

ary, fluid form - fluid in relation to the many different values (economic, demographic, gendered, subjective, semiotic) which are invested in it - means that the work finds its ultimate destiny not in the act of being viewed but in its function as 'transitional object' (in Melanie Klein's sense), which includes the echoes, after-images and after-effects created both in the subject (the temporal trace of memory, fantasy investment, projection and identification) and in the social sphere (the spatial presence of objects such as badges, toys, posters, tee-shirts, tea-mugs, calendars).

Our traditional discourses compel us to condemn these phenomena as evidence of crass commercialism, as lack of originality, as the disappearance of the author. Interestingly enough, this is exactly what George Lucas, the creator of the STAR WARS trilogy did: he disappeared as a film-author, as director. He could have retired on the several billion dollars it earned him. But since when do artists retire - or for that matter, billionaires? Instead, he founded Industrial Light & Magic, which has been the state-of-the-art in the field of cinematic digital effects for the last fifteen years. Lucas is busy re-inventing the cinema, or so his many admirers say. He himself is more modest, arguing that digitization is just a tool. And yet, in 1997 alone, Lucas made a cool \$400 millions re-issuing the first part of his STAR WARS with added digital effects, some of them done, it is said, on an Apple Powerbook. Repetition and serialization have taken on a new meaning, as the immaterial of film-fantasy is not de-materialized as in *Fantasy Island*, or re-materialized as in the toy-shops, but de-immaterialized in the form of digitization: the 'Return of the Jedi' as *Digit*. I think we may once more be entering a new war-zone among the media, but is it the Empire of the digital, or of the cinema that 'strikes back'?

'I See, if I Believe it' - Documentary and the Digital

Kay Hoffmann

Pictures have always been deceiving. The idea that film and television show what is real - that they deliver an appropriate copy of the world has been proven to be wrong and discredited long ago. The more surprising, therefore, was the journalistic irritation in Germany when the television author Michael Born was convicted of faking over 20 documentaries for various television channels in 1996. He merely followed the hard rules of the media market in coming up with more sensational and spectacular films by staging them himself. There was the German Ku Klux Klan with homemade white robes, the cat-snatcher or the wonder drug from a frog. At his trial Michael Born said: 'We are on our way from infotainment to infofiction and the kick has to be produced, because television is no good at providing information.'

However, the Michael Born incident did not lead to a discussion about our relationship to images we can no longer trust, but only to the call to order for journalists' professional ethics and a call for stronger internal controls in the nations' television newsrooms. There had already been similar reactions in Japan, in 1992, to the faked television documentary *NHK Special - Mustan: The Forbidden Kingdom Deep in the Himalayas*. After all, Born was still a forger from the analogue age. He produced his stories with paid extras in front of the camera. In future this extra expense will hardly be necessary: One dip into the digital archives will suffice to build all the images one wants. Reason enough to think about the changes digitization brings to the documentary format.

Digitization creates a bridge between the photographic and electronic world. Up to now digital tools have mainly been used for commercials and in special effect scenes of big motion picture productions. But during the last few years, a revolution has been going on in postproduction which will have an enormous impact on our relation with the moving pictures. As it is believed too difficult, time-consuming and, of course, expensive to change such a large amount of pictures, many viewers believe what they see on film or television and take it to be real. This is especially true of documentaries and news, where the notion that a technically recorded image shows reality in an objective way is still deeply ingrained in most viewers. After all, the

technical possibilities of 'faking' images convincingly are of a relatively recent date.

Conversely, it is barely a hundred years ago that mankind first had the illusion that a moving image could be an accurate record of the real world. Up to the early nineteenth century most people only knew paintings or drawings, which, however life-like, were always perceived as subjective. In the 1830s followed photography, about which people learned, after a few decades, how easy it was to fake individual pictures and how willing some were to abuse photographs for political ends.³ With the digital revolution, another qualitative change is said to have occurred. As William Mitchell puts it: 'Although a digital image may look just like a photograph when it is published in a newspaper, it actually differs as profoundly from a traditional photograph as does a photograph from a painting. The difference is grounded in fundamental physical characteristics that have logical and cultural consequences.'

But even the idea that a moving image is very hard to manipulate has never been very credible. As is well known, a documentary always follows a specific artistic concept and its production, if not scripted, has nonetheless to be strictly organized. In addition, the most important decisions for the structure and dramatization of a film are made during the final cut when the images that will eventually be shown are selected. Consequently, no objective pictures of reality are possible: selecting views means subjective views. Most directors of documentaries are quite aware of this and therefore visualize these strategies, making the production process itself enter into their work. Yet, as Marshall McLuhan has said: 'It is no longer "I will believe it, I see it" but "I see, if I believe it"'. This implies a complex reversal of our relationship with the image. It would seem that the whole idea of 'visible evidence' – the very foundation of a documentary filmmaker's work – has to be questioned.

