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More Than Talking Heads: Nonfiction Testimony and Cinematic Form

by

Irina Zora Leimbacher

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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Film and Media

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

**Professor Jeffrey Skoller, Co-Chair
Professor Linda Williams, Co-Chair
Professor Charles Hirschkind**

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Abstract

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Professor Jeffrey Skoller and Professor Linda Williams, Co-Chairs

This dissertation examines a body of formally and aesthetically innovative nonfiction and experimental films, videos, and installation works that have created new modes of cinematic testimony with new possibilities of viewer/listener engagement. I call such films cinematic testimony in order to make a distinction between them and the more common talking head interview film. When cinema is not simply a recording device but an aesthetically engaged practice, it creates a wholly new medium of testimony, something that cannot exist in any other form.

If testimony is typically associated with speech and primarily verbal expression, *cinematic* testimony has a much broader expressive scope. It includes not just speech but the voices, bodies, and gestures that articulate and give rise to this speech. It also includes a vast array of evocative and epistemologically significant possibilities afforded by mise-en-scène, bodily or cinematographic movements in and across space, the staging of reenacted or imagined events, the cinematic depictions of mental as well as physical landscapes, and various aesthetic strategies through which *cinematic* testimony can be shaped. The works of cinematic testimony explored here (for the most part made between 1985 and 2006) take conscious creative and ethical responsibility for their use of the medium. In deliberately creating new forms of testimony, they also reflect on, and reveal something about, the very nature of testimony itself.

Testimony is important because it serves as a source of knowledge about a shared world from the perspective of other human beings and signifies the emergence of as yet unheard voices in the public sphere. However, testimony also functions as the representation of a mode of *relating* (in both senses of the term) and thus as a model of human exchange. As more and more testimonial encounters occur through the medium of moving images, attention to the rhetorical and aesthetic forms of this relating, this *saying*—verbal, vocal, gestural, and cinematic—and not only the content of the *said*, seems all the more crucial to the future of ethical relations both within documentary film and beyond. Ultimately,

this dissertation argues for the centrality of cinematic form in the production, reception, and analysis of cinematic testimony. Cinema's use of its own language and voices, its own aesthetic forms, is as crucial as the embodied speakers' use of theirs when it comes to articulating testimony through moving images.

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Finally, I must thank the filmmakers who made the powerful and often daring works I discuss here. Most I do not know personally, but their ideas, images and sounds, and innovative ways of cinematically speaking about the world, have gotten deep under my skin. Although the works discussed are far from the mainstream and therefore have small audiences, I am sure that all those who see and hear them are profoundly touched by the testimonies they collaboratively create and share with us.

INTRODUCTION: TESTIMONY AND CINEMATIC FORM

This dissertation is concerned with the production and reception of what I term cinematic testimony: embodied interviews or testimony created for, in, and by moving images and addressed to an audience outside the work. Such cinematic testimony emerges at the intersection of moving image technology, documentary norms and practices, and cultural ideas about the value and function of testimony. Examining nonfiction films and videos as well as hybrid works and installation, I explore how the formal language of cinema has created new modes of interview and testimonial speech and new possibilities of viewer/listener engagement. Films do not merely present transparent records of the words, gestures, and rhythms of those who speak before a camera. In myriad ways, films reconfigure words and the bodies that utter them. Interpreting, intervening in, and re-inventing the testimonial act, the moving image works discussed here inquire into the very nature of interview, testimony, and cinematic address. In so doing, they reveal the complexities of our entanglements with language and each other and stimulate a responsive ethics of seeing and listening.

The meanings of the terms “cinema” and “testimony” have shifted and expanded over the last several decades. I use “cinema” here in the broadest sense to refer to any moving images—usually accompanied by sound—whether made on film or analog or digital video, whether exhibited in a theatre or gallery, on a television, computer, or other screen-device. While “testimony” has had a more complex cultural trajectory in the late 20th century (which I will discuss in detail below) one can say that historically testimony was a matter of words—of verbal address—in speech or writing. What happens to testimony in the cinematic realm raises crucial questions, most obviously whether the cinematic in such a case may be considered solely as an “art of record,” or whether it becomes a medium of testimony that is co-extensive and deeply intertwined with the medium of language. In what follows I argue that, while testimony remains also a matter of language, cinema has become a *wholly new medium* of testimony.

While many documentaries incorporate straightforward recordings of testimonial speech—the most banal often being in the form of studio-shot talking heads¹—testimony is not simply found; it is *created*. Whether this fabrication is acknowledged or not, testimony in the medium of moving images is produced using the tools and techniques of filmmaking and is the fruit of a complex, multi-stage, and usually invisible process. Any filmed testimony necessitates decision-making as to whom to film and how. The latter includes choices regarding mise-en-scène, shot scale, framing, cinematography, cut-aways or B roll, presence or absence of interlocutor(s), editing and (re-)structuring of

¹ According to the *OED*, this term originated in the 1960s and originally referred specifically to television presenters and interviewers, and quickly after also included interviewees. The expression now extends to any image of a speaking subject on a screen, shot usually in close-up or medium close-up so that the head/face is literally the primary (if not sole) focus of our attention.

speech, as well as dozens of other details pertaining to pre-production, production, and post-production. Many works eschew such decisions or, more often, ignore or deny that they are being made, and instead fall back on what have become the habitual norms of television journalism or documentary.² The works that I address here, refusing to blindly accept such norms, take a conscious, creative, and ethical responsibility for their use of the medium. What I call cinematic testimony is something more than a filmed or taped record of a person addressing someone near or behind a camera. Rather, cinematic testimony acknowledges and engages the medium itself to create something new, something that could not exist in any other form.

Take, for example, Juan Manuel Echavarría's minimalist *Mouths of Ash* (2003). The work (presented either on a single-screen or as a multi-screen installation) consists of single long-takes, one shot per person, framed in close-up so that we see only a face against a white outdoor background. Each individual addresses the camera straight on, articulating his or her experience of a recent massacre or the displacement of his or her village due to war in the Choco region of northwestern Colombia.³ Sometimes addressed to the president of the country, sometimes to their abandoned village, their accounts are always directed to those who might be listening. They emit a powerful call to us (the viewer/listeners) in part through the monumental scale, minute detail, and dignity of their singly framed, worn faces—each the embodiment of a human life of which we know absolutely nothing except what might be implied by their scars, the expression in their eyes, and the way in which they engage the camera. This testimony is in the form of song—their lyrics articulate both the personal and the collective experience of violent events and are set to traditional melodies of the Colombian Pacific Coast. These songs are a powerful cultural mode of grieving and commemoration, an orally transmissible form of memorialization, and a potent mode of public testimony that commands listening.⁴ All of the testimonies are here (re-)performed for Echavarría's camera, the eyes of each singer consciously reaching through the camera /screen's surface to a world beyond. The ritualized, repeatable songs (with their "lyrics" and their melodies that we assume are fixed) appear to give the singers an increment of emotional distance so that they can publicly recount these traumatic experiences. For most of us, sung testimony is

² A case in point would be the Academy Award winner for best documentary *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (Mark Jonathan Harris, 2000). Here the multiple interviews that make up the substance of the film are divided into slices to recount an ostensibly collective story that seems, ultimately, to belong to none of the individuals who speak. When I asked about the reasons behind the decisions concerning the setting and mise-en-scène of the interviews (at the Flaherty Seminar in June 2001), the director said that for budgetary reasons most interviewees were brought to and interviewed in a hotel room in Vienna; they were all set up and lit more or less in the same way to satisfy the needs of the cinematographer. The use of sentimental and impersonal music to accompany much of the archival footage further adds to the banal quality of this documentary's rhetoric.

³ In Bojayá, more than 180 people were killed or seriously injured in the bombing of a church, while in another incident the town of Juradó had all its residents forcibly displaced. Both events were part of the ongoing war between the FARC guerilla fighters and the military and para-military forces. Some of these incidents, as well as the role of local song writing as testimony to these events, is discussed by Maria Elisa Pinto Garcia in her Master's Thesis "Music and Reconciliation in Columbia: Opportunities and Limitations of Songs Composed by Victims and Ex-Combatants."

⁴ See Pinto Garcia for the cultural context of these songs.

not something we expect, and the filmmaker provides no explanation except to give the location of the events described. Echavarría's *Mouths of Ash* thus integrates his subjects' own approach to testimony into a film/installation piece without simplifying or adapting it to norms that would be more familiar to his international audience. Instead, he both further distills and amplifies these testimonies through his use of large, fixed-frame close-ups of faces and his single long-takes that compel us to enter the temporal frame and world of the singers rather than vice-versa.

Mouths of Ash is among the most austere examples I discuss as several of its crucial cinematic qualities are those of absence—the absence of *mise-en-scène*, of camera movement, of editing. And yet, in this case, it is precisely these absences, alongside the inherent cinematic capacity to look upon and experience a face *in motion* and to listen *in time* to the melodies, timbre, rhythms and tremors of each voice, that give the subjects' sung address to the camera so much power. Other works I will analyze use different qualities of cinema to give their testimonies force. For instance in *The Dream*, a documentary consisting of a series of testimonies by Palestinian refugees, Mohammed Malas uses his camera movements to locate us in the world of his subjects who have been dislocated. In addition, *The Dream*, unlike most testimonial documents in cinema or writing, gives unconscious experiences (specifically dreams) the same ontological status as the conscious events and perceptions of everyday life as it shifts seamlessly back and forth between the two. In his short piece *The March* (1999), Abraham Ravett takes a very different approach, demanding the same testimony of his mother again and again over a period of thirteen years. This moving and intimate work is created through the incorporation of the (usually hidden) scenes of address between subject and filmmaker, here a mother and son, and the poetic editing of multiple fragments of memory and of dialogue that took place over more than a decade. The testimony emerges as a temporal tapestry of fragments of Abraham's insistent inquisitiveness, his mother's discontinuous and anecdotal stories, the indescribable nature of the forced march itself, and the transforming relations between all three in the inescapable forward motion of time.

A film like Rithy Panh's *S 21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003), adopts yet another method of constructing testimony, placing the speaking subjects in the very spaces where the events they recount took place years before.⁵ They speak to Panh and to us in an old school turned prison and torture chamber and alongside, frequently touching, the objects—cells, desks, typewriters, photographs, written confessions—which were a part of their brutal acts. Here the viscerally palpable *mise-en-scène* is absolutely crucial to both the speakers' acts of enunciation and our own responses to their testimony. In the familiar rooms and torture chambers of a past that still consciously or unconsciously haunts the present, the body can testify when the mind or voice cannot. Recognizing and accepting the limitations of words and speech, Panh has some subjects enact the then banal gestures of their daily duties: hitting and tormenting prisoners, bringing them water only to throw it at them, angrily yelling at any commotion in the overcrowded cells, executing prisoners with a single shot to the head next to the ditch where their bodies would be dumped.

⁵ Some of Panh's strategies in this film are clearly influenced by Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985). This seminal work of cinematic testimony will be addressed at several points throughout this dissertation.

All the works I discuss in this dissertation use the possibilities afforded by the temporal, visual, and aural qualities of cinema to generate new kinds of testimony. Choices concerning the preparation and performance of testimony, its *mise-en-scène*, the use of cinematography, and the editing of this visual and verbal address for a public, radically effect both the nature and the subsequent experience of the testimony. While all testimony, in whatever representational medium, is a form of address to a public, the address made in and for the medium of cinema is unique. We, the off-screen audience, are rhetorically interpellated in a fundamentally different way by a visible face and an audible voice. We are called to attention and implicated in our very physical being by another physical being addressing us in words and voice, in time and across space, sometimes even seeming to look directly at us. The diegetic wall that separates us from the screen in fiction films is ruptured when we acknowledge being called upon and recognize the speaking subject's world and references as our own. We then engage with that world with or alongside the living eyes, mouth, face, and bodily presence of another unique human being. Hailed, we are asked to listen. And as we listen we attend to the face, voice, and body of the speaker in an intimate way, experiencing the temporal, visual, and aural qualities of their performances and utterances deliberately selected and shaped for us by the filmmaker.

Cinema's *temporal qualities* include the capacity, on the one hand, to have us engage in and viscerally experience the same time-flow as those on the screen or, on the other, to control this time of testimony through long takes (where we cannot escape the "real" time of the screen subjects), editing (that elides or expands our experience of time), repetition, or suspension. *Visual qualities* include the ability to frame and fragment a person however a filmmaker chooses, to place and contextualize a person in whatever space seems most pertinent or revelatory, and to show her as a living, moving, transforming body that gestures, hesitates, and engages as she speaks. These visual qualities can be employed to attend to or ignore aspects of the visual world deemed (ir)relevant, as a cinematic work frames, composes, inserts, and even invents a world that we, the audience, see. Cinema's *aural qualities* have to do with how cinema treats—amplifies, exaggerates, or reduces—sound and voice, how it adds or eliminates specific diegetic or nondiegetic sounds, and how it engages us in the process of listening through the temporal articulation of sync-sound or acousmatic (disembodied) voice. It is such myriad and minute decisions concerning the elicitation of an account and the visual, aural and temporal shaping of that account that give cinematic testimony its tangible and transformational force. This force, created *through* cinematic form, has the ability to engage or disengage us physically, emotionally, intellectually and ethically in ways no other medium can.

The works I examine in the following chapters emerge from documentary and avant-garde film traditions that acknowledge the importance of form, both from an aesthetic and a political point of view, while also believing in the power of moving images to transform viewers' relationships first to what is on the screen and from there to each other in the world. I am not interested in films whose *primary* aim is to create actions or activists about the subject at hand, nor in those pieces whose mission is predominantly archival, or that aim to create an exhaustive record of an event. Instead, the works of cinematic testimony I discuss function on a deeper and slower level, and without hope of

quantifiable results, to change our fundamental relationships to ourselves and to each other.

Questions surrounding testimony in general, and not cinematic testimony specifically, are part of a much larger discourse of witnessing, testimonial writing, or *testimonio* in a Latin American context. This discourse of testimony has spawned numerous discussions and debates in fields as diverse as history, psychoanalysis, literature, art history, the social sciences, trauma studies, Holocaust and genocide studies, and media studies. Yet the qualitative differences between verbal testimony in books or as oral histories and the *cinematic* construction of testimony in audio-visual form have only rarely been examined in any depth (Skoller 130ff; Ashuri and Pinchevski; Sarkhar and Walker). Filmed testimony is still frequently referred to as if the screen simply provided a transparent means of access to the pre-existing testimony-in-itself. Or, when the relationship between testimony and moving images is taken up, it is often conceived of so broadly that *all* documentary is considered as a form of testimony or witnessing (Chanan, cited in Sarkhar and Walker 5; Ellis *Documentary* 122ff; Torchin 7). In my definition of cinematic testimony however, cinema is never transparent, and testimony is never a matter of simply video-transmitting images of the world. It must pass through the human body and is always marked by the very human need and struggle to articulate and express.

What I ask here is what happens when testimony, as a human utterance addressed to others, is created in and enveloped by the multi-sensory discursive skin of cinema. Although still anchored in the direct address of the body and mouth of one human being to another, its form and effect radically shift due to the possibilities of moving images and sounds. It emerges from the mouth of *both* a human body and the cinema. This cinematic testimony is thus a doubled form of testimony, with one medium (words) actively framed, reconfigured, and embedded in another (cinema). The works I discuss are therefore quite limited compared to other recent works on film or media witnessing and testimony. For example, in their *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*, Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker include the following: visual documents of courtroom testimonies; archives of audio-visual testimonies on a given historical event or atrocity (for instance the ethnic violence in Rwanda or the Holocaust); and documentary films that incorporate verbal testimony into a larger discursive work. My focus here will be only on the last type of works, those which themselves become a form, rather than just a record, of testimony. My scope is also much narrower than what Paul Frosh and Amit Pincheski include in their edited collection on what they call “media witnessing.” Indeed my notion of cinematic testimony is only what is produced at the narrow juncture where Frosh and Pincheski’s three categories of witnessing—witnessing *in*, *by*, or *through* the media (1)—overlap. In other words, cinematic testimony arises when a witness appearing *in* moving images provides verbal testimony that is re-configured and co-authored with a filmmaker to create a new form of testimony (*by* cinema) that can then be addressed (*through* cinema) to an audience that exists outside the diegetic space of the film.

In today’s multiple public spheres, testimonies are created more frequently and circulate much more broadly in audio-visual media than in “live” or written forms. When compared to other forms of recorded testimony, moving-images can create more concrete

and vivid sensory experiences that frame, shape, structure, and literally guide our seeing and listening to others. And just as documentary filmmakers and artists are continuously trying to create new forms and approaches to testimony as evidenced by recent documentary features such as *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer 2013) or *The Missing Picture* (Rithy Panh 2013), viewers and listeners also engage with these moving image testimonies in new and different ways. Before turning to the development, critical discourse, and analysis of specific instances of cinematic testimony, it is important to take a closer look at the larger cultural discourse of testimony itself and what could be thought of as a large-scale “testimonial turn” in the 1980s.

Our “Age of Testimony”

During the last half century, the meaning of the term testimony broadened in scope and spread across a number of disciplines. Many of the scholarly discussions that accompanied this general testimonial turn raise a number of questions that are equally relevant to the exploration of cinematic testimony. Among those are: the epistemological and linguistic status of testimony as a rhetorical, performative, and social act; its relationship to trauma, sensory experience and the body of the unique individual; and its role in the public sphere, in the establishment and experience of history, and in arguments about historical truth.

Testimony, in the sense of discourse produced by a witness, has been discussed by authors as far back as Thucydides and Aristotle. From the idea of sworn statements made before a court of law, declarations of religious faith, confessions, or statements made with the intent to sway an audience’s belief on some matter, there have emerged more recent forms of discourse that are frequently, though not always rigorously, referred to as testimony. Most generally speaking, one could say these are “discursive acts of stating one’s experience for the benefit of an audience” (Peters “Witnessing” 709). Eyewitness accounts, personal memoirs (often of traumatic events), oral histories, and the products of qualitative interviews found in literature, history, or the social sciences all have been labeled testimonies. Depending on the domain and medium in and for which they are produced, they may have distinct rhetorical rules and functions. Unlike legal or some forms of religious testimony, the newer versions of testimony are typically not made under oath, nor elicited by coercion, nor subject to explicit institutional threat of punishment. But testimony is still made for and to other human beings, whether the witness-speaker is in the same physical space as her public or present only in mediated form. And testimony still carries with it a tacit promise of truthfulness and the unspoken assertion that the speaker believes what she says. To deliberately utter falsehoods would be considered unethical and a betrayal of the listening (or reading or viewing) public’s trust in what testimony is.

For literary scholar Shoshana Felman, who, with psychoanalyst Dore Laub, is the author of one of the best-known books on testimony, we live in an “age of testimony,” and testimony is “a crucial mode of our relation to events of our times—our relation to the traumas of contemporary history”(5). On the other hand, in her book *The Era of the Witness*, historian Annette Wieviorka is wary of this epoch in which “in a global fashion, individual stories and personal opinion often take the place of analysis” (95). Media

scholar John Ellis also claims that “witnessing has become a generalized mode of relating to the world” (cited in Frosh and Pinchevski 9), while others assert that testimony “can justifiably be labeled anachronistic” (Vattimo 181) or is simply a nostalgic idea (Beverley 78). In *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*, Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler point out that the process of witness and testimony “depends heavily on cultural values and meanings, and that changes in the cultural context have contributed significantly to changes in the discourse of witness in recent years” (10). Yet in spite of these many differences of opinion, the discourse of witnessing and testimony continues to be widely used.

The terms witness and testimony began to proliferate across a number of disciplines in the early 1980s. The increase in first-person Holocaust survivor accounts and their collection by specialized archives, the evolution of the Latin American literary genre known as *testimonio*, the consolidation of trauma studies as an inter-disciplinary field, as well as the growing number of personal and collective narratives arising from identity politics all contributed to this broad cultural dissemination. Douglass and Vogler note, for example, that 1982 was the year in which the Yale Video Archive for Holocaust testimony was opened, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (the most widely read example of *testimonio* literature) was published, and media attention to the survivor-witnesses of Hiroshima and Nagasaki almost tripled in Japan (4,6). While in the United States and Europe the Holocaust became a paradigm for scholarly discussions about—and also production of—witnessing and testimony (Langer; Caruth; Felman and Laub; Wieviorka; Douglass and Vogler),⁶ reflections on testimony’s discursive forms and its complex relation to language, memory, and truth emerged from the other areas as well.

In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman writes about testimony as a response to what she calls a “crisis of truth”(1). Although some scholars make a point of distinguishing trial testimony from the broader usage of the term outside the courtroom, Felman links both as responses to such a crisis. In the courtroom, it is a very specific issue or “crisis” that demands resolution by the law, whereas the broader conception of testimony arises in response to the more profound traumas wrought by history. As crises of “truth,” these catastrophes—she discusses primarily European catastrophes—are on such a scale or of such a unique sort that no language exists to speak about them. The events or experiences being testified to surpass words; they render them inadequate, or simply meaningless. This incapacity, or crisis, of language itself to represent historical trauma, frequently noted in texts about the Holocaust (Felman, Laub, Lyotard, Agamben), is also noted in writing and scholarship emerging from other geographical contexts. For instance, Hiroshima survivor Takenishi Hiroko writes concerning the destruction of her city by atomic bombs: “What words can

⁶ According to Wieviorka, the systematic collection of audiovisual testimonies by Holocaust survivors began at end of the 1970s, partly in response to the trivializing quality of the *Holocaust* television mini-series. The Holocaust Survivors Film Project was founded in 1979, and Steven Spielberg’s Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in 1994. Together they have archived over 56,000 testimonies extending over 110,000 hours. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has produced and collected another 6,000 testimonies.

we now use, and to what ends? Even: what are words?” (quoted in Douglass and Vogler 31).

