in a contemporary media culture. But for Maras (2004: 96), what makes the essay film different to the thesis-film is simply that the essay film “does not always form itself around a central thesis, or propose one”.

In Renov’s (2004: 70) discussion of the essay form he writes that “[i]n its heterogeneity and inexhaustibility… the essayistic work bears with it a logic that denies the verities of rhetorical composition and of system, indeed of mastery itself.” The essay form is fundamentally ‘indeterminate’, therefore, which need not preclude the possibility of its offering a thesis altogether, but might militate against it. Conversely, one shouldn’t understand the thesis-film as stolidly argumentative, or definitive, by comparison. It is in thinking about the relation between the essay-film and the thesis-film that I hope to develop a more nuanced argument about the context and ambition of my own research practice.

In a very straightforward way, *Hubbub* embodies the thesis that the audience are the most significant part of Band In A Bubble. It achieves this by editing out the band, but also by giving the audience responsibility for bringing them back into the conceptual frame. By making the audience responsible in this way, *Hubbub* argues that it is not the participant-subjects we should remember but their function and value in a participatory culture. *One More Like That*, on the other hand, says most about participatory culture through its formal juxtapositions, its use of interactivity, and its recombinant, found footage process. Its thesis is that participatory culture is both a collaboration and a struggle to be heard.

One of the benefits of practice-based research is that any conceptual field opened up by the practice can be explored further in discursive form. Although my films embody their arguments about participatory culture in the ways described, I also want to explore a more subtle, secondary thesis about the specific value of documentary practice in representing participatory culture, and to suggest that such a thesis might be seen retroactively at work in the films.

Marker's Hypothesis

Although Maras offers a brief treatment of *Sans Soleil* as a thesis-film, I want to examine Uriel Orlow's (2002: 439) more fulsome discussion of that film's 'hypothesis'. Addressing the tension between image and narration in *Sans Soleil*, Orlow writes:

> [m]y own hypothesis, following Marker's, is that the stage upon which this multiple dialectic is played out is that of the image, rather than solely that of the commentary, which has usually been assigned the role of master-editor, or 'dialectician' in Marker's films and oeuvre. (Orlow 2002: pp.438-439)

And as Marker himself writes:

> any reasonably long memory—like every collection—is more structured than it seems at first… [and starts] to draw a route, a map of the imaginary country inside us. (cited in Orlow, 2002: 438)

What these two quotes have in common is the editor who negotiates both media and memory space simultaneously, but who must contend with a certain power or volition that exists in these spaces and in their organisation. My own audio-visual archive, for example, while structured in the sense that it represents selections made by me during filming, is also structured by the culture that gave rise to the practice, to the bubble, and to the audience's contributions to both. This is echoed in *One More Like That* as well, where the user 'edits' an archive that is also structured in advance by me.

Orlow (2002: 439) argues that in *Sans Soleil* an image of an owl can be understood as an "archival motor and navigational tool", a figure that looks out upon the archive and guides the author's search through it. Similarly, when an image of a heron is followed by an image of an emu, Orlow (2002: 440) suggests that the narration becomes distracted from its course by the power of the image, as evidenced by the narrator's aside: "by the way, did you know that there were emus in the île de France?" This verbal digression switches "the viewer from Africa to France, but also from the conceptual, verbal plane back to that of the image" (Orlow, 2002: 440). One could also say that the power of the image diverts us from the narrative drive of the letters towards the uncertainty of the explorer who penned them. It is as if Marker's narrator gives up narrating for a moment, and loses himself in the archive.

But by losing the narrator in this way we also gain an awareness of the archive, and of the 'solitude of the film editor' confronted by that archive. Orlow's 'archival motor' is a productive figure here because it suggests that both the content and structure of the archive are capable of influencing the logic of the author, the audience, or an interacting user. I have tried to communicate a similar idea in my films, arguing that producers and consumers alike confront a vast media database on a daily basis, and that no matter how randomly its images and sounds might come to us, they bear the trace of their passage, along with an intertextual matrix of associations and interventions. To paraphrase Marker, our interactions with this database are more structured than they seem.