Digital effects are still very expensive. In commercials or breathtaking special effect-sequences the viewers get used to all the possibilities of digital compositing, morphing and electronically multiplying extras or props. Sitting at a computerized editing-suite, one can find a totally new aesthetic for images. But not only an aesthetics: one can 'rewrite' history. In Wolfgang Petersen's *IN THE LINE OF FIRE* (USA, 1989), a young Clint Eastwood is shown standing beside John F. Kennedy. This was done by taking a sequence from *DIRTY HARRY*, the famous Don Siegel/Clint Eastwood film made in 1971, and then isolating Eastwood electronically. To fit him into the Kennedy 1960s, Eastwood was given the first 'digital-haircut' of film history, as producer Jeff Apple always liked to remark.⁵ Young Eastwood was then matched with archive-material of President Kennedy. In other scenes

actual footage of the presidential rallies of George Bush and Bill Clinton from 1992 were manipulated and integrated to segue into the story of the movie. This method was chosen because it would have been difficult to set up, if a film crew had actually shot on location, not least because Eastwood would have attracted more public attention than either of the candidates. In a sequence of the President arriving with Air Force One the body of George Bush was used, with only his head replaced by that of the actor who plays the President in the film. Other computer-generated images, which the viewer could not recognize as artificially produced were also included. For instance, thanks to the computer, a few hundred extras became a crowd of several thousands, standing and waiting alongside the street, applauding the President on his rally through town.

Again, the technique itself is not that new. For some decades now, it has been possible to achieve similar effects with analogue pictures. The best-known example is probably Woody Allen's *ZELIG* (1983), where the eponymous hero, played by Allen, is shown meeting prominent people in different situations and at different times throughout the twentieth century, usually by posing with them in newspaper photographs. However, in 1983 this was very time-consuming work, because on the optical bench one never has real-time control as one does today. If one analyzes *ZELIG* carefully, one can see how ingeniously the technicians manipulated the photographs and how cleverly the editors did their work, in order to create the impression of this living chameleon. The film also works because strategies borrowed from the documentary form were used, such as using as eye-witnesses such well-known personalities as Saul Bellow and Susan Sontag ('He was the phenomenon of the Twenties').

In *FORREST GUMP* (1995) by Robert Zemeckis, the manipulation of historical news footage was even more elaborate. One will recall that the central character, a Vietnam hero played by Tom Hanks, meets different American Presidents, gives them a handshake and even talks to them. Our concepts of a discrete chronological time and a unique historical space are undermined. The computer literally puts the words of the script in the Presidents' mouths. As we get used to such techniques, the stakes are getting lower. Every day brings surprising new effects in television commercials, which present the state-of-the-art of digital technologies right within our living rooms. It is as if the whole history of visualization is being reinvented, with commercials often showing off a very broad palette of different techniques. Besides dazzling the viewer with colour, there has also been a renaissance of black-and-white images, to attract the viewers' attention, simulating a photographic past when a historic setting is suggested, as in advertisements for Levi's Jeans, or Jim Beam Whiskey. In future, the digital manipulation of

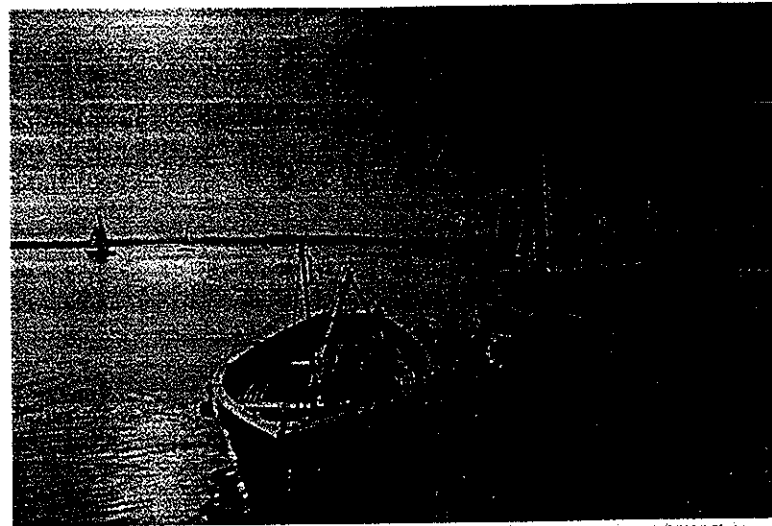
images will become a day-to-day affair and in a few years everybody will be able to change images with his own personal computer and so redefine the past. One benefit might be that not many people will be left who place their (at any rate misplaced) trust in the evidentiary truth of the moving image.