Writing specifically on Latin American testimonio literature, John Beverley also notes the exceptional relation testimony bears to common language, although in different terms than the writing on the Holocaust or the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He argues that what distinguishes testimonio is that its subject matter is defined precisely by *not yet* being part of the “public sphere.” If the voices of testimonio were already known, they would have *already* addressed us. Testimonio literature, therefore, emerges in a liminal space, hovering between the unspoken and the spoken, at the threshold of public discourse. Although testimonio literature does not have the same relation to language as does trauma testimony in psychoanalytic discourse for Beverley, it is nevertheless something that did not/could not exist yet in language, in the public sphere. Testimonio also makes language confront something new, as yet unsaid. Here, however, it is less about a cataclysmic event than about longstanding social and class oppression. Testimonio literature brings the “subaltern voice and experience into civil society.” In this way it expands “the compass of what counts as expression” (19).

As in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, a first-person account of the life and political struggles of a Guatemalan indigenous woman and testimonio literature’s most well-known, and often debated, example,⁷ testimonio also articulates a connection between individual experience and larger social forces. Not *just* a life story, testimonio is concerned with “the problematic collective social situation in which the narrator lives” (Beverley 33). Representing collective as well as individual experience, its function is metonymic in that each testimonio “evokes an absent polyphony of other voices” (34). In this way, the testimony of testimonio is always political. While Felman does not explicitly discuss this metonymic function, those testimonies that address or recount aspects of the great historical cataclysms are clearly, to some degree also metonymic, representing both an absolutely unique voice but also an experience shared by many who didn’t survive to speak or write about it and for whom the remaining witnesses also testify. First-person testimonies or memoirs that fall under the broad category of identity politics may also embody this metonymic function. One could say that these forms of testimony, in speaking experiences or life-stories that are as yet publicly unspoken, *create new subject-positions* that others can then assume or affiliate with. As newly visible or audible expressions of minority subjectivities, such testimony has the political function of being the representative of a larger collective group of as-yet-unheard voices.

Pushing the boundaries of what has been or can be publicly spoken, testimonies and testimonio texts also have a unique relation to conventional notions of historical truth. Holocaust testimonies and testimonio texts each have been accused of not being factually

⁷*I, Rigoberta Menchú*, is authored by both Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos-Debray. Although the content and structure of the text is ostensibly Menchú’s, with anthropologist Burgos-Debray only transcribing and translating, it is clearly a co-authored text, “performed” by both of them to accomplish specific goals. According to Beverley, it resulted in a much more widespread awareness of the oppression of Guatemalan indigenous peoples. Menchú, also featured in the documentary *When the Mountains Tremble* (1983) by Pamela Yates and Newton Thomas Sigel, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.

precise. Psychoanalyst Dori Laub discusses this in his well-known example of a Holocaust survivor who misremembers the number of chimneys that were blown up during the Auschwitz uprising. For Laub, the survivor's testimony was about the unimaginability of the occurrence caused by the uprising, *not* about the specific number of chimneys that exploded. While a form of historical truth for Laub, he acknowledges that for historians, it was not only 'not truth' but also a dangerous untruth because it could provide fodder for historical revisionists (Laub 60).

There have been similar discussions concerning testimonio, with some scholars attacking Menchú's text for inconsistencies, ideological biases, and the inclusion of events that Menchú herself could not have witnessed. But, as Beverley argues, Menchú's text is *strategic* in that she expresses herself in order to advance the interests of the community she represents (Beverley 75). The truths of her testimony lie in that which is "summoned in the cause of. . . exorcising and setting aright official history" (Yudice 4). Beverley also claims that one of the qualities inherent in testimonio is that it challenges the conventionally accepted hierarchies of knowledge. Through our engagement with testimonio we recognize that the accepted truths and norms of American and European academia are "not *the* truth, but a form of truth, among many others, that has fed processes of emancipation and enlightenment, but that is also both engendered and deformed by a tradition of service to the ruling classes and to institutional power" (7). In testimonio like Menchú's, the "subaltern voice" need *not* bow to these truths of the intellectual elite nor bend to the accepted narratives circulating in the public sphere. As readers, we engage with the other's—in this case her—sense of what is true and relevant: "what is at stake in testimonio is not so much truth from or about the other as the truth *of* the other" (7). As the articulation of *another's* truth, then, testimony challenges both normative hierarchies of truth and hegemonic narratives that exclude large parts of the population or large swathes of experience.

Both media scholar John Durham Peters and Holocaust historian Annette Wieviorka associate this truth of testimony with a notion of *experience*, although with quite different implications. Peters' discussion highlights the complex relationship between the allegedly pre-discursive and discursive in the articulation of testimony, while Wieviorka argues for the contingency of the experience on the social and political context of articulation. Peters, who writes about witnessing outside of any specific historical context, sees testimony as the difficult process of translation of experience into discourse, or as he puts it the "transition from sensation to sentences" (Peters 710). This analysis risks reifying "experience" as something wholly pre-discursive and simply, passively, had, rather than *also* historically and discursively *produced* (eg Scott 26), formed by but also (re-)forming language. Nevertheless, I think the relation of testimony to the lived body and its "experiences" affirmed by Peters is vital. As he notes, it is "mortal bodies in time" who witness (710) and in certain forms of testimony these bodies serve as "collateral to justify the loan of our credence" (713) under threat of castigation, or, as the recent war on terror reminds us, also torture. Even when the witness' body is not "at stake" (literally) in the act of testifying, the reason for testifying is usually due to it having *been* at stake (in situations of trauma or oppression) or due to others' bodies being at stake, either in the past, present, or future. In discussing the potentially powerful impact of testimonio on readers, John Beverley suggests that this impact is largely due to the fact that "something

of the experience of the body in pain or hunger or danger inheres in testimonio” (71). We are affected by first person accounts of bodily sensation and experience, even more so when these bodies are in pain or danger.

In her critical analysis of Holocaust testimonies, Wieviorka, on the other hand, somewhat polemically claims that the “experience” survivors testify to “does not exist on its own but only in the testimonial situation in which it takes place” (132). Advocating for greater attention to testimony’s discursive production and historical context, she emphasizes the decisive role of the choice (and constraints) of language and audience. For example, Wieviorka refers to Elie Wiesel’s memoirs written in the 1950s—the first in Yiddish, written for a Jewish audience and published in Argentina, the second in French for a more general European audience (later published in English as *Night*)—to illustrate the crucial role one’s perceived audience plays in the constitution of the testimony itself (39)⁸. She also notes different emphases in the testimonies of the same Holocaust survivors when given to Israeli prosecutor Gideon Hausner during the Eichmann trial or later to Claude Lanzmann for the film *Shoah*.⁹ To state that an experience exists *only* in a given testimonial context is to assert the inextricable imbrication of experience and discourse and the importance of political and rhetorical context.

I do not mean to suggest that no experience exists without concrete discursive formulation—the realm of the human is far more complex and multifaceted than that would allow. Scholars of trauma studies, for instance, maintain that traumatic experiences are often simply not available to either conscious memory or verbal articulation, either because they were not experienced at the time or due to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. However, the insistence on the fact that a given testimony emerges from and depends on the specific context for and in which it is uttered suggests the vital importance of the testimonial *encounter*. The psychological and rhetorical significance of this encounter for both the one who utters and the one who listens is acknowledged by scholars whose work focuses on trauma, including Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Cathy Caruth. Yet, while Wieviorka’s more matter of fact claim that “the nature of a testimony is determined both by how an interview is conducted and by how the witness understands the questions” (82) may seem self-evident, it is often forgotten when the testimony is subsequently presented as if independent of such an encounter.

⁸ *Un de Velt hot geshvign* or *And the World was Silent* was written in 1954 and published in Yiddish in Argentina, and *The Night* was written in French and published in 1958. While Wiesel has been accused of lying because of differences in the two accounts, Wieviorka sees Wiesel enacting different narrative interpretations on the events, partly in order to “play to two audiences, addressing himself in turn to the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds, adapting his discourse to the different expectations of each audience” (39).

⁹ Wieviorka was not able to screen the trial testimonies, but only had access to court transcripts. Noting that three of the witnesses at the Eichmann trial also appear in *Shoah* more than a decade later, she writes that although there are no factual discrepancies, different aspects of individual experience of events are emphasized or brought forth. Wieviorka claims that Lanzmann’s “questions set in motion a double reflection, absent from the Eichmann trial, in which the witness attempts to remember what he was thinking or feeling at the time and to reflect on what he is feeling today,” adding that “*Shoah* revolutionized testimony. It transformed it into something beyond the history of historians, into a work of art” (82-83).

This emphasis on dialogic context and relation is similar to what Judith Butler has called “the scene of address” in her book *Giving An Account of Oneself*. Like Wieviorka, Butler insists on the crucial role played by this “structure” or “scene” of address, even if the addressee is anonymous or unspecified. In any account I give, she claims, I am “elaborating a *relation to an other* in language as I go” (50 emphasis mine). In addition, “whether or not my account of myself is adequate”¹⁰ is less significant than “whether in giving the account, I establish a relationship to the one to whom my account is addressed and whether both parties to the interlocution are sustained and altered by the scene of address” (50). One could say, then, with Butler, that testimony (a word she does not use but that has numerous parallels to her “giving an account of oneself,”) is an act that one performs “for, to, even *on* an other, an allocutory deed, an acting for, and in the face of, the other and sometimes by virtue of the language provided by the other. This account does not have as its goal the establishment of a definitive narrative but constitutes a linguistic and social occasion for self-transformation” (130).

Thus the aim is not a “definitive narrative” or factual truth, but a transformation of the self and the other through a collaborative (in the largest sense of the term) process of articulation. Both Butler’s notion of giving an account of oneself and Felman’s testimonial speech acts are, according to their authors, performative acts: what they *do* in the world or in the dialogic situation that produces them has primacy over what they describe about the world. With reference to linguist J.L. Austin, Felman claims that that testimony is not a constative speech act that can be judged true or false but a performative one (Austin 5). In other words, testimony’s aim is not to describe or explain in the register of historical discourse; rather it *makes something happen*. Austin’s own oft-cited examples of performative speech acts include things like a judge’s pronouncement of marriage or the act of christening a boat. These succeed (or are “felicitous” in Austin’s terms) because they follow certain legal or social procedures and because there is a social and/or institutional consensus that the act has taken place. But what of testimony? What precisely does it make happen and who determines its success or failure?

What for Butler would be the transformation of self and other through the act of account-giving, for Dori Laub or Cathy Caruth might entail a healing process initiated as an effect of verbalizing or narrating trauma, or for Felman, Claude Lanzmann, and others, the transmission of something new—a form of knowledge, an affect—from speaker to listeners.¹¹ In the process of the struggle with language and representation on either an individual or collective scale, testimony and Butlerian accounts of self aim to create a shift in testifier and addressees’ relation to themselves, each other, and thus the world. Transformations of both self and others through *relating* (in both senses of the term) thus seem to be the goal of testimony and account-giving as performative acts, with the “scene” of testimony a constitutive part of the testimony itself.

¹⁰ In fact, for Butler an *inability* to fully articulate is central to our human condition; our “incoherence” establishes the way in which we are constituted—“implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us” (64).

¹¹ Such “transmission” is crucial to Lanzmann’s cinematic project in *Shoah* and will be discussed at length in chapter 3.

Butler's notion (and Wieviorka's implicit claim) that one gives one's account not only "in the face of" but "sometimes by virtue of the language provided by" the other is also crucial to understanding the constraints and opportunities of testimony. Testimonial accounts do not merely relay facts in an indifferent medium; linguistic and behavioral norms shape discourse and "condition the possible emergence of an encounter between myself and the other" (Butler 25). The power structures that underlie all social structures and relations inhere in scenes of address as well, often all the more covertly. Yet the specificities of any scene of address can either comply with or challenge those norms and structures, even as it is partially constituted by them. For Felman genuine testimony is expressed *only* through a crisis in these norms, a crisis "which has to break and to transvaluate previous categories and previous frames of reference" (53-54).

This matter of testimony's relation to language or other systems of representation is central to many scholars in the field. Whether personal or political, concerning individual trauma, historical cataclysm, or minority or subaltern voices demanding to be acknowledged and heard, discussions of testimony frequently suggest that a rupture of conventional language or existing frameworks is intrinsic to it. It is through such a rupture that something new enters either the public sphere or an individual consciousness, gains personal, political, or cultural recognition, and potentially transforms both its speaker and listeners. If for Felman testimony must "encounter—and make us encounter—strangeness" (7), for Beverley it is something akin to the Russian Formalist idea of *ostranenie* that is an effect of testimonio (70). How can one describe the experience of such a rupture, such an encounter with "strangeness" or defamiliarization? Is it the sense of being unsettled, unmoored, having one's habitual way of understanding the world suddenly shaken, questioned? Is it the sudden realization that other subjectivities, values, and experiences are as "real" as our own, thus forcing an unexpected shift in our sense of what is? Is it the experience of having someone else's lived experience transmitted and made meaningful to us in a visceral way?

If the kind of testimony discussed here is, for some, the "small voice of history" (Beverley 27), I would add that it is an *embodied* small voice, and one that has the power to both take history *from* and give history *back* to the body. It emerges from the body (via voice or pen) of a speaker and is offered to an audience, who listens and in so doing works to integrate the accounts into their own embodied being in the world. In making individual bodies the experiencing, witnessing, and articulating subjects of history, testimony makes history accessible and imaginable to other such bodies. In addition, testimony offers narratives that create a possible affective connection with another human being and, through them, with a moment and place in history *through a specific body*. The appeal of such accounts suggests that they compensate for something missing in impersonal explanations of historical events, political struggles, and other social transformations. They make inaccessible events and experiences discernable, visible, even palpable from the perspective of another body. Testimonial accounts provide the opportunity to imaginatively share in (to whatever miniscule degree) embodied experiences that we otherwise would not have access to. They allow us to expand the scope of our own limited subjectivity and to come in contact with the contingencies and transformations of someone else's life in this often impervious world. In so doing,

testimony also validates embodied and subjective experience *per se*, our own as well as others', as something worth taking seriously.

Through testimonies, then, something new enters the world—a new knowledge or experience, a new articulation of history or the present, a new awareness of what is possible and utterable in the world. The ways in which testimony has been discussed by the scholars above over the last two decades suggests that testimony is never self-evident, never comfortable or complacent in its relation to truth, always born out of a struggle with representation and a particular rhetorical context, and always for and in relation to an other.

Cinema as the Medium of Testimony

The “age of testimony” and the “era of the witness” have, as suggested earlier, also spread to the field of film and media studies.¹² Over the course of the last century audio-visual media have significantly expanded the capacity and discourse of witnessing and the reach of testimony. For some, the media have become a sort of “witness” themselves, and, as representations of events-to-be-witnessed circulate through ever more images on ever more platforms, the struggle to verbally articulate seems to become, for better or for worse, less necessary and relevant. Yet numerous experiences, and lives have no possible camera-witness; the human voice, and embodied or written speech, is still crucial to the formulation and existence of such testimony. Audio-visual media solicit and seek out these testimonies to incorporate, shape and multiply them. The testimonies of those who have witnessed what we ourselves cannot or did not see have been able to proliferate due to and by means of our audio-visual media. The nature of these testimonies continually evolves given the historical, technological and cultural context in which they are produced.

If human speech, or some form of embodied utterance, is always a central part of the kinds of testimony I am concerned with, then how we conceptualize such speech is crucial. As R.G. Collingwood stated in the late 1960s, “speech must be understood as an action performed by the body in its entirety” (cited in Hirschkind 196). And if testimonial speech (also in its written form) is, as I claim, one way of taking histories *from* and giving them *back to* bodies, then cinema is its ideal medium because it allows bodies and embodied actions to communicate through the screen. In fact, cinema began as the fascination with and visualization of bodies and bodily movement. Then, with the advent

¹² In a 2012 article, Amit Pinchevski convincingly argues for seeing this relationship between media and the discourse of testimony as reversed. For him, “the videotape as an audiovisual technology of recording, processing, and transmission” is “the technological unconscious of trauma and testimony discourse” (144). Referencing the early history and later impact of the Yale Fortunoff (video) Archive of Holocaust testimony, he claims that “it is *only* with audiovisual media that the shortcoming of words can be documented as they surface from the fragments of traumatic memory” (153 [emphasis added]). If one accepts Pinchevski’s proposed genealogy, one would have to claim that video recording, (and specifically the “videotestimonies” – as Geoffrey Hartman calls them – produced at Yale) generated the discourse of testimony and trauma in the 1980s. What I am calling here “cinematic testimony,” while partly an extension of these “videotestimonies” in that speech becomes embodied and temporal, is, however, still quite different from recording as “record” with a more-or-less fixed, unmoving camera in a neutral, impersonal room.

of sync-sound in the 1920s, cinema's bodies *could*—but often didn't in documentary film—become vocal. Unlike being seen, speaking or vocalizing has a connotation of agency: one is heard, can *make* oneself heard, can talk back. One can ostensibly choose (or not) to speak and how, about what, and in what register one speaks.¹³ Indeed, writing about the voice in documentary films, Jean-Louis Comolli claims that the voice is “that part of the body that projects itself towards others” and “refuses to let [the body] be reduced to the visible” (17-18).

A few filmmakers have incorporated this idea that testimonial speech is not just words and the expressions of a face, but something that emerges from and is expressed by the body in its entirety. Some also recognize the crucial role of the imagination, the unconscious, and the vagaries of human memory in the embodied act of testifying. When created in and for audio-visual form, the notion of testimony might then include voices *and* bodies, the possibility of movements in and across space, complex *mise-en-scène*, re-enacted or imagined memories and associations, depictions of mental as well as physical landscapes, and a whole gamut of other cinematic possibilities. In cinema, unlike in purely written or oral records, voice and speech are explicitly part of a body that has presence and weight and physically bears the traces of its past. Acts of articulation can therefore be conceived and engaged with in a variety of ways depending on the imagination and skill of a filmmaker and the collusion of her subject. While an increasing number of scholarly essays and books look at moving images as a channel through which we witness or experience the witnessing of others, there are few that focus on the transformations that cinema and its formal mechanisms can bring—and have brought—to the very idea of testimony itself. Such potential transformations, and how these affect the viewer/listener's responses to testimony, is the subject of what follows.

In film and video, the speaking subject-body addresses not only her immediate interlocutor but also an invisible mass of possible others—including you and me, individually and collectively. Instead of a dyad of speaker and interlocutor(s), there is a triad: speaker, interlocutor, and us—with the interlocutor often hidden and the “us” physically absent but teleologically present for both speaker and interlocutor. Although the audience is a mute participant in testimony's construction and the initial encounter that brings it forth, the work's ultimate aim is to provoke, goad into action, or somehow transform this “us.” Thus the testimonial “scene of address” in cinema is paradoxical and complex. At least one, if not two, of the participants is always absent. Yet at the same time, the carefully constructed present-tense of the encounter and the experiential co-presence of the parties is multiplied *ad infinitum* as they intersect across time and space. John Ellis has described the interview as “not a conversation in the present so much as a message addressed to a future” (*Documentary* 62). I would characterize this slightly differently: as a series of parallel presents. For the filmed interview or testimony is not merely a thing sent out to a future audience but the temporal experience of being addressed by a present-tense human presence in the audience's own present.

¹³ Needless to say this is complicated by the power dynamics that frame any human exchange and particularly one that is produced for cinematic representation. This is discussed in chapter two.

Finally, in cinematic testimony the cinematically articulated body and voice that addresses us, that participates in *our* encounter, is not solely the speaker(s), but an inseparably intertwined discursive entity that is the cinematic work itself. In this regard, testimony in moving images is more similar to the testimonio genre than to the literary testimony (novels, poetry, memoir) Felman discusses. Much Latin American testimonio literature was co-written by collaborators/editors because the subjects themselves did not have access to a written lingua franca, yet this translation and/or transliteration is rarely discussed. Both the language and narrative shape of the co-authored discourse are based on frameworks that may not be the subject's own. Although this is changing with increasing access to technology and channels of dissemination like YouTube, in moving images the means of representation and circulation have long been typically defined and controlled by others—filmmakers, producers, distributors, and commercial, archival, artistic, or educational institutions.

As the fruit of a collaboratively negotiated and created exchange between at least two people—an exchange that is ultimately aimed at an absent other—testimony is related to and emerges from the practice of the interview which originated in newsprint journalism in the 19th century and eventually became a fixture in much documentary film. The distinction between the interview and testimony in the context of cinema can be blurry. In fact, the term “testimony” was rarely used in the arena of documentary film studies until discussions of Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* began to appear (including Felman’s) in the same decade that the term became prominent in Holocaust and trauma studies.¹⁴ Suddenly documentary cinema was also producing testimony, but it was produced—and very obviously so in *Shoah* which bares its complex dialogic encounters for all to see and hear—via the creative use of the interview. The distinction between testimony and interview is frequently made based on subject matter, textual intention, or form. For example, in common parlance interviews are often called testimony when they deal with traumatic historical events. Or, for scholar Leshu Torchin, testimony is the fruit of “rhetorical efforts of film projects that portray distant atrocities with the intention of ending them” (5). On the other hand, for Jeffrey Skoller, the distinction between interview and testimony is an ontological one that is made manifest through its form, for example through the text’s relationship to the language it deploys. Similar to Felman’s claim that testimony can never offer a full account (5), Skoller defines testimony as a depiction of “speaking as a process of coming to knowledge,” of “finding the words” while journalistic interviews merely produce statements (133). A time-based and audio-visual medium like cinema can incorporate, convey, and compel us to partake in this time-reliant process of “finding words,” of something struggling to emerge into language, like no other.