In *One More Like That* the arrangement of images on screen is graphically depicted, and authoritatively fixed. But in the manner of any dialectical engagement where their correspondence must be decoded, the *meaning* of their association is not fixed. Likewise, the incursion of variable sound streams into these visual relationships makes them more mobile still. By leaving open the correspondence between images, and between sounds and images, I have tried to retain a sense of these media as having their own volition, and being rooted in the context in which they were found. So for every editing decision that gets made by me, many more images and sounds push for inclusion, as though the archive is never adequately represented. Likewise, when a subject in *Hubbub* demands: ‘Ask me a question’, he triggers a search through the archive for a suitable response. When the reply comes back, ‘Are you recording this’, *Hubbub* signals its interest in a number of types of conversation: fantasy conversations between subjects; a pragmatic dialogue between the documentary apparatus and its subjects; and a more playful dialogue that reveals the presence of the archive itself.

If the archive can serve up a question, it follows that it should also be capable of providing the answer, as it does here. But the lesson from Orlow’s reading of the Marker (hypo)thesis is not simply that the editor should know where or how to find the answer, but that the catalytic image or idea triggers and enables the terms of the search itself, a search that can shift our attention, and the attention of the editor, from one order of discourse to another. In Marker’s film, when the ‘picture of happiness’ is followed, abortively, by jets on an aircraft carrier, we are guided by the commentary to understand this as a failed attempt to find a suitable match for the image of happiness. But if we follow Orlow's lead and grant the images a level of primacy, then the sequence could instead be read as a provocative articulation of the images' connectedness — their *archival relation* — in which case the verbal commentary would be understood as a failure to appreciate the power that these images exert over the editor who tries to manipulate them. Of course both scenarios are at work in *Sans Soleil*, creating a text dense with dialectical possibilities and unpredictable shifts in discourse; shifts that are powered by association, indeterminacy, and collective memory.

Marker's ability to conjure the processes of a kind of mediatised memory produced through an encounter with a shared archive takes shape on screen as a thesis about the relationship between film-making and memory making; about discursive shifts between the two; and about the power of images to not only acquire new meaning in different cultural contexts, but to suggest their own intervention on such contexts. In *Hubbub* it is not images that divert our attention away from commentary to a more metaphorical realm of expression, but the archive itself, which constantly throws up responses to its own utterances, thereby constituting its own way of thinking and its own order of discourse. What this also means is that *Hubbub* doesn't simply jump from one conversation to another, it shifts between a mono-logical depiction of articulate, embodied participants, and the dialectical complexity and transformative power of the articulate archive.

Like Marker, my work also tries to describe the relation between filmmaking and memory making. But in my case, memory making specifically involves those social, participatory practices that give us the impression that our shared cultural memory is derived from publicly available media. To that end I have constructed an audio-visual archive that functions as both a metaphor for our collective media-memory as well as a documentary record of participation and performance within narrowly prescribed parameters. I have also tried to conjure the will of that archive through the transformative power of those who populate it. This not only honours the contributions of those participants, it also locates them within the shared but contested space of the archive, and within the shared but contested space where documentary practice and participatory culture meet.

The Documentary Thesis

I want to conclude with some final thoughts on the status of ‘the documentary’ in my films, and to think about the extent to which my work does, or does not, *perform* its documentary-ness. What this also entails is thinking about the extent to which my documentaries are present to a filmic argument only they can make: that in this instance, participatory media practices became activated by my documentary practice in a way that is particular to documentary practice, and therefore different to the ways they became activated by Band In A Bubble, or participatory culture more broadly.

Hubbub testifies to the audience’s willingness to participate in my documentary practice, and to participate in and take a position on Band In A Bubble. This basic truth is used as evidence that participatory culture is not only a conceptual field worth exploring, but that the documentary form might be uniquely placed to conjure it. Conscious of the dangers of asking documentary subjects to embody an argument they cannot intervene on, however, my films have had to embody their own argument. What this also means is that in my attempt to put participatory culture on screen, the participant that I am trying to conjure is neither Band In A Bubble's, nor my own, but precisely that which emerges in the collision between that event and my documentary practice. By recognising that different kinds of participation occur in each sphere — and that it is ultimately a constructed, hybrid participant who occupies the space where these spheres intersect — the participant becomes a function of discourse and a function of the argument of the research practice.

In order to activate its filmic thesis this practice relies on its audience seeing documentary form reflected in the world depicted: of seeing how documentary practice makes participation happen, and how documentary practice can be revealed *in* participation. However, because this practice is focused on a participatory media event that is conducted in what might be called a 'post-documentary' mode, it is almost inevitable that participation should appear to come from the historical world before the lens, rather than from the documentary camera's interaction with that world. But as Rouch (cited in Eaton 1979: 51) reminds us, the camera is itself a call to action, both a 'window' and a 'mirror'.