Documentary filmmakers have to think hard about the consequences that this entails for their work. One possible answer is to obtain credibility and reliability, not from the images themselves, but from the information about who made the film, and how it was produced. This process has to be shown in the films themselves, so that not only the 'perfect' results are shown, but the making of the film itself becomes a topic. As Brian Winston has pointed out: 'Grounding the documentary idea in reception rather than in representation is exactly the way to preserve its validity. It allows for the audience to make the truth claim for the documentary rather than the documentary implicitly making the claim for itself.'⁶

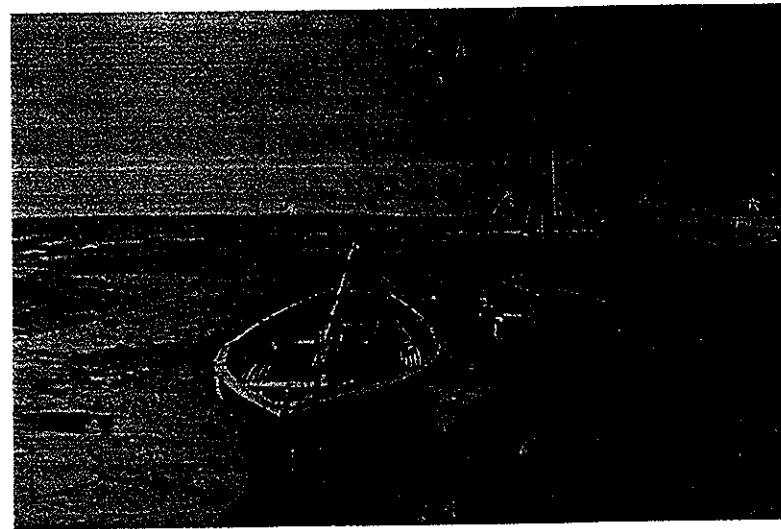
I am firmly convinced that this new concept will liberate the documentary. At the Documentary Film Centre in Stuttgart we organized a conference on this precise topic in 1996.⁷ Among the films shown, there were a number of examples of how film directors have been using the new technologies, while also launching their ideas for a new aesthetics of the documentary form. Leo Lorez from Hamburg showed a series of films, made in 1990/91 – he called them cultural videograms – which are about the Russian constructivists of the 1920s, such as El Lissitzky, Konstantin Melnikov and Alexander Rodchenko. The topic lent itself especially well for new possibilities of visualization. For example, he built a model, based on the architectural drafts of El Lissitzky for a new type of house, then made paintings of the building and integrated a computer simulation into footage of today's Moscow in a very stimulating and thought-provoking way.

The visualization of objects that do not 'really' exist is a very powerful tool, especially if it helps to tell a story or support a strong argument. Nevertheless, the question did arise whether the use of these possibilities is acceptable for documentaries. How far can and should a film maker go? Should these tools be banned in a particular genre? Can such a demand be a realistic option? Who will or should 'police' the digital world? In my opinion, the example of EL LISSITZKY shows clearly that these tools can be very helpful and can give the documentary a new openness not just aesthetically, but for new content and argument.

Joachim Faulstich is another director who has specialized in documentaries on political, scientific and ecological topics. In 1994 he made the science fiction film *CRASH 2030*. In the year 2030 the environment is so heavily damaged that a public prosecutor of the European Community is asked to investigate the causes of the ecological disaster, and what could have been