For my purposes, I will distinguish between the interview as a technique or practice that shapes discourse and the interview as the reified product of such shaping. As practice, it produces both journalistic statements *and* testimonies. Although much of it may remain hidden, an interview is part of the structure of address of both; as such it has profound relevance to what I here call cinematic testimony. Now that testimony has become a

¹⁴ This again suggests the legitimacy of Pinchevski’s claims discussed in note 11.

familiar term in the discourse of documentary film studies, it can be useful to apply it retroactively to works that were not earlier labeled “testimony” but that may fit the criteria established by scholars of literature, history, or trauma studies. Thus one might speak of the direct address accounts given to the camera by the women and men in *Housing Problems* (Elton and Anstey 1935), or by gay prostitute/maid/performer Aaron Payne/Jason in *Portrait of Jason* (Clarke 1967), or by the twenty-six lesbian and gay participants in *Word is Out* (Mariposa Film 1978), as not only interviews, but also testimony. Each of these films testifies to some traumatic experience, functions performatively and/or metonymically, and hovers at the threshold of existing public discourse to challenge hegemonic narratives with voices that had not yet been heard publicly. These accounts of experiences and of selves are destined for others; they are “allocutory deeds” that transform both the account-giver and listener/viewer alike.

Because both language *and* cinema are the medium of cinematic testimony, when Skoller defines testimony as “speaking as a process of coming to knowledge,” this should also be understood as applying to the “speech” of cinema, its aesthetic articulation through mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing. A cinematic work can also articulate its “process of coming to knowledge” through an exploration of, and experimentation with, form. Thus, while the films mentioned above *may* feel somewhat banal thirty-five or seventy-five years later, the embodied words of their subjects, as solicited and honed into cinematic address, exemplify an exploratory “coming to knowledge,” an attempt to articulate the as yet publicly unspoken through the speaker’s embodied words and the language of the nonfiction cinema of their time.

In her essay in response to the aftermath of 9/11, Judith Butler comments on the media’s crucial role in defining the “normative schemes of intelligibility” of our contemporary public sphere. The media’s discursive frames and schemes of intelligibility, she claims, largely determine what is and is not collectively recognizable as reality, who is visible and how they are visible, and which groups are categorically effaced. In response she argues for the urgent need to “establish modes of public seeing and hearing that might well respond to the cry of the human” (*Precarious* 146-147). While what is called testimony today is frequently embedded in ideologically problematic edifices and well-established institutions, it may also still express and manifest this very “cry of the human,” a cry that is in the *process* of finding its shape, its mediatized or cinematic means of expression and circulation. Just as for Beverley testimony resides at the threshold of the public sphere, and for Felman and Laub testimony can never be articulated in a language already formulated, the newly emerging or symptomatically recurring cries of the human must also rupture their representational frameworks—whether linguistic, cinematic, or other—in order to be articulated and heard. The kinds of cinema I address in this dissertation are clearly a “minor” rather than a mass media. Nevertheless, these works, as well as the filmmakers or artists who produce them and the audiences who appreciate them, are an important and noteworthy component of the “modes of public seeing and hearing” that we create and that in turn create us.

Interviews and Testimony in Film and Film Studies

In the pages that follow I first historically contextualize the development and critical analysis of interviews and testimony in cinema and then examine a number of works through the lens of cinema's transformations of testimony. While chapter one focuses on the emergence, and perceived role of, interviews in newsreels and documentary films of the late 1920s and 1930s, chapter two examines how the discipline of film studies approached and analyzed the epistemology and aesthetics of filmed interviews and testimony starting in the 1970s. The last three chapters then turn to the study of a handful of works made during the last three decades that have created new forms of testimony through their very deliberate use of the cinematic medium and its capacity to reveal and explore the body's, the voice's and the camera's role in acts of testimonial speech.

In chapter one I note that while sync sound interviews or voice recordings outside of a studio may have been technically difficult, they were possible by late 1927; in fact, the very first example of sync-sound film released in a theatre was a newsreel of Mussolini addressing the American public. Newsreels subsequently made broad use of the filmed interview, and within a decade many of the world's political and cultural celebrities had appeared on screen speaking to the cinema's many publics. Documentary filmmakers, however, were slower to incorporate this practice into their films, partly *because* it was associated with newsreels—considered a lesser form of filmmaking—and partly because they had developed an aesthetically rich approach to sound that left no room, aesthetically or ideologically, for individual interviews. Indeed, most filmmakers never incorporated sync sound interviews into their work during the 1930s or 40s. When individual voices of the poor or unemployed were included in a handful of British films, such use of the interview and direct address was considered controversial. American documentaries of the same era likewise featured experimentation with the construction of complex voices and multiple points of view, yet never included interviews. I propose that individual interviews at this time were ideologically irrelevant and aesthetically dissatisfying, and thus they played almost no role in the documentary filmmaking of the day.

In fact, up until the 1960s, the recourse to sync-sound direct address from the mouths of filmed subjects remained the exception. This may have been due to technological limitations, a desire to focus on the collective rather than the individual during and after wartime, or the fact that the interview—previously associated with newsreels—had by the 1950s come to be perceived as the province of television (Waugh 247; Grindon 4). Only in the 1960s and 1970s did the interview suddenly become a vital element in a vast number of documentary films. In France films such as Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'un été* (1961) and Chris Marker's *Le Joli mai* (1963) and SLON films (1967 ff), each included lengthy spontaneous interviews and conversations with filmed subjects. In the United States, on the other hand, direct cinema practitioners such as Ricky Leacock and Fred Wiseman refused the inclusion of interviews in their films precisely because they felt that they were neither revealing nor truthful. Indeed, for Wiseman filmed interviews only produce "formal, pompous bullshit" (74).¹⁵ Yet in works more explicitly

¹⁵One could discern in Wiseman's early work a Foucauldian critique of American society as one that manifests its power over the individual through constant, unending interviews (qua-interrogations). Thus

engaged with politics or film form such as those by the Newsreel collectives in New York or San Francisco, the political documentaries of Emile de Antonio, avant-garde filmmaker Shirley Clark's radical *Portrait of Jason* (1969), or the hybrid fiction-documentary *Medium Cool* by Haskell Wexler (1969), the interview became a significant and sometimes highly self-reflexive tool for the presentation of diverse and counter-cultural voices. By providing an outlet for voices disregarded or marginalized in the public sphere at the time, interviews, depending on how they were constructed, could contribute to the political empowerment and public presence of those ignored by most mainstream representational conduits.

As documentary filmmaking became more widespread and popular, so too did its place in the emerging discipline of Film Studies. In the second chapter I examine how such scholarship has—and has not—approached and analyzed the interview as a rhetorical device of nonfiction film. After presenting some of the major theoretical frameworks used to analyze interview and testimony, I suggest possible new approaches. In the 1970s and 1980s, the use of interviews and embodied direct address as a rhetorical device became a topic of interest for historians and scholars of documentary. Among others, Tom Waugh, Barbara Halpren Martineau, and Bill Nichols debated whether interviews were vehicles of empowerment for minorities and women or, rather, ideologically suspect tools of manipulation deployed by filmmakers. In the early 1990s, Nichols developed an analytical taxonomy that characterized interviews based on the differential of power and control between filmmaker and interviewee. A decade later Leger Grindon challenged this framework in his examination of the interview styles of well-known American “auteur” documentarians Errol Morris, Michael Moore, and Ken Burns. Grindon devised another classification system that incorporated the effects of pre-production decisions and relations (which had been largely missing in Nichols' analysis), but almost completely ignored politics and ethics. More recently, Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker's edited anthology *Documentary Testimonies* articulates a framework for multiple discussions of nonfiction film testimony. Nevertheless, most of this scholarly writing does not pay adequate attention to the non-verbal visual and aural qualities of cinematic testimony and especially the effects these qualities can provoke in listeners/viewers. Although Shoshana Felman initiated reflections in this direction in her seminal essay on Lanzmann's *Shoah* in the 1990s, film scholars haven't developed these in a way that is applicable to other works. For Felman the power of *Shoah* lies not in the words Lanzmann elicits “but the equivocal, puzzling relation between words and voice, the interaction, that is, between words, voice, rhythm, melody, images, writing, and silence” (277). A deliberate focus on the interactions of these and other aspects of embodied speech and expression is precisely what cinema can bring to testimony and through which it can transform it into a specifically cinematic art. The last three chapters turn to examine a number of works that do just this.

Chapter three examines films from the perspective of their attention to and deliberate incorporation of gesture and the body. Focusing specifically on *mise-en-scène* and the

Titicut Follies (1967), *High School* (1968), *Hospital* (1970), and *Welfare* (1975) are full of characters subjected to interviews by the representatives of institutions that define, shape, and (de-)legitimate them.

use of (re-)enactment and bodily gesture as a central part of the testimonial address to the audience, I consider the impact of such films on viewers. In these works, cinematic testimony is conveyed not through words alone, but rather through moving images of those testifying with their bodies as well as with their mouths. I discuss recent neurological research that shows how profoundly we communicate with each other simply through expressions and bodily gestures and then argue that such communication occurs in our engagement with films as well. Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Rithy Panh's *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003), Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre's *Maquilapolis* (2006), and Chen Chieh-jen's *Factory* (2003) each deliberately incorporate the staging or enacting of gesture and place great importance on their mise-en-scène. These filmmakers do so not solely or primarily because the subjects lack words, but rather to create a qualitatively different relationship between the testifying subjects and viewers. They thus are able to create what I call a "shared body" of knowledge through mise-en-scène and the purposeful integration of the expressive body into the very texture of the testimony itself.

Chapter four then focuses on works that emphasize the role of listening or voice (as something that is distinct from mere speech) in their articulation of cinematic testimony. Such films elicit an attentive, embodied listening, not only to the meanings of spoken words, but also to the myriad musical and affective qualities of voice. I argue that just as films construct preferred viewing positions for audiences, they also create preferred listening positions, whether through the kind of address they reproduce or through the modeling of acts of listening in the work itself. Typically invisible in conventional documentaries, listening has often been conceived of as something left solely to the audience. But listening can become palpable and self-aware in works that either include it in the visual and temporal diegesis of testimony or call attention to our own listening through emphasis on or manipulation of the qualities of voice. In my discussion I touch on some works already examined in chapter three (but through the lens of listening) and then turn to Juan Manuel Echevarría's *Mouths of Ash* (2003), Steve Reich and Beryl Korot's video opera/installation *The Cave* (1993), and Anja Salomonowitz' *It Happened Just Before* (2006). I propose a kind of aural haptics that is created when works call attention to voice and provoke a palpable and self-reflexive listening that engages and touches us in new ways. Through techniques of repetition, fragmentation, musical mimicry and response, and estrangement, we are forced to listen differently and to reconsider not only our own responses to aurality, but what it means to speak, to give voice, and to publicly articulate traumatic experiences or strongly felt convictions. The work of philosophers and sound theorists Jean-Luc Nancy, Adriana Cavarero, Mladen Dolar and Michel Chion is crucial to my understanding of the importance of voice (as juxtaposed to speech) and listening (as juxtaposed to understanding) and the profound role the realm of the sonorous plays in our encounters with others.

Finally, chapter five argues for the role of an ethics that depends on and is tied to the possibilities of cinematic form. I examine the ethical implications of the very different strategies of two films—Abraham Ravett's *The March* (1999) and Mohammed Malas' *The Dream* (1986)—and link the kinds of ethical encounters provoked by cinematic testimonies to the aesthetic and representational strategies of the artist or filmmaker. I examine and contrast notions of empathy, both as discussed in chapter three and as

criticized by Levinas, Cavarero and Sarah Cooper, with a Levinasian concept of alterity and identify both as central to the ethical relation. Arguing that an ethical encounter as constructed through film or a work of art must be one that fluctuates *between* a sense of alterity and empathy rather than resting in either one or the other, I invoke Levinas' idea of experience becoming "creature" through the speaking-listening encounter as a productive ethical model for cinematic testimony. Looking to the works of Ravett and Malas as examples of cinematic testimony that provokes such an ethical encounter in viewers, I argue that it is the ways in which these filmmakers formally construct and cinematically articulate their testimonies, and make them "creature," that gives these films their ethical and affective power.

Ultimately, this dissertation argues for the centrality of cinematic form when it comes to understanding, engaging with, and experiencing the testimonies of others as told and constructed in moving images. An analysis of the history and evolution of the interview and testimony as a practice and as a technique in documentary/nonfiction film grounds this exploration of the methods and effects of more recent cinematic testimony. The works I examine in depth provide what I believe to be fruitful and thought-provoking alternatives to conventional approaches to interviews and testimony. Not only as a source of information or knowledge, but as a representation of and model for ethical human exchange in general, media testimonies play a significant role in our contemporary world. With Felman, Skoller, and Butler (who argue this from different perspectives), I argue that in testimonial encounters, the rhetorical context and the very construction of "speech"—here the verbal, the embodied, and the multiple and complex possibilities inherent in the cinematic—lie at the heart of the performative testimonial act and its reception by others.

1. PEACE, LOVE, AND (MIS-)UNDERSTANDING: THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE INTERVIEW

From its inception, the interview was a contested form. Both in print journalism, where the term “interview” was coined, and in documentary film, the introduction of the interview as a rhetorical trope was considered problematic by some and transformative by others. In looking at the methods, characteristics, and effects of cinematic testimony it is worthwhile to first consider the form’s early origins. As the expression of a debate concerning the perceived role, functions, and consequences of this rhetorical form, the history of the filmed documentary interview and the earlier newspaper interview merit discussion and analysis. This historical perspective is vital not solely for the sake of providing a solid foundation on the form’s evolution, but because it is precisely at the moment when the interview emerges as a technological and ideological possibility that its stakes, limitations, and possible futures become visible.

What did its early critics and champions imagine the effects of the interview would be? Why did some filmmakers pursue its use and others not at all? Here I explore these questions by first examining how the earliest interviews were constructed, deployed, and then received by the public. In order to fully understand the use (and reception) of the interview in film, I look to early newspaper interviews and the polarized responses they garnered. Then, focusing on Anglophone newsreel and documentary producers of the late 1920s and 1930s, I discuss the uses of sync sound speech in nonfiction film and early reactions to this technique. I also examine other aural and vocal strategies favored by newsreels and documentary filmmakers and consider debates around the rare use of interviews in documentary films of this time. I argue that, although filmed interviews or testimonies were technically possible during this period, they were largely avoided for ideological and aesthetic reasons.

In both print and moving image media the initial introduction of interviews signaled a radically new form of communication. For interview enthusiasts, “peace,” “love,” and greater interpersonal understanding seemed the inevitable outcome.¹⁶ They predicted the form would empower readers and audiences by providing access to new voices and more complex facets of human expression. Yet in newsreels the interview quickly became a tool of power, a means of not only soliciting new opinions but also influencing them through the scripted depiction of others’ opinions. While interviews and the opportunity to speak *could* empower those who were usually spoken *for*, such speaking, especially in documentary films, was still framed and contained by the filmmaker. Ultimately, in the 1930s the voices of individuals who didn’t represent a particular political or cultural institution or who couldn’t be easily shaped to meet the ideological and aesthetic aims of a given work were considered inconsequential and were, for the most part, ignored.

¹⁶ See H.D. whose opinions on interviews will be discussed below.

Nevertheless, the few examples of individual voices that do exist are remarkable and suggest the trajectories filmed interviews and testimony would take more than thirty years later.

The term “interview” is a product of late 19th century journalism. According to the OED, the term “interview” was coined in 1869 to refer to a then much maligned American practice that was just ten years old. In the 1870s a public debate over the value of the interview took place in the American press. Those who wrote to defend it ascribed the origins of this practice to one of two pieces published in 1859, on the eve of the Civil War. At the time of their publication, these were called “reports of conversations.” One such conversation was between well-known newspaper editor Horace Greeley and Brigham Young, founder of the Mormon Church, and was concerned with Mormon views on slavery. The other was between an anonymous reporter and Gerritt Smith, a prominent abolitionist, doctor, and long-time supporter—financially and ideologically—of John Brown and (in the aftermath of Brown’s failed raid in Harper’s Ferry) it is this relationship that is the topic of the journalist’s queries (Turnbull). In both instances, the results of these conversations were printed with quotations (although Greeley suggests that he is writing out the conversation *ex post-facto* and including only the significant parts) in the *New York Tribune* and the *New York Herald* respectively. The political urgency and polemical nature of the topic of slavery in 1859 may have contributed to the choice of a rhetorical presentation that attributes ideas and convictions directly to their respective authors/speakers, and does so ostensibly in their own words. According to historian of journalism Frederic Hudson, writing in 1873, Smith’s interview caused a sensation and led to a flurry of subsequent interviews with Rebel leaders, also published in the press (563).

Within a little more than a decade, in 1869, the now newly labeled “interview” became the subject of passionate debate. *The Nation* and a number of other American and British newspapers condemned it as an inferior, irresponsible, and often calumnious form of journalism concocted by some “hack politician” and some “humbug of a reporter” (OED). On the opposing side, in the 1870s, Hudson and *Atlanta Constitution* editor William Grady each separately defended the interview as a radically new form of journalism. Hudson notes that after the Civil War, interviews were regularly conducted with politicians, and it is through such interviews, he claims, that “the executive powers of the world are placed in more intimate relations with the governed classes, and the result can not but be beneficial for the general peace of mankind” (Hudson 564). Indeed, by the early 1870s interviews had become “quite a feature in New York journalism” (563). Numerous heads of state and military leaders—including Andrew Jackson, Napoleon, the Emperor of Brazil, and Bismarck to name a few—had been interviewed by the press. Hudson notes that “every body [sic] of any note, or who had been guilty of any crime or extraordinary act, was immediately called upon by a reporter. State-houses and state prisons were visited by representatives of the Press for notorious subjects. Interviewing, indeed, became a journalistic mania...” (564).

A few years later, in a front page editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution*, William Grady vehemently argues for the respectability of the journalistic interview by tracing its lineage to Socrates and Socratic dialogue. According to Grady, the idea of the interview “took

like wild-fire” starting in the 1860s and happily replaced some of the old “stiff, heavy, dogmatic articles” (1). Arguing that the interview is the best way of getting information to the public, he writes:

Kings, empresses, diplomats, presidents, prime ministers, statesmen, have all been interviewed and their opinions and expressions published in colloquial shape in the daily papers. So the murderer in his cell—the pedestrian on his ‘lap’—the aeronaut in his balloon—the Indian in his lava-bed—the actor in his dressing-room—the communist in his beer shop—the pastor in his study—all these yield to the tap of the interviewer, and come to the public *in propria persona*, scattering wise, or smart, or stupid sayings, each of which is stamped with the individuality of the author by the quick hand of the journalist, and then tossed into view, as fresh and definite clear-cut as a dollar still hot from the mint. (1)

The published interview “brought the person interviewed and the public face to face” (1). The newspaper-reading public had new access to the language and manners of speaking (the description of which was a vital part of the product for Grady) of those with whom they otherwise would have had no contact, be they politicians, criminals, or the man on the street, while those being interviewed could address and reach a much larger audience.

Among the enhancements in human understanding that were being attributed to the interview, three stand out to me as prescient of the interview’s potential in documentary film. First, the interview allows the reader to “hear” others whom one otherwise wouldn’t have access to due to geographic, socio-cultural, economic, or other barriers, and to hear them *in their own words* rather than just read *about* them. Thus it permits constituents to better comprehend politicians, creates greater intimacy between people, and therefore, as Hudson put it, contributes to “peace.” Secondly, the relationship established between the interviewee and reader/public is experienced as *more* direct than if the journalist had re-hashed the beliefs, convictions, or experiences of another person, putting them in the third person. In other words, the interview feels *less* “mediated” than would either the journalist or the interviewee—politician, criminal, celebrity, or stranger—*writing* their thoughts. Indeed it gives us readers-cum-public the sense that we are “face to face” (Grady) with the interviewee. And thirdly, perhaps paradoxically, it is precisely this *process of spoken dialogue* between journalist and interviewee, in other words this partly spontaneous discourse of two rather than one, which gives, at least according to Grady, the published interview its “dignity.” It allows “the correspondent to preserve the flavor of the great man’s [sic] individuality, and carry his subtle characteristics into print. By leading from the single thread of a narrative into suggestive by-ways and turn-outs, all the minor lights and shades of information could be brought out” (2).

Sixty years after this debate about newspaper interviews, a similar debate took place concerning the value of the now *audible* and *visible* interview in moving images. With the advent of sound film in the late 1920s, the incorporation of both synchronous and non-synchronous sound—including commentary, music, on- and off-screen voices, and other sounds—became a possibility. Although newsreels quickly exploited the new

possibilities of sync-sound, filmmakers working in “documentary,” a term coined by John Grierson in Britain, focused their creative energies on other aspects of cinematic soundscapes. Before turning to the attitudes of documentary filmmakers concerning the use of interviews, it is worth examining how newsreels immediately seized on the sync sound interview, and how such interviews were received by the public.

Even before Warner Brothers released the first (partly) sync sound feature *The Jazz Singer* in 1927, Fox Movietone had produced its earliest sound newsreels, which featured well-known figures speaking to the audience.¹⁷ Movietone’s first productions included Benedetto Mussolini addressing the American people (via a direct gaze into the camera with occasional glances downward probably to cue cards); the public speeches of Charles Lindbergh and President Coolidge upon Lindbergh’s celebrated return to Washington after his first transatlantic flight; and playwright George Bernard Shaw mocking both Mussolini and the talking newsreel itself in a delightful performance explicitly addressed to the audience seated in a cinema. The most popular of these—“a sensation” according to Fox and “the most impressive use to which the on-sweeping movietone has so far been put” according to the *New York Daily News* (Simmon)—was the appearance of George Bernard Shaw.