In its guise as a window, my documentary practice insists on its own framework for depicting our contemporary media environment. As a mirror held up to its subjects it incites action, it fills participatory gaps, and provides a forum for disaffected and enthusiastic participants alike. Finally, and in the guise of a critical research practice, my documentaries not only treat participation in media practice as a necessarily transformative act, they themselves transform the participation they uncover as a first step in the productive process of cultural dissemination.

Final Thoughts

In the process of trying to represent participatory culture on screen, this research has also sought to place participatory culture under examination. In a sense all documentaries are obliged to research and analyse what they wish to represent. But in this research I have tried to do more than analyse participatory culture in the way that a filmmaker might in the name of finding the best way to show it on screen. Rather, in the spirit of a theoretically informed practice, or praxis, I have tried to analyse both participatory culture and documentary filmmaking simultaneously, both on the screen as well as on the page. I have sought to reveal the ways that thinking about one can be understood as thinking about the other, and how, in the contemporary context, the methods of one are surprisingly illuminated and productively challenged when analysed alongside the methods of the other. It is of course particular to this research that these two fields should be treated as so entwined, given that participatory culture serves as the subject of the documentary practice.

Although there are methodological limitations involved in merging two quite distinct registers of discourse (on the whole, audience and fan studies utilise different methodologies to those used to examine documentary films), this research argues that documentary filmmaking and theory are able to offer their own special insights into audience activity and participatory practices. And although the kind of work done by writers like Jenkins, Barker, Klinger et al, alerts us to the way audiences take up ancillary media to engage more actively with media texts, this research has shown how ancillary texts are employed by documentary filmmakers in particular, and shown how their appeals to authenticity, the active audience, and connoisseurship bear only a passing resemblance to those appeals directed at audiences of fiction films. In short, when participation is rallied to the cause of truth telling, it is not the truth claims we should be wary of but the claims made for participation itself.

The documentary form itself can sometimes be understood as an ancillary text, as it is in the case of *Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That!*, in *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's Container*, as well as in my own two films. Often the extras on a DVD of a narrative fiction film are framed as ancillary documentaries, and in fiction films like *Cloverfield* and *The Blair Witch Project* the documentary form is used like an authenticating motif, but one that is especially attached to participatory practices. Indeed the real participation of real audiences in the dissemination of these films can be understood as bolstering the truth claims these mockumentaries make on audiences in general. Because the more people contribute to the framing narrative of these films, the more the fiction comes alive in a real world context.

Urban's and Hjort's use of 'metaculture' to explain texts like Dogma 95 offers an especially useful framework for thinking about events like Band In A Bubble because that framework focuses our attention on the kinds of ancillary media that not only predate the primary cultural text (Dogma films, Regurgitator's album), but which allow for a formative, critical engagement with what those texts might be and what they might mean. Thinking about metaculture encourages us to think about the creativity of the *producers* of participatory media and the kinds of critical awareness they imagine audiences in a participatory culture to have. The logic of metaculture is such that we should not seek to replicate culture because that renders culture inert. We should instead intervene on and transform those cultural forms we encounter in the name of dissemination. Band In A Bubble gives its audiences the opportunity to either see it as a replication of reality television formats, and to therefore see their participation as being in keeping with that of the reality television audience, or to see their role as participants in an unrealised, emergent process of cultural dissemination. It is this idea that I have used to anchor my understanding of the relations between producers and consumers of this event, and to focus my efforts to represent participatory culture in a way that avoids replicating what has already been said about it. In the process I hope that the encounter between my documentary practice and participatory culture can be understood as contributing to the processes of dissemination that keep media and culture moving.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS USED FOR HUBBUB

- Can you tell me what you are doing in Federation Square today, and where you've travelled from?
- What do you think of *Band In A Bubble*?
- Do you think *Band In A Bubble* is art or publicity?
- Are you a fan of Regurgitator?
- Have you interacted with the bubble in any way, or communicated with the band?
- What do you think the band hope to get out of this event?
- What has been the highlight of the event for you?
- What does this event remind you of?
- What is the difference between Big Brother/Australian Idol and *Band In A Bubble*?
- Why is this event being held now, rather than five or ten years ago?
- Why is it being held in Federation Square?
- Does the event inspire you at all in your own creative efforts?
- How did you hear about the event?

APPENDIX 2: INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DVD

One More Like That should be watched on a DVD-Video player connected to a television, rather than a computer with a DVD player, since the latter is unlikely to provide a simple audio-switching button. The remote control on DVD-Video players includes a button called 'audio'. Pressing this button should toggle between the two available sound streams.

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