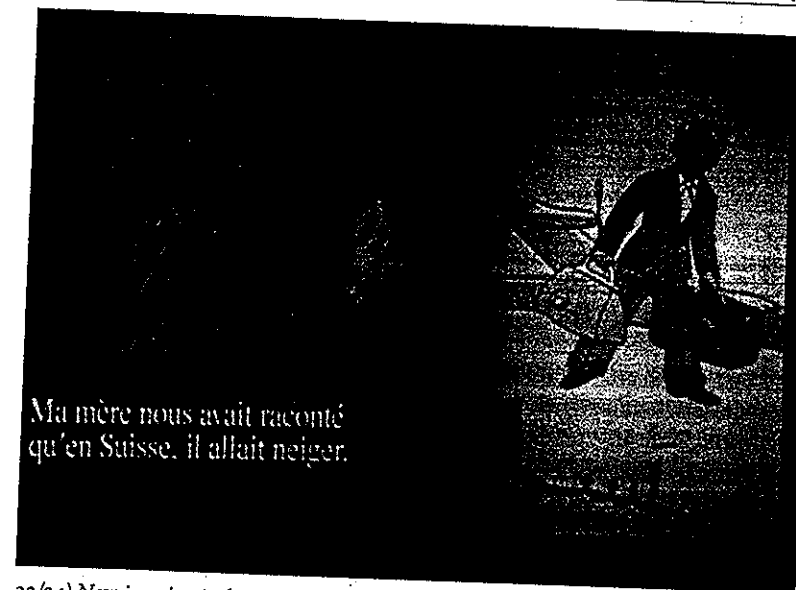
31/32 In *CRASH 2030* (1994) by Joachim Faulstich an impending environmental catastrophe is illustrated by digitally manipulating photographic images from the present, using simple paintbox software. The goal was to inform and activate the viewers by simulating the future 'realistically', which is to say, providing a perspective the viewer can identify with.



Jone to prevent the catastrophe in the 1980s and 1990s. *CRASH 2030* is a subjective comment on our times, and uses an interesting mixture of different materials. It incorporates quotations from news bulletins and television-features, classical documentary footage and graphics, while the sequences with the prosecutor are staged, as are the eyewitness reports. For the viewer a differentiation between the sources is no longer possible. However, it is clear that, given the underlying scenario, the images are subject to a strong argumentative structure provided by the director. Some images, especially the so called 'reconstructions' are made with a simple paintbox-system. What is most interesting is how Faulstich uses the new digital possibilities to develop a forceful commentary on ecological politics. Insofar as it started fruitful discussions on the topics it raised, the film can be considered as very successful.

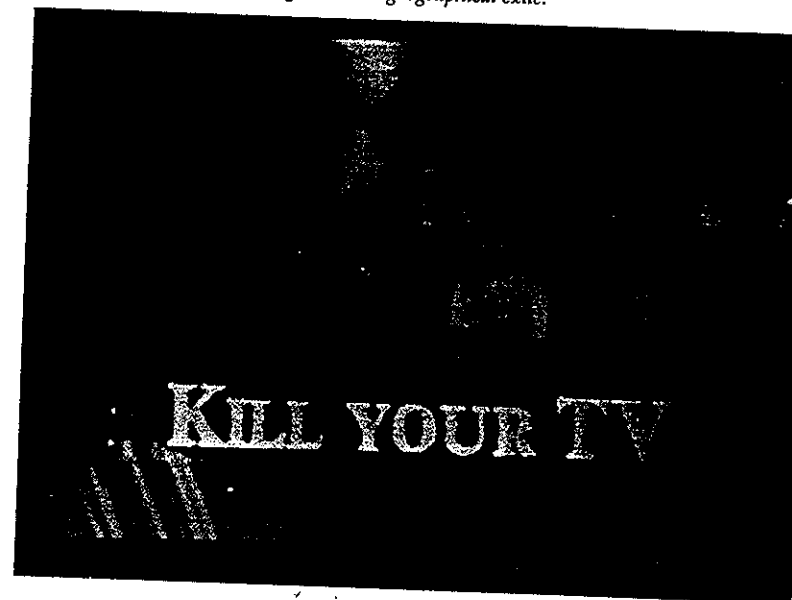
The Swiss film *BABYLON 2* could also be called extremely subjective. Made by an Iraqi-born film maker, Samir, who has lived in Switzerland since the age of six, the film concerns the second generation of immigrants and their situation today. Samir uses different materials such as documentary images shot by himself, old news footage, private amateur movies and videos, fictional scenes, photographs, graphics and even written text and words. The editing was done on an Avid compositor, and Samir blended the material in an interesting and original way, also creating a very sophisticated and complicated soundtrack for the film. Given that there is usually more than one image simultaneously on the screen, the linearity of traditional film is overthrown. Such a layered structure is extremely suitable for this particular topic, as the young people featured in the film are, of course, also divided and have multiple presences: negotiating their identity between their new home, Switzerland, and the country their parents originally came from. Yet despite these potentially intrusive technologies, Samir made a very personal film and opened a new horizon with his concept. As a critic wrote: 'The result is a documentary which is literally the most multifaceted film of its kind to have come out of Switzerland. Above all, however, *BABYLON 2* is a montage which is not content simply to compile otherwise pre-existing material, but seeks to draw the varied spectrum of material into an interplay of confrontational relationships. This confirms Samir's belief that as individuals, not only the immigrants in the mass residential areas of the Swiss suburbs, but all of us, are damned to remain helplessly isolated.'