Introduced by a title card as “the world’s outstanding literary genius,” Shaw is first seen walking down a garden path, ostensibly oblivious to the cinematic apparatus, when, as if suddenly surprised on a morning walk, he acknowledges and begins to address us, the viewers, as if addressing a crowded theatre. “Have you all come to see *me*, ladies and gentlemen? Well, I should never have expected this” he says, moving his eyes back and forth across the imagined crowd, then continuing to hold forth for several minutes on this strange encounter, his thoughts about posing for a camera, and an anecdote about a child autograph-seeker. Shaw’s address draws attention to its own form while also commenting on (and critiquing) Mussolini’s form of address. In the midst of reflecting on how one should pose for a camera, he contrasts himself to Mussolini, whose “imposing look that terrifies one” he briefly mimics. Shaw, however, shows that he can also take it off, while Mussolini is “condemned to go through life with that terrible and imposing expression which really does a great deal of injustice to his kindly nature.” Indeed, much of the reel, which Shaw himself insisted on “directing” was poking fun at Mussolini’s earlier ‘greeting to the American people.’ Like Mussolini, Shaw begins by walking up to a camera that seems to be waiting for him, but rather than pretending it is not there, he treats it as if all of us (in the theatre) had shown up. At the end of the reel, about to take his leave he says good night, but then corrects himself: “by the way, this may be a matinee, good-night may not be the right thing to say. However call it ‘good afternoon,’ ‘good day,’ and anyhow, good-bye and good luck.” In a second newsreel two years later, Shaw, introduced now as the “most brilliant mind in the world today,” again directly addresses the movie audience by pointing to (and poking fun at) the particularities and benefits of the medium: “Here am I, enjoying myself, down at Malvern and there are you, enjoying yourself by allowing a photograph to talk to you. That, you

¹⁷ Fox Movietone released their sync sound Mussolini newsreel a few days before *The Jazz Singer* was released in September 1927, showing it before Murnau’s *Sunrise* (Fox’s first sound feature, with no dialogue) (Crafton 94).

see, is one of the marvels of the movietone. It brings us together *in a way that used to be entirely impossible*” [emphasis mine].

Attitudes to this new possibility of hearing the voices and seeing the faces of public figures at one and the same time were enthusiastic. The poet and film critic HD (Hilda Doolittle), although damning in her attitude to the use of sync-sound dialogue in dramatic films, wrote about being able to *hear and see* Lindbergh and Coolidge in Fox’s 1927 newsreel as a transformative experience. For HD, having access to sync-sound voice opened a new door to comprehending other people and other nations via the screen. She writes:

If [Movietone] were used properly there would be no more misunderstandings. . . Nations are in turns of wrists, in intonations of voices, and that is where the Movietone can do elaborate and intimate propaganda. Peace and love and understanding and education could be immensely aided by it. . . Let us understand one another. Let the Movietone become a weapon in the hand of a Divinity. (209-10)

The inclusion of simultaneous voice, speech, and gesture in cinema’s portrayal of the world was experienced as a huge breakthrough. Just as newspaper interviewers had been convinced that their new, more colloquial form of mediated human interaction would create intimacy and promote understanding and peace, HD experienced the new *filmed* interview as once again creating a radical shift in the possibilities of human and global understanding. It is notable that in her description of the value of such interviews, she includes the visual representation of the bodily gesture (in the turns of wrists) as well as the audible qualities of voice, accent, and intonation. Indeed, these qualities are much more significant to her than the actual words themselves—which she barely mentions.

The director of the early Fox Movietone reels, Jack Connolly, recorded a number of important personalities speaking to the camera, among them Maréchal Foch, King George V, and John D. Rockefeller. Less about promoting peace and love (*pace* HD) than getting people into theatres, public figures addressing the audience quickly became a regular addition to compilation newsreels. By 1928 Fox was putting out two all-sound Movietone newsreel editions each week, and by 1929 four a week; with airplanes used to deliver the reels as quickly as possible, they were considered to have the immediacy of radio (Crafton 98-99). Soon most of the other studios were also producing talking newsreels. The *New York Times*’ Movietone reviews of 1930 and 1931 mention, among others, “a pictorial and sound interview with Mother Jones” on her 100th birthday, with Ethel Barrymore on the condition of theatres, and with Sinclair Lewis on winning the Nobel Prize. Mussolini was shown and heard declaring that Italy would never start a war, and the Prince of Wales spoke in “the first intimate interview he has granted the sound newsreels.” Hearst newsreels¹⁸ included interviews with Mahatma Gandhi in India, Leon Trotsky in Copenhagen, H. G. Wells, and others less famous and of more prurient interest, such as the girlfriend of the recently assassinated gangster Legs Diamond. Some figures were solicited for opinions or statements about the state of the

¹⁸ These and a number of other early Hearst newsreels were viewed at the UCLA Film Archive.

world, others simply out of public curiosity about their private lives, and all for the excitement of hearing and seeing a public figure speak. Publicity about the newsreels frequently emphasized what was sensational: someone's "first appearance," their "talkie debut," or their fame. Ghandi's is "the voice of the most remarkable man in the world today," Rockefeller's is the "first appearance in sound films of world's richest man," and Tagore is "another of the world's outstanding figures." According to Donald Crafton, within months of their debut, many of the Movietone camera operators "became precursors of paparazzi" (96), and the content of talking newsreels rapidly shifted "to what we call now 'soft' or even 'tabloid' news" (99).

Interviewing also becomes linked to opinion polling in the 1930s, the decade in which public opinion polling, for political and market research ends, became institutionalized.¹⁹ Indeed, opinion polling might be considered the most instrumentalized and narrow form of interview. And it was in this decade that (wo-)man-on-the-street interviews became popular. Public interest in what "normal" people think—and the interest of politically powerful institutions invested in the status quo—seems to have been sparked by pre-election anxieties or curiosity. What became the well-known and immensely popular "Vox Pop" radio program went on the air in 1932 right before the Roosevelt versus Hoover presidential election. Random people on the street were queried about their political opinions using a microphone hung on a cord through the window of the hotel room where the studio was housed. These on-the-street radio interviews then expanded to other topics, becoming a nationally syndicated radio show by the mid 1930s.²⁰ By 1934 such on-the-street interviews had become so familiar that they could even be convincingly faked in newsreel films. Such was the case of MGM's infamous two-part series *California Election News* in which supposedly spontaneous (but actually carefully scripted) interviews became part of what historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. called "the first all-out public relations Blitzkrieg in American politics," Hollywood's concerted attack on leftist gubernatorial candidate Upton Sinclair (Mitchell 369ff). A supposed cross-section of California—manual workers, unemployed migrants, housewives, businessmen, lawyers, and immigrants—are asked by the "Inquiring Cameraman" who they are voting for in this deft piece of negative propaganda. The "spontaneous answers," performed as convincing depictions of natural speech, very subtly suggested the dangers of a Sinclair victory. Sinclair lost the election. Five years later, Pathé released a newsreel in which supposedly random people are asked whether or not they think the United States should go to war. In this cleverly edited piece, individual responses are reduced to shorter and shorter sound bytes that end with a resounding and clearly directive "no."²¹ Carefully constructed and quasi-musical, this collage of fourteen responses becomes a clearly biased representation of "public opinion" rather than an

¹⁹ The American Institute of Public Opinion was founded by George Gallup in 1936.

²⁰ A few years later "Vox Pop" became a quiz show (luring people to answer questions with the promise of a prize) sponsored by corporations, and the interviewee/contestants were pre-selected and prepared for their role, rather than spontaneously found on the street.

²¹ The reel is included in Frank Capra's film *Prelude to War*, where it is preceded by an introduction: "The confusion in our way of thinking is apparent in this slice of public opinion as it appeared in Pathé News in 1939." I would wager that this "slice" of opinion is far more manufactured than found.

attempt to actually engage in any significant manner with the pros and cons of entering the war. Clearly, in American newsreels, the “candid” interview had become a useful device to *manipulate* opinions as much as a means to investigate those opinions. The interview format and its scripted performance had become an effective tool of propaganda.

One final approach to interviews worth noting is that of the *March of Time* news magazine series.²² Developed from the *March of Time* radio broadcasts and beginning production in 1935, it had more regular viewers than other films, reaching over twenty-two million viewers in 9,800 theaters by the end of 1937 (Fielding 185). The radio broadcast was originally conceived as an advertisement for the printed *Time Magazine*, and sketches *illustrating* news items were performed by professional actors trained “to mimic exactly the voice patterns, inflections, and characteristics of the figures impersonated” (Fielding 14). In other words, *March of Time* radio never went out to solicit or record the speech of well-known or political figures; instead they recreated or approximated it and performed it. This was considered so normal that no one except for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, when he received complaints about what he had “said” on the program, is known to have objected (Fielding 15).²³ And the filmed *March of Time* did the same, combining actual footage of public figures in public with staged scenes. Dramatically presenting a handful of news items in 20 minutes every week, these newsreel magazines were considered “pictorial journalism,” and producer Louis de Rochement adopted a cinematic story-telling format mixing re-enactments and impersonations of famous people—including Hitler, Huey P. Long, and many others—with footage of the actual figures. Although actor-doubles regularly impersonated important figures, some of the subjects agreed to re-enact, or simply act, scenes written by the newsreel producers for the camera. For example, both Louisiana Senator Huey P. Long and New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia performed scenes written by *March of Time* staff.

While performing sync sound scenes as if they were real, *March of Time* had an aversion to live interviews, and de Rochement forbade all direct address to the audience, according to Raymond Fielding (80). In fact, whenever statements were made or opinions given, these were presented in acted scenes that placed speech in a dramatic context, such that a character would always speak their lines *to* someone and never solely to the camera. For example, a “secretary” or “reporter” or “crowd” would be addressed, and then shown in reverse shot. Aside from the diegetic logic of such an approach, this strategy permitted the careful control that gave the *March of Time*, both the radio program and the newsreel, its highly-crafted dramatic flow. Nothing was unscripted. Spontaneous, off-the-cuff

²² For Raymond Fielding it was the *March of Time*, and not the far less seen New Deal or independent films, that “successfully introduced and established the documentary format for film audiences in the United States” (73). However, the filmmakers working in the documentary traditions discussed later in this chapter—the British documentary movement and the American New Deal documentary of the 1930s—were not, as far as I know, influenced by the *March of Time* and instead actively differentiated themselves from all things “newsreel.”

²³ After a number of such complaints from the White House, *March of Time*, afraid that others might begin to object as well, stopped impersonating Roosevelt at all in 1937 (Fielding 15).

speech and the give and take of actual dialogue was considered inherently messy and eluded control. While in print journalism it may be simple to paraphrase, elide, reorganize and edit in a manner that is imperceptible to a third party, in an audio-visual recording medium such manipulation becomes much more complex and obvious. The well-known, invisible “Voice of Time,” as Cornelius Westbrook Van Voorhis’ distinctive voice with its idiosyncratic syntax came to be known, could then interpret and wryly comment on this carefully orchestrated world, a world in which speech was welcome only when scripted.

Documentary films of this time didn’t seem to want to have anything to do with interviews either, spontaneous or scripted. Perhaps it was partly because the movietone newsreels so quickly took up sync sound interviews that documentary filmmakers first eschewed them, instead opting for much more complex soundscapes without the use of sync sound. Technological difficulties and cost of shooting sync outside a studio certainly contributed to this situation; however, aesthetic principles and the newly named documentary’s need to distinguish itself from newsreels were probably even more significant. For John Grierson, one of documentary’s first spokesmen and the leader of the British documentary movement of the 1930s, to be considered documentary, a film had to distinguish itself from the newsreel (“just a snip-snap of some utterly unimportant ceremony” and “purely journalistic”), and also from the “lecture film.” Documentary was defined as not just “the plain (or fancy) descriptions of natural material” but rather the “arrangement, rearrangements, and creative shapings” of such material (Grierson 35-36).

Although interviews, considered a technique associated with the lesser newsreel, were not to be found in early documentaries, many other voices and sounds were. Scholars such as Charles Wolfe and Jonathan Kahana have noted that while early sound documentaries are usually described in terms of their simple “voice-over” or “voice-of-god” commentary tracks, these terms do not do justice to the range and spectrum of vocal strategies used in the films of the 1930s and ‘40s. As Wolfe points out, early sound documentaries exhibit influences from two distinct vocal traditions: the *lecturer format* of early travelogue films (silent films shown with the lecturer speaking to the side of the screen) and the more dramatic strategies of *vocal re-enactment* with roots in radio drama. The latter might include a single narrator who speaks for voiceless figures, a number of different voices expressing the thoughts of characters, or dialogue exchanged across different levels of narration (154). These voices might give context and facts from outside the diegetic space of the images, but they could also serve to create character subjectivity for those seen on the screen, by conveying their emotions, telling us what they think, or speaking in their voice. They could foreground collective emotions and attitudes or slide between omniscient and localized knowledge and back again.

Indeed, most American and British documentary films of the 1930s used sound design in extremely creative ways and experimented with “poetic or colloquial language, diffused authority, and polyvocalism” (Wolfe 162). Poets or writers were also solicited to write commentaries (for example W.H. Auden in Britain, Lewis Mumford in the U.S.), and well-known composers (Benjamin Britten in Britain, Virgil Thompson and Aaron Copland in the U.S.) were commissioned to compose scores. Intricate sound montages of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, almost in the spirit of ‘*musique concrète*,’ were also

created for certain films. For the British documentary movement led by John Grierson, sound design was considered a crucial element in the “creative treatment of reality.” Alberto Cavalcanti’s contributions to the soundtracks of *Granton Crawler* (Grierson, 1934) using non-synchronized and thus apparently collective voices of the seamen, and his innovative and complex sound collages for *Song of Ceylon* (Wright, 1934) and *Coal Face* (Cavalcanti, 1935) are powerful examples of this evocative and atmospheric early use of sound. In the United States a film like *The City* (Van Dyke and Steiner, USA, 1939) also had a remarkable soundtrack that combined both expository and poetic voice-overs, a score by Aaron Copland, and a complex collage of urban sounds. In the first and last sections, an informative and rhetorically persuasive voice-over accompanied by music links idyllic rural (part one) with planned suburban living (part four). But in the middle sections a radical shift occurs. In the second part the tone, diction, language and grammar of the voice-over shifts as if to embody the collective voice—the “we”—of the poor steel workers who we see on the screen,²⁴ Shifting yet again, the third part—as if to give “voice” to the chaotic city it depicts—consists of a collage of non-verbal sounds in the Cavalcanti tradition conveying the life, speed, rhythms, and jarring distractions of the crowded urban life that the film ostensibly denigrates. Despite—or because of—this elaborate use of sounds, language, and voice, the inclusion of interviews wasn’t a consideration. The voices of significance were those that were omniscient (presenting the situation from the outside) or collective, and thus able to eloquently articulate the struggles of the working or disenfranchised classes as a whole. Documentary scholar Paul Arthur interprets such stylistic (and sonorous) heterogeneity of American New Deal films as signifying “plural authorship” and a “trope of individual freedom within a unifying consensus of social directives” (113). The incorporation of individual and idiosyncratic voices and perspectives would therefore have been either redundant or counterproductive given the emphasis on social collectivities. When actual interviews finally were used, becoming a central element in the British film *Housing Problems* (Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton, 1935), a debate about their aesthetic and social value ensued.

Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton’s *Housing Problems* has become *the* paradigmatic “interview film” of the 1930s, cited, referred to, and screened in any history of documentary text or course. However, this seminal film was actually part of a group of lesser-known British films experimenting with the inclusion of subjects’ voices. Anstey and Elton had both worked for John Grierson, and the Grierson documentaries—in addition to distinguishing themselves from newsreels and lecture films—used a gamut of cinematic techniques including realistic re-enactments, Soviet-influenced cinematography, experimental sound montage, and expository and impressionist texts, all in the service of what Grierson sometimes called propaganda and sometimes citizenship. A significant aim of these films, explicitly discussed by Grierson, was to forge national (or imperial, as the case may be) identity through the depiction of British institutions and citizens *for* British citizens. Grierson was clearly concerned with providing visual representations of institutions such as the post office or unemployment exchanges; labor

²⁴ Unfortunately, the re-recorded soundtrack for the 2009 Naxos DVD release of *The City* is quite different in tone and language from the original reading by Morris Carnovsky in this section. As the old version is also included on the DVD, it is instructive to listen to them both.

such as that of state employees, fishermen, city planners, etc.; and the working class in general. However, the *actual* voices of this class were absent—just as they were in the United States during the 1930s—until Anstey and Elton began to try to include them in their films.

Four films made by Anstey or Anstey and Elton in the mid 1930s exemplify these attempts to record and incorporate the actual voices of their filmed subjects, both through on-screen (sync sound) and off-screen (recorded later and placed alongside other voice-over) speech. Both *Dinner Hour* (1935) and *On the Way to Work* (1936) include the voices of several subjects whom we see on film but with limited sync sound. *Housing Problems* and *Enough to Eat?* (aka *The Nutrition Film*, 1936) have significant scenes in which individuals speak either to the camera or to others in the film—this quickly became the most noted aspect of the works. Following the Grierson model, all four films focus on a specific problem or issue of contemporary society and explain either “how things work,” or how and why they *don't* work, but will work better in the future. Thus *Dinner Hour* explains the importance of gas and its distribution in the daily life of urban residents; *On the Way to Work* suggests a possible solution to the problem of massive unemployment in Britain; *Housing Problems* shows the deplorable living conditions in the slums and then explains how they are being improved; and *Enough to Eat?* is constructed as a tool of public education around the issue of malnutrition in England. While all four include omniscient narration which provides context and information to the viewer, they also incorporate embodied speech in ways that were innovative for their time. In doing so, they do what no other British or American films had up to that point: they distribute the power and authority to address the public across diverse voices. These include a mix of omniscient narrators who give voice to the film as a whole, administrators or experts who also comment on the question at hand, and those whose *lived experience* is most relevant to the problem or work being depicted. This redistribution of authority and the power of speech was clearly their aim.

Each film has two if not three distinct layers of address. Introduced first is the omniscient male narrator's voice, the explanatory “voice-of-God” that frames, controls and orchestrates the entire text. The film's subjects who have been “given” the opportunity to speak by the film/narrator are introduced subsequently. These are the voices of people who, for the most part, were entering the cinematic “public sphere” for the first time as *speaking* subjects. Their placement, function, and meaning are qualitatively different from the disembodied narrating voice. For instance, these subjects do not speak in the third-person. Using first-person pronouns, they are idiosyncratic in their references, syntax, and accents (unlike the invisible narrator) and marked by their social class. They relate to and contextualize what we see from a very different vantage point than the omniscient narrator, a vantage point based on personal and biographical experience. These voices emerge from the world we are seeing. While the invisible narrator—still functioning as the voice *of* the film—provides us with abstract, generalizable knowledge, the multiple voices *in* the film convey embodied, local, and lived knowledge.

Dinner Hour shows the crucial importance of gas to London's ability to feed the city. Narratively framed by a voice-over and dramatic scenes in the main gas works for the

city, the core of the film consists of scenes in five establishments where city residents and workers eat their midday meal. This film has three distinct types of voice: omniscient narrator, occasional sync-sound in dramatized scenes of the gas workers, and numerous examples of off-screen voices of subjects who work in the institutions that are preparing and providing food to the city residents. Anstey's later *On the Way to Work*, produced by Rotha's Strand Film Company and made with the Ministry of Labour's Training and Instructional Centres, adopts similar strategies with the omniscient male narrator framing the film and providing the context for the problem—in this case that 33% of the labor force on the Northeast coast of England was unemployed—and the government's attempts at a solution. Woven throughout the piece, this omniscient explanatory voice is periodically intercut with observed or enacted sync-sound scenes of training programs and other events narrated by the off-screen voices of those we see on the screen.

For many of the workplace scenes in *Dinner Hour*, Anstey and Elton recorded those we see on screen in a recording studio as they are watching the finished film. Thus their words *become* embodied as we associate them with the person on the screen; we see them working while on the sound track they are telling us (in off-screen voice) anecdotes or providing details about their work. Even though this speech is not embodied in sync-sound, it *is* a quasi-embodied form of speech—it refers back to a living flesh and blood speaker whom we see (and imaginatively attach the voice to) and who becomes an individualized character through his speech. This speech is full of deictic references that serve both to authenticate it and to bind it to the visual field in front of us. In *Dinner Hour* for example we are told by the baker “Here's the machine that makes the pie” and then he explains, in case we viewers are curious about the picture on the wall of this industrial kitchen, “This is Bill Holten, if you follow boxing.” *On The Way to Work* similarly mixes the omniscient narrator, sync-sound scenes and the off-screen voices of on-screen characters, for example: “This is where I teach the men to bend glass tubing for neon signs and to make glass apparatus for scientific work. [...] These three fellows are in their first week and are making pretty hard work of it,” or in another scene “We have four schillings a week pocket money to spend, and sometimes a body saves up to go into town.”

Films construct viewing positions for their audiences (de Lauretis, Nichols, Williams). In the documentary realm, they also construct *listening* positions. The selection of forms and sources of address deployed in a nonfiction work are a crucial aspect of this process. If one kind of viewing/listening position is constructed by an unchallenged omniscient narrator and another by a poetic but romanticized voice speaking in the name of a community or collective as in the Grierson produced *Night Mail* (1936) or the American *The City*, a quite different one is constructed when we hear embodied subjects, whose mortality we see, speak directly to us. While the former narrators seem to ask us to submit to their omniscient authority or lyrical vision like students listening to a teacher or enthusiasts to an orator, the latter engage us physically, affectively, not nearly as elegantly, but as fellow human beings in a shared world. In the British films by Anstey and Elton discussed here, the single disembodied voice has been replaced by panoply of voices, each with its own idiosyncrasies and areas of expertise, and some of those voices are directly related to the bodies we see on screen. These secondary voices represent local rather than universal knowledge, refer to specific events, speak from a first-person

perspective and give a different inflection to what is being shown than what the omniscient narrator or observational footage can convey. Our perspective shifts with the shift in voice, as we engage sensuously with the inflections, accents, and sonorous qualities of each, as well as with the small details and lived anecdotes that only they can provide. The entire world we see on screen is marked by their vocal inflections and the accounts they give.

Housing Problems, with significant segments of sync-sound testimony by poor men and women living in the slums of East London, sparked the most commentary from the press and other filmmakers. It was the first of the British documentaries to have a substantial amount of direct address to the audience from the film's subjects. Their sync-sound speech was shot and recorded in their own homes in the cramped slums. A social problem documentary, *Housing Problems* presents the problem of slums in gory details, and then praises the practical solution that was already in the process of being carried out by the local government housing authority. After the general problem is presented first by the omniscient narrator, then echoed by an invisible Councillor of the Housing Estate, a series of first-person statements are made to the camera presenting details and anecdotes of how the tenants experience living in the slum conditions. Finally a solution is offered, and a few more statements to the camera confirm the merit of that solution. What was unheard of at the time was that these first-person testimonies were presented on screen and addressed directly to us by the inhabitants themselves. Approximately six minutes of this eighteen-minute film are devoted to slum dwellers speaking to the cinema public.

The omniscient narrator of *Housing Problems* introduces the piece with "A great deal these days is written about the slums. This film is going to introduce you to some of the people really concerned." He then introduces Councillor Lauder, whom we never see speaking on screen, but whose expository voice is woven throughout the piece, directly commenting on problems and solutions. His comments are placed over illustrative shots of the slum area. It is the omniscient narrator who then introduces the tenants with phrases such as "And now for the people who live in the slums. Here is Mr. Norwood" or later "This is what Mrs. Hill has to say." Four slum dwellers speak directly to the camera about their housing conditions, recounting nightmarish anecdotes about rats, vermin, and babies being bitten, while the film occasionally cuts away to direct illustrations of their words. After the "solution"—new housing developments with windows that open, gas heating, and hot water—is presented by the Councillor's voice with numerous shots of architectural models and then the buildings themselves, more sync-sound testimonies are given by two people who now live in the new apartments but remember all too well the travails of living in the slums. After a brief on-camera comment by the new caretaker of the housing estate and final reflections from the voice of the Councillor ("Up to the present, only the fringes of the problem of the slums have been touched. However..."), the film ends with a brief montage sequence showing the slums again, with interwoven off-screen voices of the inhabitants discussing the bad conditions.

Although opinions regarding the merits and problems of Anstey's approach were mixed, the use of the interviews was clearly striking. In his favorable 1936 review, Graham

Greene contrasted the film with BBC radio documentaries full of “ironed-out personalities with censored scripts” (Corner 66). For the most part the speakers look directly at the camera in medium shots with a few medium close-ups and speak in two to three relatively long takes. Perhaps somewhat ill at ease or nervous in their cramped quarters that had been taken over by the camera and sound equipment, their speech nevertheless seems quite natural—probably practiced (Anstey denied any “full rehearsal”), but clearly not scripted. Contemporaries criticized a lack of any aesthetic in Anstey’s direction, but he claimed that the film’s sparseness was deliberate. Interviewed more than four decades later about the production, he said:

We narrowed ourselves down in *Housing Problems* to a very, very simple technique, which was open to us, at that time nobody had done it, and we gave the slum dwellers a chance to make *their own film*. [...] [W]hat we felt was ‘this is *their film* not ours. We don’t want any directorial intervention. Their story is strong enough by itself.’ (Cited in Sussex 68, emphasis mine)

Speaking about the framing, he says “we felt that the camera must remain sort of four feet above the ground and dead on, because it *wasn’t our film*” (Sussex 62, emphasis mine). Here it is not the naiveté or possible disingenuity of phrases such as “their own film” which interests me, but rather the possibility that this is how the film was experienced at the time, by Anstey and his contemporaries. In Anstey’s and others’ accounts, credit is always given to Ruby Grierson (John Grierson’s sister, who died during the war) for her crucial role in putting the film’s subjects, especially the women, at ease in front of the camera (Rotha 255, Sussex 64). Perhaps her significant intermediary role also contributed to the sense that the film didn’t belong to its director (Anstey) and producer (Elton).

Contemporary opinions of other filmmakers regarding *Housing Problems* were first ambivalent. Both Grierson and Paul Rotha initially took the film to task for its lack of aesthetic or dramatic power. However, in a 1938 essay entitled “Battle for Authenticity” Grierson wrote glowingly of its new approach to social problems:

I think the greatest advance of all came with two little films which, except among the far-seeing, went almost unnoticed. One was called *Housing Problems* and the other *Workers and Jobs*. ... These simple films went deeper than earlier films like *Drifters* and later films like *Night Mail* and *North Sea*. They showed the common man, not in the romance of his calling, but in the more complex and intimate drama of his citizenship. See *Industrial Britain*, *Night Mail*, *Shipyard* and *North Sea* alongside *Housing Problems*. There is a precious difference. *Housing Problems* is not so well made nor so brilliant in technical excitements, but something speaks within it that touches the conscience. These other films ‘uplift.’ *Housing Problems* ‘transforms’ and will not let you forget. (83-84)

Rotha, meanwhile, criticized *Housing Problems* as a “piece of journalistic reporting” (*Documentary* 131) that showed that British documentarians could not create “actor[s] out of natural material” (182). But he also credits the filmmakers as having

“let people tell their own story without prompting or rehearsal. [...] Miss Grierson’s ability to win people’s confidence gave a spontaneity and an honesty to the ‘interviews’ that contrasted sharply with the previous romantic method of handling people. Audiences were deeply moved by the film. Its grim authenticity shocked them. It brought them, perhaps for the first time in the cinema, face to face with unpleasant facts. The term ‘realist’ entered the documentary vocabulary.” (256)

Presenting the speech and embodied voices of the poor, each with their own name, accent, gestures, and story, was radical. Of course, these voices are still framed and contained by the higher authority of the Councillor and the omniscient narrator, and today the tone of the film feels patronizing. Yet the fact that these voices emerge at all, that they break into a discursive arena that had until then been reserved for individuals of a different class and background, is in and of itself remarkable. Grierson’s and Rotha’s description of the film as having something that “*speaks* within it” or that brings audiences “*face to face*” with facts suggests that viewers/listeners of *Housing Problems* suddenly felt confronted not with cleverly or beautifully wrought film rhetoric but by “real” faces and voices in the testimonies of the slum-dwellers. It “shocked” and “transformed” viewers/listeners precisely because of its lack of artistry and rupturing of previous romanticized codes of documentary representation and voice. Generating a response reminiscent of HD’s ecstatic comments on hearing “Lindy” ten years before, whom she suddenly “knows” in a new way, here it is not a well-known public figure that is heard for the first time, but individual embodied voices from a social class whose voices had never before been articulated on the screen.

Paul Rotha hints at these issues in his 1938 essay “Films of Fact and Fiction,” in which he discusses the need for more “human qualities” in documentary film and the problematic treatment of individuals in documentary work. Rotha notes that documentary filmmakers were often “embarrassed at the thought of handling their people as people and took the easiest way out by treating them as symbols (‘the man behind the machine’)” (Rotha 165). He felt that *Song of Ceylon* and *Night Mail*, while aesthetically pleasing and romantic films, largely ignored the place of the individual. However, for Rotha, although Anstey’s and Elton’s films took a radically different tack, they did not solve this problem either.²⁵ Concerning their work, he wrote:

The personal interview with camera and microphone, first used in Elton’s *Workers and Jobs* and Anstey’s *Housing Problems* in 1935, cut right across this impressionist style. Here were real human beings spontaneously speaking and gesturing right into the lens and microphone. This was not acting but normal behaviour far as the presence of the

²⁵ Rotha’s own films didn’t solve the problem of the individual either, although his works with subjects dramatically “enacting” situations was his attempt to do so.

camera would permit. Sociologically, this was important; the method deprived the documentary film of much of its cinematic quality. It became an illustrated lecture studded with personal interviews which provided ‘documentary’ evidence that the unseen commentator was speaking the truth. [...] [T]hese films contribute little to the fundamental problem of the dramatic presentation of human beings. (Rotha 165-166)

Rotha suggests that in the overall structure of the film, the “real” human beings serve merely as “evidence” of the unseen voices’ authority and truth. Here he anticipates Bill Nichols’ articulation of the problematic tension that continues to inform numerous debates in nonfiction film—that between the voice *of* the film itself and the various voices created *for* and featured *in* a given film.²⁶ While perceiving Anstey and Elton’s work as a critical, dialectical response to the overblown romanticism and collective heroism of other British films, he doesn’t find it to be a satisfactory response to the conundrum of how to create an unromanticized but “dramatic” and individualized documentary film subject.²⁷

Anstey’s next experiment with sync-sound address, *Enough to Eat?* (aka *The Nutrition Film*) (1936), didn’t grapple with this either. Instead it is a didactic but more complexly argued “lecture film” on malnutrition in contemporary England. The film does away with the omniscient narrator altogether and replaces him with a well-known flesh-and-blood public intellectual and incorporates a number of other voices. Biologist Julian Huxley (brother of Aldous) sits at a desk explaining the problem (which affects not only the poor) and its possible solutions, in three or four slightly different camera set-ups. Throughout the film, he speaks with authority, addressing us directly and discussing several of the images (including a number of charts and graphs), almost in the guise of a public lecture. In the middle of the film he literally introduces himself, saying: “I am the Secretary of the Zoological Society, and at the Zoo we have found the absolute necessity of giving the animals proper food. If we gave the chimpanzees a diet like that actually eaten by millions of people in this country, we should be rightly blamed for not keeping them in proper condition.” Huxley is a more compelling authority than a mere disembodied voice because of his well-known position in the British intelligentsia and at the Zoological Society—a fact that provides both rhetorical power and perhaps some comic relief given his association of humans with chimpanzees. In addition to Huxley, who is given the most screen time, there are other instances of embodied direct address to the audience in this film. However, these voices come mainly from authorities and public officials, those with expertise rather than lived experience. Thus we are introduced by

²⁶ By the “voice” of the film, I am referring to Nichols’ discussion in his seminal 1983 article “The Voice of Documentary.” Here he defines a film’s voice as “something narrower than style: that which conveys to us a sense of a text’s social point of view, of how it is speaking to us and how it is organizing the materials it is presenting to us” (18). Nichols criticizes filmmakers who rely on many interviews for sometimes deploying other voices primarily to abdicate responsibility for clearly articulating and assuming responsibility for their own.

²⁷ Rotha himself experimented with voice quite radically in his social documentaries of the 1940s. Omniscient narrators became “characters” and interacted with people seen on screen, and the latter frequently responded to this invisible voice (and camera) directly. None of his experiments, however, include spontaneous interviews as far as I know.

name to “two public health doctors,” the leader of the London County Council, and the Chairman of a Committee on Nutrition for the League of Nations. All address the camera directly, and their statements are marshaled and organized (visually as well as aurally) to strengthen the overall force of the film’s message.

In spite of the screen presence and direct address of all these powerful men, a contemporary advertisement for *Enough to Eat?* foregrounds “the little interviews with poor mothers struggling bravely to feed their families,” labeling these “the most searching things in the picture” (*World Film News* 6). These scenes with the mothers take up comparatively little space in the overall film, and the fact that they are its main selling point suggests the perceived public desire to hear these voices more than those of the loquacious experts. Unlike the testimonies of *Housing Problems* in which all embodied speakers directly address us, the women here (unlike the “expert” men) speak in scenes in which they are interviewed (by social workers on screen) about what they feed their families and how much they spend per day on food. The voices of these women, their accounts of difficult circumstances, and their manner of expressing themselves, is apparently what held appeal to audiences of the day. Although *Enough to Eat?* does not continue or develop the approach of *Housing Problems*, it is clearly a step in dismantling documentary film’s reliance on disembodied narration—whether soberly factual, lyrically romantic, or inspiring a collective identity—in favor of multiple embodied voices, each with its own function and authority. As in all the British films discussed here, these voices are carefully deployed to contribute to the overall argument and social message of the film.

Enough to Eat? gives up the omniscient disembodied narrator probably for the first time in a talking documentary; yet it retains clear control over the orchestrated voices and, in its didactic presentation, maintains even more of a class hierarchy than *Housing Problems*. Another, smaller, film, *Eastern Valley* (1937) produced by Rotha’s Strand Film Company and directed by Donald Alexander is more radical in its presentation of first-person testimonial voice. The film acquaints its viewers with a former mining community in South Wales now experiencing high levels of unemployment, poverty, and hunger. It mixes scenes with disembodied voice-over explaining the history and current economic situation of the valley with sync-sound enacted scenes of villagers discussing their dire situation and the effort to ameliorate it through the creation of agricultural cooperatives in the region. At the end of this fifteen-minute film, as if a coda, there is a cut to a medium shot of a woman in front of a dark background with smoke behind her. Middle-aged, dressed in dark clothes and missing a tooth, she stands and looks directly into the camera and begins to speak.

I am the wife of one of these men, my husband, through no fault of his own, has been unemployed 10 years. He used to work underground. Now he’s on the van delivering milk and bread to unemployed homes like ours. Now and then he loses half, it’s true, but I stand no nonsense from him. I would like you to know what the scheme has meant to me and the kiddies. Trying to raise three kiddies on 30 shillings a week is ridiculous.

As she speaks there is a cut to a truck delivering milk and later cuts to two children. After the second cut she is framed in close-up, and concludes with:

What's more, there are other men outside the valley who have asked for help to start schemes in their own places. But money doesn't grow on trees. Will you please help to make the scheme better and to start other schemes going, by sending money to Mr. Peter Scott, Abergavenny. Will you help us, please.

She begins to turn to one side, presumably looking to see her (off-screen) audience's reaction as the camera cuts. As if rendered silent by the appeal of this woman directly to the audience, the omniscient narrator doesn't return. Instead, the film goes to black with text on screen: "As Mrs. Wetton asks, will you send a donation towards Subsistence Production to Peter Scott, Abergavenny."

While one can see the scene above as foreshadowing the use (and abuse) of images and voices of victims of economic or political circumstances to solicit funds for social welfare projects, it also demonstrates that a number of British filmmakers were experimenting with incorporating voices of citizens not typically heard in the public sphere. Mrs. Wetton's brief address is deployed in *Eastern Valley* for obvious rhetorical purposes. Nevertheless, it is an exceptional form of address at this time, and its power is undeniable. Her direct physical and vocal engagement with the camera and with us beyond the lens feels genuine, idiosyncratic, and personal, even if it was perhaps planned and rehearsed. The world we observe in the film becomes palpable and tangible in a way it simply could not with only an omniscient narrator. Her appeal to us, the mention of the regularly spilt milk and the difficulties of raising her "kiddies," as well as the address of some of the men earlier in the film encourage us to listen to and experience the valley and its inhabitants through and alongside these very particular embodied voices and lives.

The fascination, ambivalence, and debate surrounding the use of early interviews in journalism and embodied direct address in newsreels and documentary films are instructive. In spite of residual skepticism among the public regarding the interview as practice, Shaw's claim that talking photographs bring people together in entirely new ways, HD's elation at the sudden sense of understanding imparted by the "intonations of voices," the "turns of wrists," as well as Grierson's opinion that hearing the voices of the poor would "transform" us, indicate early recognition that seeing and hearing someone address us from the screen could be a profound and moving experience. When sound became the norm in documentary cinema, there was a marked difference between hearing an authoritative or poetic disembodied narrator and seeing and listening to someone in-the-flesh speaking to us from their part of the world to ours. Politically driven newsreels and documentaries took advantage of this in a variety of ways as seen in several of the examples in this chapter. Individualized hearing/seeing which crossed class boundaries or included those who previously had not had a voice in documentary film or in the public sphere, accentuated the sense of rupturing or crossing of a representational divide. In spite of criticism concerning the aesthetic value of such works, greater "authenticity" and "realism" were attributed to them, and they elicited new types of listening and affective engagement than did documentary films without speaking subjects. Nevertheless, the

speaking individual retained a minor place in the documentaries of the 1930s. As Rotha suggested, romanticized symbols, classes, and collectivities were the subject positions of aesthetic and ideological interest in the films of the time (165). In fact, films structured around speaking subjects did not even begin to proliferate until the 1960s when sync-sound technology became more accessible and when listening to idiosyncratic perspectives and minority voices became a meaningful part of the cultural ethos.

2. FROM INTERVIEW TO TESTIMONY IN DOCUMENTARY STUDIES

Though ambivalent towards the filmed interview and subjects' direct address to of the audience, some early documentary filmmakers recognized in these voices, especially those of the poor, an enormous power to engage audiences. The following chapter examines a similar ambivalence towards the use of interviews in the field of documentary studies. Tracing shifts in the perception, analysis, and critique of the interview from the inception of documentary film history and theory—primarily in the work of Erik Barnouw and Thomas Waugh—to the more theoretical approaches of the present, I focus on the early debates and then on the analytical schema brought to bear on interviews by documentary scholar Bill Nichols and later Leger Grindon. It is only in the writing that emerged in the wake of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) that the term testimony becomes quite common in documentary film studies. Janet Walker's work on what she calls "trauma cinema" is relevant as it addresses a number of documentaries that incorporate interviews and personal testimonies, primarily about incest, the Holocaust, and more recently other collective political traumas.²⁸ Here I present an overview of what I have found to be the most insightful analytical frameworks and conceptual approaches for discussing moving image interviews and testimony and note certain areas that seem to have not yet been adequately theorized or explored.

A period of global political turmoil—including decolonization, the cold war, civil rights movements, and general social unrest—combined with new technological developments in portable 16mm sync-sound filmmaking (largely instigated and realized by the filmmakers themselves in 1959 and 1960) together created a surge in documentary film production in North America and Europe in the 1960s.²⁹ The majority of these films focused on depicting contemporary events, institutions, and attitudes. Many of the American "direct cinema" filmmakers of the 1960s refused the inclusion of interviews and instead preferred a "fly-on-the-wall" approach to filming in which the camera was rarely if ever acknowledged. For many, interviews and "talking heads" were associated with television which, according to documentary scholar Thomas Waugh, had relegated the interview "to its most pedestrian, digestible, reliably content-free ingredient" (247). In Europe, however, there was no such aversion to interviews; French documentarians in the early 1960s frequently adopted direct engagement with their subjects (through interviews or group conversations) as a central strategy of their films.³⁰

²⁸ See *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* and her more recent collection (co-edited with Bhaskar Sarkar) *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*.

²⁹ Those primarily associated with the development of the new portable sync-sound technology were Pierre Perrault in Canada, Robert Drew (and Drew Associates) in the United States, and Jean Rouch's collaborator Stefan Kudelski who invented the sync nagra.

³⁰ For instance in most of the work of Jean Rouch and Chris Marker made in the 1960s including *Chronique d'un été* and *Le Joli mai*.

Although many American observational filmmakers of the same era thought interviews produced only “bullshit” (Wiseman 74) not all agreed. A handful of explicitly political and experimental filmmakers used the interview to critique or confront the status quo, to provide an outlet for marginalized or countercultural voices, and to represent those who had not yet been represented by any mainstream media.³¹ By the 1970s the use of interviews in documentary films had become widespread. Bill Nichols attributes this partly to a frustration, on the part of filmmakers and audiences, with direct cinema, which was limited to observing the visible present and provided neither historical context nor broader perspective. The new proliferation of interviews seems also to be connected to the intensified cultural critique of mainstream media, political movements demanding—and creating—representations, the growth of identity politics as a mode of political organization, and a related surge of interest in the life-experiences of marginalized individuals and groups. North American documentaries of the 1970s and early 80s, according to Nichols, were dominated by “a host of political and feminist films [in which] witness-participants step before the camera to tell their story,” and such interview films had become the “central model for contemporary documentary” (“Voice” 17-18). An example of a seminal documentary of this type is the collectively directed *Word is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives* (1977) in which twenty-six gay and lesbian individuals speak about their very different experiences growing up, living, and surviving in an American heteronormative society.

Alongside the abundance of new documentaries of the 1960s and 1970s emerged historians and scholars devoted specifically to the history and analysis of nonfiction film. In 1974, in the first edition of the first history of nonfiction film, Erik Barnouw commented on the plethora of new films focused on “talking people.” This trend, he claimed, marked a radical change in the history of documentary; suddenly, speech was no longer the exclusive prerogative of “elitist spokesmen”(262). As he puts it, in the past all the “non-talking people had tended to be puppets, manipulated in the editing,” while in the new films, “talking human beings with their own, spontaneous talk [...] began to take control away from the director. It was to these people—including people whom the audience had not counted as part of *their* world—that viewers were reacting” (234-35). For Barnouw, these interview-based films “helped the lowly become articulate participants in society” (262), while also expanding the audience’s worldview by putting them in dialogue with those whom they had never “heard” before. Although Barnouw does not directly say so, he seems to be praising documentary film for bridging, through the screen, the effects of social segregation due to factors of class, race, geography, and ideology.

Also writing in the mid-1970s, scholar Thomas Waugh expressed ambivalence about the function of interviews, excoriating the way they were typically used by television and admiring them in politically motivated critical films. Suppressed by American observational filmmakers such as Leacock and Wiseman (for whom Waugh shows

³¹ I referred to some of these in chapter one, specifically Emile de Antonio’s work in the 1960s and 1970s, Shirley Clarke’s *Portrait of Jason* (1969, an arresting and controversial feature length interview with a Black gay hustler), the Black Panther interview in Haskell Wexler’s semi-documentary *Medium Cool*, and the work of the Newsreel collectives discussed below in this chapter.

disdain), the interview was nevertheless a stable component of the European *cinéma vérité* and Canadian *cinéma-direct* traditions where it often served as a means of “personal revelation” (247).³² For Waugh however, the interview’s greatest power was as a tool of political analysis in investigative or critical films, such as those by Emile de Antonio—films in which speech, dialogue, and logic (!) play a vital role and engage their audiences in radical thought. De Antonio’s films use a wide range of interviews—from his own to appropriated ones, from those with famous or infamous political figures to those featuring ordinary bystanders. He treats the interviews quite differently depending on the film, sometimes subverting or mocking them through juxtaposition or visual counterpoint, sometimes presenting them with utter seriousness. Waugh doesn’t inventory or analyze the strategies he admires in de Antonio’s work or that of others. He is more concerned with the political content of the speech (that there *is* content) than with its function in the text.