Such new aesthetics and editing effects were, of course, also possible with traditional tools, but complicated, more expensive and giving the filmmaker often only poor control over the results.



Ma mère nous avait raconté
qu'en Suisse, il allait neiger.

33/34) *New imaging tools can result in a fascinating new aesthetic, as shown in BABYLON 2 (1993), a film by the Swiss-Iraqi director Samir, who puts together a literally 'multi-layered' portrait of linguistic and geographical exile.*



BABYLON 2, by utilizing the full range of effects now available manages to overcome the old educational concept of the documentary, opening it up to a more subjective way of handling even political topics. These films are refreshing, not least because in the 1970s and 1980s there were so many politically engaged documentary films whose strongly didactic, educating intent ended up alienating the viewer. In this respect, the political 1970s were not a good decade for documentaries: previously, there had been more interesting examples of ironic and subjective films, such as those coming out of the documentary department of the Süddeutscher Rundfunk, known as the so-called 'Stuttgarter Schule'. There, already in the mid-1950s, a group of young filmmakers, strongly influenced by the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, were searching for ways of renewing the television documentary. The targets, against which they tried out their ideas, were the time-honoured 'Kulturfilm' (natural history film) and the 'Wochenschau' (news-reel film), genres that had been abused for political propaganda in the Third Reich. After an initial period of trial and error, Heinz Huber, Dieter Ertel and his colleagues found a new form, featured mostly in the series *Zeichen der Zeit* (Sign of the Times), broadcast between 1957 and 1972, at a rate of several films per year. They tried to present current aspects of German society, commenting often ironically and with a sense of humour in the editing, which is rare, if not unknown today. In the 1960s the group was strongly influenced by the American Direct Cinema, which is one more reason why these traditions should not be altogether forgotten and why the films deserve to be rediscovered.

In conclusion, it is worth repeating that our trust in the moving image as an index of truth is of fairly recent standing, and has always required a healthy dose of scepticism and critical intelligence. With digitization we may have to adjust to a new magnitude of constructedness of the image, when it comes to how 'reality' is presented to us in film and television, but the principle and the problem are as old as the cinema itself. This applies to documentaries and news footage, just as much as to fiction films or television broadcasting, where the same critical stance is needed that we have already developed towards photography and printed information. This may be one reason why, since the 1970s, film and television are no longer as hostile to each other: they probably know perfectly well, that, in the face of our sharpened awareness of what they are up to, they need – and need to support – each other.

Theatrical and Television Documentary: The Sound of One Hand Clapping

Brian Winston

The dominant British (or, better, Anglo-American) documentary tradition is one of social realist work dedicated to public education and information – a tradition I shall refer to, in shorthand, as Griersonian. In considering it, not much understanding can be gained from examining the difference between cinema works and television works since the tradition has, for the reasons John Ellis has suggested, at best only a *pre-history* in the cinema. The documentary has developed in Britain, in essence, as a television form so that the idea that film and television documentary are locked together in some Cain-and-Abel conflict makes little sense in the British context. It is more like one hand clapping.

John Grierson defined the documentary as 'the creative treatment of actuality', but of these three terms 'actuality' came to dominate.¹ Beyond art, which is what creativity implies; beyond drama, which is what treatment means; the documentary is also evidentiary, scientific. The term 'documentary' depends on the presence of 'actuality' in this definition. 'Document', to quote the Oxford English Dictionary, is 'something written, inscribed etc. which furnishes evidence or information'. It is crucial because Grierson also allowed 'creativity' and 'treatment', both of which work against any truth claim. Only 'actuality' sustains the non-fiction status of the documentary.

The 'etc.' in the Dictionary embraces photography. The concept of the photograph as document, despite the contemporary positioning of photography as an art, arises from the camera's basic status as a scientific instrument capable of producing evidence. There are two main reasons for this. First, there is the long history of pictorial representation as a mode of scientific evidence, a history which conditions, in part, the research agenda that produces the modern camera; and second, there is the tendency of modern science to produce data via instruments of inscription whose operations are analogous to the camera. The camera, in effect, joined 'the thermometer, barometer, hygrometer', and the telescope and microscope in 1839 as nothing so much as the latest of scientific instruments. The photographic document offers *prima facie* evidence of the real.

Not only that, but the data produced by these instruments of inscription led the way in creating an 'avalanche of printed numbers', of statistics, at first scientific and then, by analogy, social. The new concept of *l'homme*