Waugh does, however, note films he finds to be particularly powerful by virtue of the kinds of voices they solicit. Among these he includes de Antonio’s somewhat atypical *Rush to Judgment* (1967), which, made with journalist Mark Lane, challenges the Warren Commission’s findings on the assassination of President Kennedy, as well as Newsreel’s *Richmond Oil Strike* (1970) and *The Woman’s Film* (1971).³³ These films show that

not only can non-participant, non-expert subjects offer profound, illuminating discussion of the social forces which affect their lives, but *their testimonies alone, by virtue of their very existence*, can themselves in the specific socio-political context of their lives constitute the basis of a moving and provocative aesthetic/political experience. (248 [emphasis added])

At the same time, he criticizes films that turn history, and the testimonies through which such history is articulated, into something “therapeutic or cathartic, [or], worse still, a paradigm of the moral relativity of human acts” (257). He includes Marcel Ophuls’ *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969) and Peter Davis’ *Hearts and Minds* (1974) in this blanket condemnation. But what is it, for Waugh, that makes a testimony “a moving and provocative aesthetic/political experience” versus something that is merely “therapeutic or cathartic?” The Newsreel films Waugh mentions distinguish themselves through (1) their commitment to documenting and endorsing social change, (2) their speaking subjects’ engagement in some kind of political transformation, and (3) the speaking subjects’ largely (though not exclusively) working class or non-privileged backgrounds. Although one can’t imagine Waugh condoning Barnouw’s paternalist claim that interview documentaries help “the lowly become articulate participants in society,”

³² “Personal revelation” seems a bit reductive. Certainly in the French films of the period, the interviews are often personal but *also* political, first in the issues they address (the Algerian war, racism, social inequality, consumerism, and the like) and secondly in how they are orchestrated and juxtaposed in the films as a whole.

³³ Newsreel was a group of independent filmmakers, photographers and media makers who, in 1967, formed a loose collective to document events that were not being covered by the mainstream media, including anti-war demonstrations, women’s issues, anti-imperialism, and other political topics.

Waugh's appreciation for the potential power of interviews and testimony is not *so* dissimilar from Barnouw's. For Waugh the context and political content are crucial elements, but both men find something inherently revelatory and significant in gaining access to the speech of others not typically represented in the media, mass and otherwise.

One of the most passionate defenders of interviews and testimonies in films of this period is feminist filmmaker and scholar Barbara Halpern Martineau. Writing in the early 1980s, like Barnouw and Waugh she notes the ubiquity of 'talking heads'—especially on television and in educational documentaries. Acknowledging that the term 'talking heads' had become a "term of dreary opprobrium among 'hip' film people" (257), she nevertheless defends the usage of interviews and subjects directly addressing the camera as developed by feminist and third-world activist filmmakers. Countering contemporary psychoanalytic film theory's critique of cinematic realism and the perils of identification,³⁴ she writes:

The first concern of the Movement was simply to put women, recognizable to us as women, in the picture. The first independent women's groups grabbed camera or video and went to talk to women about their lives and experiences. In this context, where what the media offer is only misrecognition, the stage of recognition of, and identification with, the category women... cannot simply be left out in a rush to the total deconstruction of all representation and identification whatsoever. (254)

One cannot reductively equate all talking heads. It is the way in which they are filmed and the political ends to which they are used that matters, but critics, Martineau claims, had never made distinctions. She, however, differentiates between talking heads used to express authoritative expert opinions and those articulating personal experience. She distinguishes between a speaker addressing the filmmaker (on or off-screen), a speaker in candid discussion with others, and a speaker who addresses the audience directly via the camera. She suggests the nature of the relationship between filmmaker and subject (and between these two and the audience) affects the nature of the representation, emphasizing the importance of a commitment to shared goals. "Early women's liberation cinema used images of women talking in close-up to validate the concept of self-expression, a crucial concept for women used to being objectified, interpreted, eroticized and generally discounted by the mass media" (258).

Although Martineau says she finds "prescriptive theorizing about what feminist documentarians should or shouldn't do worse than useless" (260), it is clear where her interests and allegiances lie. Discussing a handful of films from the late 1960s through the early 1980s, she comments on the power of direct address to the camera, especially in political advocacy films, because such address can be "experienced by the audience as *sharing*" (265 [emphasis added]). While she incorporates direct address to the camera in her own practice, such address is neither candid nor spontaneous. In *Heroes* (1983) she

³⁴ In other words, the predominant Marxist, psychoanalytic, and feminist film theories of the 1970s that denigrated the cinematic pleasures associated with realist/classic narrative and identification with either a male or apparatus gaze and with characters on the screen.

provided her subjects with the questions well ahead of time so that they could reflect on, and consciously choose how to formulate, their answers. The responses were then intercut with unrehearsed footage chosen together with her subjects. Another approach she advocated included having subjects rehearse an account several times, watch video recordings of the rehearsals, and then collaboratively decide how to perform the account most effectively for the film camera. Key here is acknowledging that spontaneity has no higher truth-value than conscious performance, and that collaborative planning of cinematic address can be extremely productive and empowering to the subject speaking on camera.

For Martineau, talking heads can serve as an enormously important empowering device, “representing people who represent themselves, thereby suggesting that we are all capable of representing ourselves, of interpreting and acting upon our own interpretations of reality” (263). Most of the films she discusses and admires use speaking subjects who challenged existing cultural norms of (male) authority. “By empowering ordinary people to speak as experts, they question a basic assumption of dominant ideology, that only those already in power, those who have a stake in defending the status quo, are entitled to speak as if they know something” (263). At the same time, she does not fetishize spontaneity,³⁵ choosing to work with subjects to consciously and deliberately author and perform their address to future audiences.

Bill Nichols’ seminal article “The Voice of Documentary” was published around the same time as Martineau’s essay in Waugh’s anthology on documentary. It is here that Nichols notes that films structured around talking heads had become the model and norm of contemporary documentary. He delineates a four-part typology of documentary “voice” that includes interview-based direct address alongside: the voice-of-god expository mode; observational cinema; and the self-reflexive mode.³⁶ Nichols sees the turn toward documentary interviews as a clear response to the limitations of observational cinema like that of Leacock or Wiseman. Recognizing that “neither can events speak for themselves nor can a single voice speak with ultimate authority,” while “[i]nterviews diffuse authority” (265), filmmakers sought others to speak for or alongside them. Critical of this trend, Nichols laments that the reliance on interviews obfuscates the position of the filmmaker since the voices *in*, and the textual voice *of*, the film are rarely differentiated. In addition, most interview documentaries of the time incorporated no analysis of how the knowledge presented by the interviewees—or the documentary itself—was constructed. It was the rare film—the work of Emile de Antonio and Connie Field’s *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980) are his examples—that framed interviews and spoken testimonies in a larger social and political context rather than

³⁵ As Trinh Minh-ha would write a few years later in *Women, Native, Other*, spontaneity “does not guarantee more authenticity than stereotypy” (36).

³⁶ In “The Voice of Documentary,” voice is defined as “something narrower than style: that which conveys to us a sense of a text’s social point of view, of how it is speaking to us and how it is organizing the materials it is presenting to us” (18). It is important to note that Nichols’ categories of documentary voice, or style as he later calls it, change and multiply over the years; one must read him across texts, for his typologies—of hermeneutic rather than absolute value—constantly transform. While critics may read any one of these as authoritative and definitive, those who have read Nichols over the years know that they are approximations that constantly measure themselves against a shifting reality.

simply putting them forward as expressions of truth. Most interview films “naively endorse limited, selective recall. The tactic flattens witnesses into a series of imaginary puppets conforming to a line” (269). While Barnouw designated as “puppets” subjects who *didn't* or weren't allowed to speak in films, a decade later Nichols argues that interviewees and witnesses are the puppets, because they—if not during filming, at least in the editing room—are just as manipulated by filmmakers who carefully select and regulate their speech and placement in the overall text.

Nichols is either uninterested in or skeptical of the individually empowering qualities that Martineau praised in her own and other feminist films of the period. He criticizes the advocacy film *Word is Out* for its less than dialectical sense of history, its idealized sense of character, and its clichéd *mise-en-scène* (26-27).³⁷ Yet one must acknowledge that such films *did* play an important cultural and political role in challenging stereotypes and representing diversity. In John Beverley's terms, it is the truth *of the other*—in this case those who agree to speak in *Word is Out*—that must take priority over truths *about the other* in the “testimonio” of marginalized groups. For Martineau, an important function of the advocacy films of the 1970s and 1980s was to engage subjects and audiences in the praxis of “self-expression.” Nevertheless, deeper questions of *how* self-expression occurs, *which self* is amenable to expression, and *in whose language* this expression takes place, are not explicitly addressed by the film scholars above. For Martineau (and for Barnouw and Waugh to some degree) a film's modeling of speech, self-representation, or personal or political transformation suffices to make talking heads a tool of empowerment. It is enough if a film can set up “the preconditions for useful dialogue—and action—towards social change” (Martineau 271).

Martineau raises one of the most persistent concerns when analyzing the use of interviews, testimony and direct address. She asks how one judges when subjects are treated as true subjects—as “centers of consciousness with accessible points of view”—or as objects, “their images [and we presume words] manipulated to illustrate certain ideas or attitudes alienated from their own consciousness” (255). While this issue of how interviewees are positioned in a given film is crucial, her definition of subject and object positions feels reductive, and filmed interviews and testimony often fall in some murky in between space. One might also question the ideological implications of including/constructing only subjects with “accessible points of view.” This would certainly preclude a true diversity of voices (whether cultural, racial, class, or ethnic diversity) and suggests the inherent power dynamic that defines the relationship of filmmaker to subject since it is the filmmaker's idea of audience that would define what is “accessible.” In addition, an interviewee need not be used to illustrate attitudes “alienated from their consciousness” to become an object; someone representing a position they believe in can still be objectified. Reductive or reified images of people can

³⁷ With regard to the clichéd *mise-en-scène*, he refers to the use of bedrooms and bucolic outdoor settings. Nevertheless, there are also offices, dance studios, and a variety of workplaces and living rooms featured. While this film does feel dated (and sometimes clichéd) in presentation and *mise-en-scène*, it also imparts the palpable sensation that a number of participants are speaking “out” to a wide-ranging public for the first time. As in John Beverley's claim for testimonio literature, individual voices are breaking into a public sphere that was previously closed to them.

be the fruit of the best of political intentions, and what one labels and expects of “subjects” and “objects” shifts with history and over time.³⁸ When images and testimonies become part of a larger text, it is not always so obvious to separate “subjects” from “puppets,” to separate what is “just representation” from what is “just exploitation” (see Martineau 255). This question of what happens to the speaking human being when positioned in a larger text not of their own making is a crucial one.

In the early 1990s Bill Nichols takes on the question of power relations and the positioning of (and control over) filmed interviewees in his comprehensive theoretical analysis of documentary film *Representing Reality*. For Nichols, the interview is inherently a form of hierarchical discourse. Invoking Foucault’s work on testimony and patient-client interviews, he links the interview to interrogation, to the confessional, and to other “technologies of knowledge” used in fields such as medicine, anthropology, television, journalism, education, and the law. “Most basically, the interview testifies to a power relation in which institutional hierarchy and regulation pertain to speech itself” (*Representing* 50). Examining the relationship of techniques of filming and framing interviews to the autonomy granted to these interviewees in documentary films, his attitude remains skeptical. With none of Barnouw’s, Martineau’s, or even Waugh’s qualified enthusiasm for the politically empowering possibilities of the ‘talking head,’ Nichols seems to suggest that all testimony and interviews (except when the result of spontaneous conversation) divest the interviewee of any autonomous voice.

Nevertheless, Nichols does distinguish between the function of interviews in what he now calls “interactive documentaries” and in expository documentaries.³⁹ When interviews contribute to the latter, they “serve as evidence for the filmmaker’s, or text’s, argument,” but when they contribute to the former, they “serve as evidence for an argument presented as the product of the interaction of filmmaker and subject” (48). This is quite similar to Martineau’s dichotomy between subjects and objects; in interactive films, speakers are “subjects,” in expository films they function as instrumentalized “objects.” In the newly named interactive mode, “the dynamics of social exchange between filmmaker and subject become fundamental to the film” (49). However, such an interactive social exchange takes place *outside a formal* interview structure—thus it is no longer an interview *per se*. In these films “the filmmaker and social actors engage one another as peers, taking a position on the common ground of social encounter, presenting themselves as social actors who must negotiate the terms and conditions of their own interaction” (49).⁴⁰

³⁸ For example, in a film like *Housing Problems* (1935), the film’s rhetorical positioning of the slum dwellers, who constitute the majority of the voices in the film, provoke very different reactions—for some they are powerful subjects, for others, mere objects.

³⁹ This new “mode” of documentary film (mode being similar to what he had earlier called voice) allows him to distinguish between what he calls exploratory or evidentiary interviews, depending on the mode of the film they are conducted for.

⁴⁰ Rouch and Morin’s *Chronique d’un été* or Shirley Clarke’s *Portrait of Jason* can be thought of as examples of films in which there is, at times, a *peer-like* relationship. It is worth noting that even in these,

Nichols sees the link between technique and power made manifest through what he perceives as distinct “spatio-temporal configurations” of testimony and interviewee. He constructs a taxonomy of five models of interview, differentiated by the degree of control of the interviewer/filmmaker and participation of the interviewee/subject.

(1) A *conversation* is defined as exchange without predetermined course or agenda. This seems to be the only category in which there might be a peer relationship and genuine negotiation. Conversations fall in the interactive mode of documentary.

(2) The *masked interview* occurs when a topic is “implanted” for filmed subjects to discuss (without the presence of the filmmaker).

(3) A *dialogue or ‘pseudo-dialogue,’* occurs between an interviewer and interviewee—pseudo because the interviewer may “*appear* at the service of the interviewee whose speech he or she actually controls” (52).

(4) The *common interview* serves the specific agenda of the film and filmmaker. Its aim is to solicit information that is then framed by the film’s argument, to which it contributes. It is this model that normally requires subjects to provide a frontal view of themselves and generally discipline their bodies to oblige the camera’s requirements regarding depth of field and angle of view. The individual identity, autobiographical background, or idiosyncratic qualities of those interviewed become secondary to an external referent: some aspect of the historical world to which they can contribute special knowledge (53).

(5) The *pseudo-monologue* occurs when the filmmaker has disappeared visually, and often aurally, leaving the speaker-subject to directly address the camera. The sole presence of the subject-as-witness and the diegetic absence of the filmmaker mimics oral history. The *pseudo-monologue* then “appears to deliver the thoughts, impressions, feelings, and memories of the individual witness directly to the viewer” thus making the viewer “the subject of cinematic address, erasing the very mediations of filmmaker/subject/viewer that the interactive mode accentuates” (54).

Nichols’ categorization of the various possible visual configurations of interviewee and interviewer clearly articulates the tension between what we see on a screen and the (in)visible power dynamics framing and controlling not only our vision but the subject’s speech. However, the one-to-one correspondence he draws between each configuration and a filmmaker’s level of control ignores a host of other factors. Other pre- and pro-filmic realities, strategies, and interactions may well have greater significance than those intimated by the spatio-temporal configuration on the screen. For instance, the relations established before any shooting begins will have an enormous impact on how power plays itself out in a film, and a pseudo-monologue can be the product of a long collaboration between filmmaker and subject as in Martineau’s earlier examples.

there is a visible or audible power dynamic at work among the characters and filmmakers whether on or off-screen. However, this dynamic is not hidden from us as it usually is in conventional interviews.

Decisions concerning the site of filming and mise-en-scène as well as the cinematography—the positioning of the camera and its movement and gestures—both have enormous bearing on how the audience perceives the power differential, as does the way that an interview or testimony is cut, partitioned, elided, or has its temporal flow respected.

Nichols' categories also leave out the pre-existing socio-economic and cultural hierarchies that affect the power dynamic between interviewee and interviewer. For example, to present conversation—an ostensibly spontaneous exchange of speech—as inherently signifying a relation of “peers,” seems naive. This supposition ignores the extra-filmic historical and social context, the participants' relation to their respective language(s), and their socio-economic relation to each other. Even in conversation, those who are not fluent in the speech of the masters are on different footing from those who decide, define, and control the language used. As Jean-Luc Godard said in a scathing critique of filmmakers who were claiming to give voice to the “voiceless” simply by providing them with a microphone: “Who can answer when he's had his mouth sewn shut? Who can answer?”⁴¹ One can't ignore the fact that so many filmed interviews over the years have featured those clearly positioned by society (and the films themselves) as either victims or experts. Whether in a situation of supposed “conversational” parity or in a “common interview,” the structural inequalities and differences of the “real” world must also be taken into account. Can mouths be cleaved open just because a microphone is placed in front of them? And if so, whose language will they (have to) speak? Indeed, a conversation can have greater power disparity than a pseudo-monologue. A pseudo-monologue, even when the speakers' “words [and] bodies seem held in the grip of the mise-en-scène,” (54) as Nichols puts it, *can* be the jointly negotiated product of both parties—but negotiated off-screen and well before filming. In fact, a pseudo-monologue—the form often taken by personal testimony—conceivably provides the speaker with much greater control and authorship than unrehearsed conversation. Certainly Martineau would argue this to be the case.

Nichols' analysis leaves out elements I consider essential in my investigation. With the exception of conversation, his typology emphasizes the filmmaker's (and the film's) hegemony over the people and voices recruited. Neither the push and pull of the filmed subject nor the role of the spectator come into play. The power relations he outlines seem impossible to challenge or subvert. But what about the role of our (the audience's)—and the filmmaker's—desire to listen to other human beings, to learn from and about them. Although Nichols eloquently dissects the epistophilia, or the desire to consume knowledge, at the heart of documentary elsewhere in *Representing Reality*, he never suggests that there may be a genuine and profoundly generous curiosity about the world and others. This curiosity, this desire to be addressed by and to listen to others, is not only about accruing knowledge, facts, or some form of cultural capital. I would counter Nichols' *epistophilia* with an *auraphilia*—a desire to listen, to be in the aural presence of

⁴¹ This scene is in Patrick Camus' *La politique et le bonheur* (1972) and included on the Criterion release of *Tout va bien* (Godard and Gorin 1972)

another human being who breathes,⁴² who speaks. Here Emmanuel Levinas' distinction of the said and the saying (discussed in chapter five) is relevant: if epistophilia is focused on a desire for the said, auraphilia would be focused on a desire for the saying. This saying does not signify the said, but signification itself; it is the "condition for all communication," "exposure to another" and "an abandon of the sovereign and active subjectivity" in an attitude of passivity and responsibility to another (*Otherwise* 48; 47).

Never claiming that his analysis of interview is exhaustive, Nichols limits his analysis of the filmmaker-subject relationship to only what is manifest in the "spatio-temporal configurations" on the screen. Extra-diegetic and pre- and post-production collaboration regarding the arrangement and performance of an interview or testimony remain outside the purview of his schema: if the "interactive" engagement isn't visible, it doesn't exist. Perhaps due to the ultimate futility of such a taxonomic project, only one scholar has taken up Nichols' analysis in order to critique it and propose his own. Claiming that Nichols' classification is "not effective" because an interview's "design" doesn't determine the degree of participation of subjects (6), Grindon proposes a "poetics" of the interview instead. In his analysis, the power differential between filmmaker and subject is no longer an axis of evaluation. The differences in interview styles are said to largely stem from which of two historical trajectories they emerge: the "French *cinéma vérité* tradition, with roots in ethnography, or the American political heritage, with ties to television journalism" (4). According to Grindon, the *vérité* approach used interviews to "reveal or expose" and tended to feature witnesses speaking from a position of vulnerability, while the American political films used interviews to "persuade," seeking out authorities who speak from a position of knowledge and whose words the filmmaker may confirm or contest (6).⁴³ This distinction echoes that made by Waugh in the 1970s and also parallels Nichols' interactive and expository modes, although Nichols never associates his interactive mode exclusively with a *cinéma vérité* tradition. Although it shouldn't be implied that the interactive mode and the French *cinéma vérité* tradition are not "political"—one need only think of the best known examples—it is true that they are not structured by a pre-ordained political message nor do their interviewees function primarily as fodder for the film's argument.⁴⁴

Like Michael Renov's earlier "Towards a Poetics of Documentary," Grindon's aim is "to submit aesthetic forms to rigorous investigation as to their composition, function and effect" (Renov 20). He suggests five analytical categories intended to provide a theoretical framework for considering and "designing" the cinematic interview:

(1) *Presence* connects the presence (or absence) of the filmmaker in the process of the interview with our perception of the interviewee's speech—Grindon notes

⁴² The origin of the term aural is in the Ancient Greek term for breath.

⁴³ Grindon's article, and especially his use of "revelation" versus "persuasion," refers to and is in dialogue with Michael Renov's "Towards a Poetics of Documentary."

⁴⁴ Take for example, two of the best known French documentaries of the early 1960s: Rouch's *Chronicle of a Summer* and Marker's *Le Joli mai*. One of the most clearly "conversational" documentaries ever made in the United States is Louis Hock's *The Mexican Tapes* (1986). All of these films are extremely political, both in terms of the subject matter they address, and in terms of their radical filmmaking strategies.

that a Ken Burns interview often seems like a lecture (because Burns is completely absent and speech becomes a monologue), a Michael Moore interview like a conversation, and an Errol Morris interview like a confession or therapeutic self-appraisal⁴⁵ (because his rare but open-ended questions let the speaker go on and on).

(2) *Perspective* encompasses the diegetic setting of the interview and its significance, as well as the framing and proximity of the speaker to the camera/filmmaker.

(3) *Pictorial context* applies to images used as cutaways (which can either illustrate and/or discredit the speaker's word) as well as to how frequently we see/hear the interviewee over the course of the film.

(4) *Performance* is concerned with the effect of an interviewee's visual presence—how “facial expression, hand gestures, body language and clothing” characterize the interviewee—as well as the subject's ability to perform on camera.

(5) *Polyvalence* relates to the filmmaker's approach to the authority of the interview—whether she explicitly affirms and/or undermines the interview through the questions and structure of the film or whether her approach is openly exploratory, leaving the film more ambiguous.

Grindon's categories are very useful in thinking about how to describe and plan cinematic interviews and testimony. His framework does not limit the analysis of the scene of address to what is visible in the final film, and it takes into account both pre-production and post-production practices, including how the interview is contextualized by other images and illustrated or undermined by the rest of the film. However, Grindon has evacuated all explicit discussion of power, politics, and the ideological consequences of adhering to certain cinematic conventions. While his five P's do allow us to describe contending approaches in more detail, the categories fail to provide a clear sense of what is at stake. What is at stake if the structure of an interview or testimony more clearly mimics a lecture, a conversation, or a confession? What is at stake in a filmmaker's deliberate emphasis or de-emphasis of specific aspects of “performance,” or in the choice of one kind of perspective over another? What gets lost in Grindon's framework is precisely what Nichols' revealed: issues of ideology, agency, and ultimately the responsibility of the filmmaker herself. And while he does address the “effect” of some of the aesthetic choices he brings to light, the scope of films he considers is quite narrow and the effects he mentions are quite superficial.

Taxonomic frameworks such as Nichols' or Grindon's are ultimately dissatisfying because they never are, and never can be, exhaustive. Perhaps it is more relevant to ask what new insight they provide. While Nichols illuminates the deeply embedded power structures at work in any form of question and answer and how these tend to be

deliberately obfuscated and hidden by the cinematic framing of interviews and testimony, Grindon expands what we think of as an interview by including elements such as choice of camera perspective, contextual editing, and the effects of performance. In other words, the interview is not merely images of talking people, but how these are performed, framed, contextualized, and deployed across the temporal body of the work in its entirety. Grindon's attention to "performance" allows him to consider things like facial expression, body language, and gesture, and to acknowledge that "the ability of a subject to perform for the camera may be a vital element in convincing the documentary filmmaker to pursue a project in the first place" (7-8).⁴⁶ In fact, documentarians frequently do "pre-interviews" for films, which serve partly as information gathering and partly as casting sessions, for just this reason.⁴⁷ And collaborative pre-production relationships based on like-minded goals (like those Martineau described) can have enormous impact on the performance of testimony on camera. Grindon rightly claims that a person's use of gesture can enhance what they say, that dynamic presence reinforces verbal declaration, and that attitude and facial expression can promote a sense of "getting the insider's truth from one who knows from experience" (9). However, he ignores the deeper political, psychological, and ethical ramifications of performance (both for the interviewee and the audience) beyond the somewhat clichéd attributes of intimacy, authority, or charisma. Several of these will be taken up in my subsequent chapters.

The more recently published *Documentary Testimonies: Archives of Global Suffering* (edited by Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker) is the first full volume to focus on *testimony* in moving image media. Testimony for Sarkar and Walker refers exclusively to accounts of trauma and suffering: it is the survivors and witnesses of historical cataclysms who testify. The anthology is comprised of close textual and ideological readings of specific works that include such testimony—from films to videos to websites—and analyses of institutions that produce or disseminate such works. In their introduction, Sarkar and Walker offer a complex definition of what they consider documentary testimony. It is:

the most intimate manifestation of the survivor-witness relationship and the product of intercalated institutions and practices; profoundly human and incontrovertibly cyborgian; a performative act continually in the making; and, at the level of methodology, both a circumscribed object of documentary studies and the gold standard for global human rights initiatives (5).

The various essays focus on first-person accounts of the Holocaust, Hurricane Katrina, the Cambodian killing fields, the Japanese enslavement of Korean women, the Rwandan genocide, and the displacement of Indian minorities by massive dam projects. Encompassing a wide range of scholarly approaches, the volume presents a nuanced, multi-faceted view of the possibilities and limitations of different aspects of what the

⁴⁶ A lucid discussion of the role of charisma and the influence of the star qualities of some documentary subjects in ethnographic films can be found in David MacDougall's "Complicities of Style" in *Transcultural Cinema*.

⁴⁷ See for example Zheutlin and the discussion of the complex "casting" process of the documentary *Rosie the Riveter*.

editors call the “testimonial apparatus.” This apparatus has an important “empowering function” in the face of state brutality or negligence (23) and is “at pains to enact, to bring into being, to perform, a world of hurt” (10). It has also become a part of a “global testimonial industry with its own market specifications” (24).

Janet Walker has body of scholarly work focusing on trauma and cinema and has written on a handful of documentaries that incorporate personal accounts of trauma, especially the Holocaust and incest trauma, in her book *Trauma Cinema*. In the introduction she describes trauma cinema as films or videos that “adopt catastrophe as their subject and formations of trauma as their aesthetic” (xix) and are “characterized by disturbance and fragmentation of the film narrative and stylistic regimes” (19). Many of the works she chooses to examine draw on mental processes and the psychology of trauma for aesthetic inspiration. While films of testimony are not her central focus here, she discusses a handful, noting that along with the use of home movies and reenactments, “direct address epitomizes the traumatic documentary’s historiographical practice” (90). Two cinematic strategies she identifies in “trauma documentaries” that are important in my own work are “situated testimony” and the incorporation of enactment or reenactment. Situated testimony refers to interviews conducted in locations that are relevant to and contextualize (both for the speaker and for us) the trauma being discussed, often where the traumatic events of the past took place, while directed enactments or reenactments of past events are used in order to “reactivate” those very events, both for the witnesses who are speaking and for us as viewers.⁴⁸

These latter two strategies, when used as a crucial element in or complement to spoken testimonies, became a part of documentary vocabulary largely through the impact of Lanzmann’s *Shoah*. As Shoshana Felman, Annette Wieviorka and others have claimed, *Shoah* transformed testimony “into a work of art” (Wieviorka 83) and showed that film was a medium that expands—and I argue transforms—the capacity for witnessing (Felman 206). Not only does *Shoah* use the visual medium to reflect on the nature of eyewitness testimony as Felman says, it uses cinema to create *an entirely new medium* of testimony, one that incorporates not only words—words that accrue detail after minute detail under the barrage of Lanzmann’s questions—but also silence, song, voice, bodily gesture, landscape, *mise-en-scène*, cinematographic gesture, various forms of (re)enactment, repetition, and elaborate scenes of address. For Lanzmann, the aim was to “transmit” something of the Shoah and its palpable presence, rather than to have an audience feel that they could “understand” a past.⁴⁹ What is transmitted is not primarily factual or verbal, but a kind of embodied incarnation far beyond language that only an audio-visual medium can express. All his numerous and innovative strategies, many of which have been subsequently used by other filmmakers in other contexts and some of which will be explored in later chapters, were developed with this aim in mind. In so doing he established cinema as a unique and powerful medium of testimony with its own *cinematic* forms of address and aesthetic strategies.

⁴⁸ On this idea of “reactivating” the past in images of the present, particularly in Errol Morris’ *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) and Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, see Linda Williams, “Mirrors Without Memories” 17.

⁴⁹ For a critique of Lanzmann’s project and methods, and specifically his ideas about transmission and incarnation, see LaCapra.

This is not to say that Lanzmann was the only one who was experimenting with audiovisual forms of testimony and interview, but simply that *Shoah*, which had both theatrical and television distribution, made a mark on public perceptions of what testimony could be when in the medium of cinema. Nevertheless, perhaps because the subject matter made it exceptional among films of its day, its unique strategies were often left out of general discussions of interview techniques. Linda Williams (“Mirrors”) was one of the first scholars to compare its strategies of “reactivating the past” to those of a film (Errol Morris’ *Thin Blue Line* (1988)) that was *not* about the Holocaust or a genocide. Indeed, many of the ways in which *Shoah* explored and expanded ideas of cinematic testimony are relevant to the practice of a range of interviews and testimony in audiovisual form, as I hope to show.

The wide interest in personal testimonies has, of course, become a part of global television culture as well. If the growing use of talking heads in 1950s’ television was typically a way to embed and reinforce a producer’s position by distributing authority among a number of experts (Baker 8, 13), by the end of the century the “expert” had been replaced by the “witness,” and “‘This is what I live’ [took] the place of ‘This is what I think’” (Mehl 25). As media critic Dominique Mehl puts it, television talk shows and reality TV have erected a “monument to testimonies” (26). Calling the witness the “figurehead of neo-television,” she notes that most are recruited for their ordinariness and representativeness—“a public opinion in ‘flesh and blood’, ... clothed in reality, a production with which the average audience is tempted to identify” (21). This function of the television talk show witness, to confirm or reify a hegemonic version of public opinion, was already seen in some of the staged newsreels of the 1930s and 40s, although the late 20th century version doesn’t offer political opinions but instead is “commandeered to speak about their experience and real life” (20). This witness is encouraged to declare: “‘What I say is true because I have experienced it’” (22). Indeed for Mehl, the “promotion of the witness and the decline of the expert contribute to a profound transformation in the public sphere” (24).

This juxtaposition of the expert (one who has the expertise to speak) and the “witness” (one who speaks of her own experience—at least in Mehl’s use of the term) embodies a deep-seated tension that underlies the history of the interview since its inception as a popular rhetorical practice in various media. Those who are asked or authorized to speak, to address a public, do so based on either their *expertise* (I include public figures such as politicians or celebrities in this category) or their lived *experience*. Those who speak primarily based on lived experience are typically sought out because they belong to a collectivity or minority that is either in “need” of representation (according to the interviewer or to the collectivity itself) or because they are able to illuminate—or simply mirror and/or flatter, if we take Mehl’s examples into account—a swathe of experience/history that some part of society is seeking to engage with. Since the 1980s, when the “age of testimony” became conscious of itself as such, the term testimony (outside the courtroom) has typically been reserved for those who speak not as expert witnesses but as eye- (and more pertinently full body-) witnesses.

Notwithstanding Mehl’s damning and perhaps hyperbolic examples from television, film and media scholars as a whole have shown critical ambivalence to both interviews and

testimony. The distinction between those interviewed for their expertise or for their experience is of import, as is whether the interviews are the primary focus of the work or whether they are secondary to the film's rhetorical argument. While the experts are often deployed as tools or puppets in the effort to "persuade" viewers, those whose experiences or lives are the primary focus *may* retain the status of "subjects." Clear distinctions between these categories, however, are not always so easy to determine, and interviews and testimonies are used—and interpreted—for an array of shifting ideological purposes, as I hope my sporadic foray into documentary history has shown. While one testimony or interview empowers another simply exploits; while one expands the possibilities of social and individual expression, another extolls cathartic emotionality at the expense of analysis; while one challenges hegemonic regimes of truth, another just endorses selective recall.

Nevertheless, throughout the history of the interview, there have been those euphoric moments in which voices, histories, or modes of existence suddenly erupted into a public sphere that previously ignored them. Such interviews and testimonies create new possibilities of engaging with a shared social world and across the multiple, diverse subjectivities that constitute it. Throughout their history, filmed interviews have been said to have the power to "move" (Grierson, Waugh); "provoke" (Waugh); "shock" (Rotha); "transform" (Grierson, Felman); or "share" with others (Martineau). Because testimony can transform our sense of the world, of what exists, and of what is possible, the political and ethical stakes of films of testimony are significant. They articulate histories that haunt and inform our geo-political or psychic topographies; they elucidate no longer or barely visible realities that only embodied testimony can make palpable. And they do so through images, voices, gestures, words, and the films that shape and offer these to us.

Up until now, scholars have paid little attention to the specifics of cinematic testimony's reception. In a discussion near the end of *Representing Reality*, Bill Nichols comments that the inclusion of interviews and voices of witnesses in documentary films can approximate a representation of subjectivity and interiority. Yet such voices are "outside the field of historical engagement itself;" they "come from elsewhere" (252). For Nichols, the paradox is that while interviews or testimony may provide us with a point of view from the inside, we are kept at a distance by the witness' own distance, whether discursive, temporal, and/or spatial. Overall he suggests that nonfiction films need strategies of "vivification:" methods to conjure or restore the full dimensionality of history (230). I will argue that testimony, when it is cinematic, *does* vivify the "small voices"⁵⁰—and bodies—of history and is able to convey some of history's multi-dimensionality through the creation of a shared and embodied "presence of the now."⁵¹ It does so through the use of cinema's own mode of address, which is visual and aural as well as verbal; gestural and performative as well as factual; and temporally and spatially fluid rather than constant and fixed. Such testimony is concerned with the *saying* (human and cinematic) as much as with the *said*. In the following chapters I turn to examine how this saying—this complex intertwining of embodied human and cinematic

⁵⁰ I am referring again to John Beverley's claim that testimonio is the "small voice of history" (27).

⁵¹ I discuss cinematic testimony in relation to Walter Benjamin's *Jetztzeit* more fully in chapter five.

address— engages us as active viewers, listeners, and participants in testimony's transformations.

3. BODY/LANGUAGE: TESTIMONY IN THE FLESH

By the 1980s, interviews and testimony were ubiquitous in nonfiction films, yet their rhetorical function and role varied widely. The belief that talking heads were often boring was not uncommon, and there was clearly a sense that films relying exclusively on interviews resulted in what Nichols called the “dilemma of a body too few” (*Representing* 250). Talking heads typically remained distanced from any visceral engagement with the events they recounted and needed something else to “vivify” them. Interview-based films had recourse to archival footage or other B-roll cutaways to illustrate the verbal accounts, to conceal how speech had been cut and edited, or to simply enliven a film’s pacing. While people speaking to the camera could offer the audience a unique, first-person inflection, they did so in a medium whose greatest attraction lay not in reporting the verbal, but in creatively shaping the visible. To compensate for the perceived lack of visual engagement in lengthy scenes of talking heads and spoken words, some documentaries began to incorporate acted or reenacted scenes (in addition to, or instead of, the more commonly used archival footage). These staged scenes restored some of the sensory immediacy and intensity that had been lost in giving primacy to words and spoken language.

Reenactments were hardly new in nonfiction film at the time.⁵² A central strategy of many documentaries of the 1920s and 1930s, reenactments and the staging of events for purposes of illustration fell into explicit disfavor with popularity of direct cinema in the 1960s. Direct cinema held that reality was there to be captured, never staged, and it considered all explicit directorial intervention to be suspect.⁵³ However, in the 1980s reenactments began to reappear in documentaries, primarily in interview- and testimony-based films. For example, staged or reenacted scenes might be placed between or simultaneously with testimonies or interviews to illustrate, elaborate, or comment on them. The image and words of speaking subjects provided a guarantee of authenticity and truth, while staged scenes gave immediacy and intensity to those words, even as we (hopefully) recognized them as staged.

⁵²Though the term “reenactment” is commonly used, these filmed sequences never claim to be mimetically reenacting an event *exactly* as it happened. Janet Walker makes a distinction between reenactment and enactment: in the former a past event is replayed for the camera while the latter simply involves a more-elaborate-than-usual staging of an interview involving the interview subject and elements of the *mise-en-scène* (*Trauma Cinema* 109, 135, 144). I will, for the most part, use the term reenactment but with the understanding that a reenactment is *not* a literal re-playing of a past event, but rather a *demonstration or evocation* of some habitual or past action, event, or state of being. More significant for my analysis in this chapter is *who* is involved in the staging or reenacting—whether it is an actor or the testifying subject him- or herself.

⁵³ Staged reenactments are still considered suspect unless explicitly announced. This was made clear by the controversy over the Academy Award-winning *Mighty Times, Volume 2: The Children’s March* (Robert Hudson and Bobby Houston, 2004) (see Lacher).

In this chapter I briefly present the spectrum of reenactment strategies used in interview- and testimony-based documentaries and explore the role of depictions of the body in the production of documentary knowledge. I then turn to my central focus, films in which those who testify use *their own* bodies to “flesh out” their accounts and experiences. Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (France, 1985), Rithy Panh’s *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (Cambodia/France 2002), Chen Chie-Jen’s *Factory* (Taiwan, 2002), and Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre’s *Maquilapolis* (USA/Mexico, 2006) all include powerful scenes in which embodied reenactments cease to be a visual supplement to language and become instead an intrinsic and crucial element of testimony. Rather than relying solely on spoken language, cinematic testimony in these films incorporates the body’s multiple modes of expression and creates a qualitatively different relationship between those who recount and those who observe and listen from the other side of the screen.

Testimony’s Recourse to Reenactment

Some of the earliest inclusions of staged scenes in testimony-based films can be found in documentaries such as *When the Mountains Tremble* (Sigel and Yates, 1983), *Las Madres de la Plaza De Mayo* (Muñoz and Portillo, 1985), *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris, 1988) or *Dialogues with Madwomen* (Light and Saraf, 1993). Each of these films is in some way concerned with a contested or marginal political reality. Even if the filmmakers had wanted to include archival footage, the testimonies in these films refer to events for which there is no footage to “illustrate” or visually represent them. Each film thus constructs scenes that “show” us what the speaker is referring to, rather than asking us to rely solely on words and leaving details up to our imagination. Each film uses strategies of reenactment differently, and together they suggest four different possibilities for the use of reenacted scenes in testimony-based films: (1) explicitly acknowledged reenactments of specific events, (2) sensory reenactments to align our experience with that of the speaker, (3) inquiring or subversive reenactments that may challenge the words of the speaker, and (4) collaboratively created reenactments performed *by* the speaker to render some aspect of their inner life or states of being.

When the Mountains Tremble, a film based on and including the testimonies of Guatemalan indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchú⁵⁴, explicitly announces its staged presentation of the CIA-backed coup of the leftist Arbenz government *as* a reenactment. Although it is clearly staged and acted, the filmmakers use this reenactment as one might archival footage (had it existed). As a viewer, one presumes that their decision to reenact this historical event is intended to emphasize its significance to the ideological argument made by the documentary, rather than to let it pass as a minor or contested detail of Guatemala’s political history. While the scene feels dated today, its explicitly *acknowledged status as reenactment* suggests two things: first the fact that history *is* a contested field and that one must recognize it as such; and second that crucial historical events may be invisible, and have been *kept* invisible for ideological reasons. The film’s explicit decision to make the coup visible through reenactment echoes the larger aim to make Menchú’s perspective on Guatemalan history “heard,” both through

⁵⁴ The film followed publication of her book *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, which was discussed in my introduction as an example of testimonio literature.

her own published testimonio and through this film's attempt to recount a history from below rather than from above.

Las Madres de la Plaza De Mayo, on the other hand, uses its brief reenacted scenes to dramatize the stories of the families of Argentina's disappeared—punctuating and illustrating the oral accounts of the wives, husbands, and parents who lost loved ones. As interviewees recount the sudden, unfathomable abductions of their relatives by the military, we are shown dimly lit scenes of soldiers or police forcing their way into homes at night to take them away. In *Las Madres* the shadowy enactments give the testimonies an embodied and sensory resonance; they are used as a tool to communicate the sensation and fear that the families may have felt at the time. Their aim seems to be to put us in the bodies of those speaking, to provide a glimpse into what that moment of time looked and felt like as the subjects experienced it. Recently, many more mainstream documentaries have adopted this strategy of recreating or simulating the physical and emotional aspects of verbally recounted experiences.

The Thin Blue Line takes a different, and for its time radically new, approach to enacting testimony. Using elegantly stylized cinematography, special effects such as slow motion, and repetition of the same scene with different details, Morris' multiple reenactments of the same event are enactments of contradictory eye-witness testimony and not a reenactment of an agreed-upon past. They suggest the self-serving fiction at the heart of much testimony, in this case eyewitness testimony about the murder of a policeman presented in a courtroom and re-told by participants in interviews for the film. What was radical about Morris's approach was that the reenactments, while creatively depicting the accounts of various interviewees, were not used to illustrate what "really" was, but rather to illustrate the contested, often implausible, *versions* of what might, or more likely might not, have been. Due to the highly stylized and fiction-like qualities of the repeated murder scene, and the fact that each time it is shown quite differently, viewers experience it as ironic, as a citation of multiple and deliberate *mis*-representations of events. *The Thin Blue Line* thus uses its reenactments to subvert and question the very testimony it presents.

Finally, *Dialogues with Madwomen* uses staged enactments in yet another way to complement its protagonists' testimonies. Here staged scenes are used primarily to depict the fantasies, emotions, and affective states the women describe in their direct address to the camera. Attempting to be true to their varied experiences during periods of what was labeled schizophrenia, manic depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or post-partum depression by the medical establishment, these enactments eschew realism to give visual form to fantastic and idiosyncratic psychic landscapes. Unlike the staged scenes in any of the previous films, these sequences are also the fruit of an active collaboration between the filmmaker and the film's subjects. Manic episodes, split personalities, and suicide attempts are all creatively and carefully enacted to render inner emotional worlds palpably visible to others, and it is the women themselves who appear in these scenes. Their "acting" themselves "out," gives density and presence to the subjective, affective states that were a central part of their lives during the periods they describe. For viewers, these staged scenes serve as an invitation into the inner affective landscapes and psyches of the subjects as they themselves now understand them.

Of these four types of reenactment, it is those that try to recreate the speaking subjects' experience—whether from deep inside so we, too, “live” it (as in *Dialogues with Madwomen*), or from the outside in a somewhat more distanced manner (as in *Las Madres*)—that have become more and more common in big budget and mainstream documentaries. This recourse to reenactment in ever more spectacular forms in order to give visual and dramatic shape to oral testimonies can be seen in films such as *Touching the Void* (Macdonald, 2003), *The Road to Guantanamo* (Winterbottom and Whitecross, 2006), *Standard Operating Procedure* (Morris, 2008), or *Man on Wire* (Marsh, 2008). In the latter films, the enactments take on the scope and form of elaborately crafted fiction features with spectacular images of mountain climbing, helicopter explosions, a recreated Guantanamo, or the exploits of planning a tightrope walk across the Twin Towers. Talking heads—in these films the subjects are usually shot straight on in a studio setting—directly address us as they recount harrowing experiences. The spoken testimonies anchor the emotionally gripping tales in the seated bodies we see and the voices we hear. Using actors, sophisticated film crews, special effects, and recognizable fictional conventions, the reenactments then render the speaker's accounts more-than-real—emotionally gripping and visually and aurally sensational. While our nonfiction craving for the real is satisfied by what we perceive as real people speaking to us (in real studios with real professional lighting and camera crews), we are also seduced by the bodily and sensory pleasures of narrative immersion and cinematic entertainment. Our need for the cinematic pleasures associated with going-to-the-movies is placated by a massive dose of carefully-paced, musically accompanied, action-packed docu-drama.

These dramatized scenes compensate for the lack of immediacy and visceral intensity of mere speech. When words fall short, enactments fill in the gaps and allow us to engage sensually with the screen through a multiplicity of subject positions and bodies. If, as John Durham Peters posits, “the journey from experience (the seen) into words (the said) is precarious”(710) and often unfulfilling, then reenactments act as a substitute for what is lost along the way. Through reenactment we may see the ‘unseen,’ recover the past in the present, and collectively fantasize that an intangible past can be had, held, and (re-)experienced. According to Peters, “words can be exchanged [but] experiences cannot” (710). But the entire movie industry's wager is precisely that experiences *can* be exchanged. However approximately or imperfectly, experiences *can* be cinematically (re-)created and transmitted. While never claiming to be a recovery of original experience (although frequently uncritically presented or received as such), cinematic reenactments evoke a sense of the original and provide us with the sensory stimulation that words lack. By inserting dramatized images and sounds into testimonial speech, filmmakers acknowledge (and perhaps encourage?) the limits of verbal accounts while recognizing a hunger for and fascination with the communicative power of *bodies-in-action* rather than just (talking) *heads*.

However, when it is the person giving the testimony who incorporates her own body into these embodied communicative acts, then reenactment becomes something quite different. It becomes an intrinsic and inseparable part of the cinematic testimony itself. This may occur through an elaborate collaborative process, as in *Dialogues with Madwomen* or under the suggested or explicit direction of the filmmaker as in *Shoah*. The relationship between the subject and what is being recounted (the content of speech)

shifts once the body is engaged. The “speaker” becomes the “embodier” of her own testimony, and the testimony itself becomes embodied. At the same time, the audience’s relationship to the speaker and her testimony is also transformed. With this transformation, the notion of a possible exchange of experience as opposed to a mere exchange of words takes on new resonance.

Embodied Spectatorship and Documentary Knowledge

Indeed, one must ask, what *of* the bodies involved in documentary films and documentary viewing? In the past two decades scholarly attention has turned to forms of “embodied knowledge” conveyed by documentaries (Nichols *Blurred*; MacDougall *Corporeal*) and more recently also the embodied *reception* of nonfiction film. If documentary film is now defined as a “mode of response” (Vaughan 3) or “an experience rather than a thing,” (Sobchack “Toward a Phenomenology” 271), then viewer responses and experiences need to be analyzed. Scholars working primarily on other cinematic genres have written provocatively on modalities of embodied reception, including Linda Williams on porn and melodrama, Vivian Sobchack on narrative fiction and some documentary, and Laura Marks on experimental video and documentary. With regard specifically to documentary, Sobchack and ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall have explored the embodied nature of the knowledge that documentary can transmit in some detail. As I will show below, MacDougall’s and Sobchack’s claims have strong parallels with the recent findings in the field of neuroscience.

David MacDougall makes the argument that audio-visual media produce ways of knowing that are radically distinct from the conceptual or descriptive knowledge produced through verbal discourse. Images, rather than making statements, put viewers in a particular *relation* to a subject. What he calls “visual knowledge” is inherently corporeal. Perceptual and experiential, it is based on sensory acquaintance and not on description. Eliciting bodily sensation in ways that words cannot, filmed images “stretch the boundaries of our consciousness,” and also “create affinities with bodies other than our own” (17). MacDougall sees film as a privileged vehicle for the dissemination of corporeal knowledge because the filmed images *of* bodies have visceral effects *on* the bodies of their viewers. Citing work by Merleau-Ponty concerning the “involuntary mimicry” involved in looking at others’ bodies, he extends Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the “postural ‘impregnation’ of my own body by the conducts I witness” (23) to include the conducts and actions I witness *on film*. This kind of involuntary engagement, whether with a person in the world or a person on film, can create a bodily connection that is “deeper [...] than empathy” (23).

This potential for an embodied engagement between bodies on and off the screen is already hinted at in an earlier essay in which MacDougall asserts that film has the ability to mimic various modes of human thinking – in particular what psychologist and educator Jerome Bruner categorized as iconic, symbolic and enactive modes of thought (“Films of Memory” 236ff). Through the use of images, of spoken or written words, and, in the case of enactive thought, bodily or cinematic gesture, film exhibits similar representational capacities to those of the mind. Enactive thought for Bruner and MacDougall is related to kinesthetic experience, experience as it is recalled in the

muscles and body, and is also associated with emotions and affect. The filmic counterpart of enactive thought is produced in two possible ways according to MacDougall. It can be expressed and communicated through images of physical behavior, especially behavior of a habitual kind, or through dynamic editing.⁵⁵ While dynamic editing creates “cinematic landscapes of the mind... [and] analogues of the spatial dimension of memory” (“Films of Memory” 238), images that deliberately accentuate physical actions and embodied gestures can provoke a kind of enactive response in viewers. Visual media, much more so than verbal discourse, therefore lend themselves to the communication of (and “impregnation” by, as suggested by Merleau-Ponty) enactive, embodied knowledge. Several instances of this will be seen in the cinematic testimony discussed below.

Vivian Sobchack also makes strong claims regarding the role our bodies play in the process and experience of film viewing, even when we are not consciously aware of it. Also strongly influenced by the work of Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack has brought a phenomenological approach to cinema reception studies. For her, watching a film, like any act of perception, is a bodily experience that engages the entire sensory apparatus. “[W]e do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium” (*Carnal* 63). In “What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh” she includes a description of her own somatic experiences while watching Jane Campion’s *The Piano*. The film opens with an abstract image of light and color, which in a subsequent reverse shot is revealed to be the main character Ada looking through the fingers of her hands. Sobchack writes of watching this opening image without being able to conceptually comprehend it, but having a distinct bodily response. She says “my fingers comprehended that image, grasped it with a nearly imperceptible tingle of attention and anticipation and, off-screen, ‘felt themselves’ as a potentiality in the subjective and fleshy situation figured onscreen.” Once her mind later made the connection that she had actually been seeing the abstracted flesh of fingers covering the heroine’s eyes, she had a “pleasurable culmination and confirmation of what my fingers—and I, reflexively if not yet reflectively—already knew” (63).

With her notion of the “cinesthetic subject,” Sobchack theorizes the prereflective bodily responsiveness to film viewing that she had observed in her own viewing practice. Derived from the combination of “cinema” with “synaesthesia” and “coenaesthesia,” this cinesthetic subject is “the film viewer... who through an embodied vision in-formed by the knowledge of the other senses, ‘makes sense’ of what it is to ‘see’ a movie— both ‘in the flesh’ and as it ‘matters’” (70). While synaesthesia refers to the translation and exchange between and among the different senses, for example when sound is experienced as having color, coenaesthesia describes the open sensual condition of the infant before the development of a hierarchical and discrete arrangement of the senses through cultural immersion and practice. It refers to the capacity of what is called cross-modal sensorial exchange between the different senses prior to the advent of a culturally

⁵⁵ This claim was already made by Sergei Eisenstein in a number of essays written in the 1920s (see 34, 39, 40ff).

normative hierarchy. For Sobchack, when watching and perceiving films, we automatically mix and translate our sensory perceptions with other bodily sensations that they inspire. In other words, she asserts that our cinematic experiences are not reducible to distanced, passive sight and hearing—what she calls “anorexic theories of identification that have no flesh on them” (71)—but involve our entire bodily sensorium in constant inter-sensory interaction with what we perceive on the screen. “[T]he cinesthetic subject feels his or her literal body as only one side of an irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity that has as its other side the figural objects of bodily provocation on the screen” (79).

To more precisely describe this sensory experience of the movies, Sobchack employs the concept of catachresis, a rhetorical term for something which mediates and conflates the metaphoric and literal when no proper term is available, as when a word is used in some new sense in order to remedy a gap in the vocabulary. Examples are terms borrowed from one context to name something in another such as the “arm” of a chair, the “head” of a pin, or the “foot” of a mountain (Sapir and Crocker cited in Sobchack 81). For Sobchack, cinema’s modes of representation work through a kind of catachresis, giving us the figurative (images) as if it were literal (reality); and the language we use to speak about our experience of cinema, with its dependence on references to the corporeal, is also catachretic. But most importantly, the “spectator’s lived body in the film experience engages in a form of *sensual catachresis*. That is, it fills in the gap in its sensual grasp of the figural world onscreen by turning back on itself to reciprocally (albeit not sufficiently) ‘flesh it out’ into literal physicalized sense” (82). Our bodies are thus in constant reciprocal interplay with the sensory stimulation and representations of the moving images. Citing Richard Schiff on such catachresis in the paintings of Cézanne, Sobchack suggests that in film viewing, as well, “[t]he reciprocity or shifting produced by catachresis undermines any polarization of subject and object, self and other, deviation and norm, touch and vision” (82).

Sobchack’s account of embodied film viewing completely undermines the notion of a stable, fixed viewing subject that had been a staple of earlier film theory. If anything, the cinematic experience uproots us and encourages de-centered, multiple, roaming subject-positions. According to Sobchack, it is our culturally warranted, monolithic, and narrow concept of vision and the lingering influence of psychoanalytic approaches to film theory that “occlude our awareness of our body’s other ways of taking up and making meaning of the world—and its representation” (64). Indeed, in order to better understand the potential stakes and effects of film spectatorship—not only in fiction but perhaps even more importantly in nonfiction—we must attend more carefully to how we engage with moving images and the role of the full mind-body in that engagement.

The “Shared Body States” of Neuroscience

Linda Williams, writing about viewer responses to pre-cinematic sexual imagery, claims that our sense of sight engages tactility. This is *not* an imagined tactility with regards to the imagined object in the image, but the “touch of spectator-observers’ bodies with ... themselves” (“Corporealized” 14). Williams’ suggestion of changes in the spectator’s *own* body produced by images of other bodies, Sobchack’s model of sensual catachresis

as the body's "fleshing out" of cinematic experience, and MacDougall's claims that film can provide or provoke forms of enactive thought are all surprisingly corroborated by, and brought new perspective through, recent developments in neuroscience. The discovery of "mirror neurons," first in the brains of monkeys, then humans, have had a significant impact on the neurological understanding of what happens when we observe others carrying out bodily actions. This in turn has significant implications for how we conceive intersubjective relations—from our most basic understanding of another's actions to the experience of empathy—and how we respond to and resonate with not only the bodies next to us but also *images* of human bodies in general.

Mirror neurons are neurons that fire in our brains when a bodily action is executed and also when that action is merely observed in another human being. In other words, when we *observe* someone doing something with their bodies, our brains activate the same neural network as if we were *doing* the same action: an automatic simulated re-enactment of the action takes place in the brain/body of the observer. This embodied simulation, as Vittorio Gallese, one of the scientists credited with discovering mirror neurons, calls it, results in an implicit form of *action understanding*. Automatic and pre-reflective, this understanding through neurological simulation is a sensory-motor *and* mental representation by, and in, the body. As Gallese explains, "[i]t is mental because it has content, but it is sensory-motor because its function is realized by the sensory-motor system. I call it 'embodied' not only because it is neurally realized, but also because it uses a pre-existing body-model in the brain, and therefore involves a non-propositional form of self-representation" ("Embodied" 41-42).

According to Gallese, mirror neurons and the embodied simulation they activate are a basic and crucial feature of how our brain-body system models its interactions with, and understanding of, the world. Our embodied simulations are, in fact, what accounts for and gives rise to what Gallese names the "shared manifold of intersubjectivity" ("Manifold Nature" 517ff). In this meaningful intersubjective space—a "correlative and reversible we-centric space"—both observer and observed are part of a system governed by reversible rules (525). In order to better understand this space that precedes our sense of ourselves as individual subjects and which underlies our subsequent existence in the world, we can look to the example of facial mimicry.

Over the last two decades, several neurological studies have provided evidence of the automatic, unconscious mimicry of facial expression in both infants and adults (Dimberg *et. al*; Damasio *Looking* 117). In infants this occurs long before the constitution of a conscious subject of experience. From this, Gallese infers the existence a "primitive self-other space," what he also calls a "shared, multimodal, we-centric, blended space" that is a "paradoxical form of intersubjectivity without subjects" ("Manifold" 518).

Since the very beginning of our life we ... inhabit a shared multidimensional interpersonal space, which, I posit, also constitutes a substantial part of our social semantic space during adulthood. When we observe other acting individuals, and face their full range of expressive power (the way they act, the emotions and feeling they display), a meaningful embodied interpersonal link is automatically established. (519)

This embodied interpersonal link is the consequence of mimicry, whether actually copying an action or gesture or engaging in its embodied simulation. By copying or simulating something in our brain/body, we experience a similar body state to the one we observe without any cognitive mediation, and this process constitutes “a level of understanding [...] that does not entail the explicit use of any theory or symbolic representation” (523).

Not only the understanding of bodily actions, but also of affective states and certain kinds of aesthetic expression can be linked to this specific neurological mechanism. How does one get from the simulation of actions and action understanding to the ability to grasp and share affective states? The answer lies in the neurological conception of affect or emotion⁵⁷ as a kind of action or expression of the brain/body, an action that is automatic, non-conscious, and precedes feeling (the latter being our conscious *representation* of emotion as a specific body state). For Antonio Damasio, whose several books address the neurological underpinnings of emotion (what others call affect) in the human brain, emotions (as distinct from feelings) are complex chemical responses that take place in our brain and body, are engaged automatically, and are frequently publicly observable.⁵⁸ They can be detected in explicit facial expressions, but also in more subtle contractions of facial muscles, changes in eye movements, and micro- and macro- musculoskeletal changes such as body posture and overall shaping of body movements (*Feeling* 50-53).

It is because affect, or what Damasio calls emotion, is first and foremost an embodied state that we can sense or experience it in others—we do so through our own bodies, due to mirroring mechanisms. For this reason Gallese claims that our capacity for empathy is largely, though not exclusively, dependent on our mirror neurons. Defining empathy as the capacity to grasp an other’s affective states, Gallese makes a point to distinguish it from the feeling of *concern* for these affective states, which he calls sympathy (“Commentary” 147). To empathize with another human being is

to directly grasp the meaning of the emotions and affective states they are experiencing while attributing these states to the other. I posit that the

⁵⁷ Different authors use these terms differently, which can be confusing. “Emotion” is used by Antonio Damasio for what Brian Massumi and others have called “affect,” and what Damasio calls “feeling” is similar to what Massumi refers to as “emotion.”

⁵⁸ See Damasio, *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994), *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (1999), and *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (2003). Much of Damasio’s work is dedicated to exploring the relationship between emotion, feeling, and reason. For Damasio, emotions precede and are the foundations for feelings. His stages in the emotion-feeling continuum are as follows: “a *state of emotion*, which can be triggered and executed nonconsciously; a *state of feeling*, which can be represented nonconsciously; and a *state of feeling made conscious*, i.e., known to the organism having both emotion and feeling” (*Feeling* 37). He summarizes how this continuum makes itself felt in our experience: “We can feel our emotions consistently and we know we feel them. The fabric of our minds and of our behavior is woven around continuous cycles of emotions followed by feelings that become known and beget new emotions, a running polyphony that underscores and punctuates specific thoughts in our minds and actions in our behavior. But although emotion and feeling are now part of a functional continuum, it is helpful to distinguish the steps along that continuum if we are to study their biological underpinnings with any degree of success” (*Feeling* 43).

empathic process is not in the first place the outcome of an inference by analogy. It is the product of a direct matching between what the other is expressing by means of ostensive behavior and what we would feel were we expressing those affective states ourselves. (“Commentary” 147)

According to Gallese, it is the activity of our interpersonal shared neural substrate in what he calls a *we-centric dimension of experience* that accounts for and gives rise to empathy. “The other’s emotion is constituted and directly understood by means of an embodied simulation producing a shared body state. It is the body state shared by the observer and the observed that enables direct understanding” (“Embodied” 39).

Gallese’s theories and his claims for the existence of shared body states and a realm of pre-reflective social cognition produced by embodied simulation routines may seem deterministic at first glance. Where is human agency in all this, and isn’t empathy and our ability to understand each other’s actions largely culturally and biographically determined? Gallese is careful to assert that there are multiple modes of interpersonal understanding, and that explicit and learned cognitive reasoning happens *alongside* our embodied simulations. The two mechanisms are not mutually exclusive, and occur with regard to the same observed events.

Embodied simulation is experience-based, while the second mechanism is a cognitive description of an external state of affairs. I posit that embodied simulation scaffolds the propositional, more cognitively sophisticated mentalizing mechanism. When the former mechanism is not present or malfunctioning, [...] the latter can provide only a pale, detached account of the social experiences of others. (“Embodied” 42).

In other words, we interact with and understand the world and each other *both* through pre-reflective neurological simulation and through learned cognitive inferences. While embodied simulation is only one way we engage with others, Gallese suggests it is much more fundamental than we might initially acknowledge.

The recently elaborated neuroscientific models of our embodied simulation mechanisms offer an explanation for many of the claims made by film theorists who write about embodied film viewing. While Gallese notes the connections between his own research findings and the phenomenological descriptions of interpersonal experience in the writing of Edmund Husserl, Sobchack frequently refers to the work of Merleau-Ponty: thus the correlations in their assertions partly link to their philosophical underpinnings. Sobchack’s entire description of “what her fingers knew”—the tingling, the sense of their bodily presence before her conscious recognition of the image she was watching—could easily be an illustration for Gallese’s thesis. Her “cinesthetic subject” (as it engages pre-reflectively and bodily with cinematic perceptions, has cross-modal and synaesthetic fluidity, exists in an intersubjective realm where bodily sensation is to some degree shared and reciprocal, and “fleshes out” what it sees into “physicalized sense”) is completely consistent with Gallese’s theories. In their respective disciplines both Gallese and Sobchack argue, as did the phenomenologists before them, for an embodied mind thoroughly enmeshed in an intersubjective world. Gallese writes:

we do not just “see” an action, an emotion, or a sensation. Side by side with the sensory description of the observed social stimuli, internal representations of the body states associated with these actions, emotions, and sensations are evoked in the observer, “as if” he/she would be doing a similar action or experiencing a similar emotion or sensation. (Commentary 148)

This could be Sobchack writing on her experiences at the cinema.

By emphasizing the relevance of the brain’s mirroring mechanisms and embodied simulation to film viewing and our engagement with audio-visual media in general, I am not suggesting that these media are transparent (i.e. that when we watch media it is as if we are watching the world), nor that audio-visual media do not have their own rhetorical qualities and gestures which influence how and what we see. In fact, I will argue later that specific strategies of such media can either radically accentuate or diminish the power of forms of embodied engagement. Nevertheless, how we observe bodies in the world clearly is related to how we engage with bodies on a screen. Gallese himself has written, in a piece co-authored with art historian David Freedberg about the implications of mirror neurons and embodied simulation for our aesthetic reactions to works of art, in particular those that include images of the body, but also those that suggest gestural acts even in abstract form (Freedberg and Gallese 197ff).⁵⁹

Freedberg and Gallese argue that a crucial element of our aesthetic response to visual art “consists of the activation of embodied mechanisms encompassing the simulation of actions, emotions and corporeal sensation” (197). These are automatic empathic responses that result from the neural mechanisms described earlier in this chapter (202). Feelings of the empathy towards the emotions of characters depicted in art works or even a sense of inward imitation of the observed actions in pictures and sculptures are not uncommon. With regard to representations of bodies in pain or in situations of violence or constraint,⁶⁰ Freedberg and Gallese claim that

the physical responses seem to be located in precisely those parts of the body that are threatened, pressured, constrained or destabilized. Furthermore, physical empathy easily transmutes into a feeling of empathy for the emotional consequences of the ways in which the body is damaged or mutilated. Even when the image contains no overt emotional component, a sense of bodily resonance can arise. These are all instances in which beholders might find themselves automatically simulating the

⁵⁹ In this essay they propose “a theory of empathetic responses to works of art that is not purely introspective, intuitive or metaphysical but has a precise and definable material basis in the brain. Although the evidence we consider enables modulation by a wide variety of contextual factors (historical, social, cultural or even personal), here we are concerned with the basic mechanisms that have been brought to the fore by recent research on mirror and canonical neurons, and the neural underpinnings of empathy and embodiment.” (199)

⁶⁰ The authors refer to Michelangelo’s sculpture *Slave called Atlas* and an etching from Goya’s *Los Desastres de la Guerra* in which a body is being mutilated by its captors.

emotional expression, the movement or even the implied movement within the representation. (197)

This understanding of our bodily responses to artistic representations is not new. As the authors acknowledge, already in the 19th century the concept of *Einfühlung* (literally “feeling in,” translated as empathy in English), was coined to explain how we somatically engage with sculptural and spatial forms, and only later was it used to refer to our sense of physiological *and* psychological resonance with other living beings. The 1909 citation for “empathy” from the Oxford English Dictionary is as follows: “Not only do I see gravity and modesty and pride... but I feel or act them in the mind’s muscles. This is, I suppose, a simple case of empathy, if we may coin that term as a rendering of *Einfühlung*.” *Einfühlung* or empathy was also used to speak about aesthetic experiences, in the sense of “feeling oneself into” a work of art. According to philosopher Theodor Lipps, whose work is associated with its early use, we frequently respond with involuntary mimicry when observing human beings or works of art, and this motor response *then* creates an emotional response. Involuntary imitation of salient expressions or postures *give rise* to feelings that correspond to them.

Such embodied engagement seems to have been largely dismissed by 20th century art history, but Freedberg and Gallese strongly argue for once again proclaiming the importance of bodily responses in aesthetic experience. According to them, it is precisely the new understanding of the brain’s mirroring mechanisms and the theory of embodied simulation that can

account for three of the chief forms of response to visual images that have hitherto remained unexplained: (i) the feeling of bodily engagement with the gestures, movements and intentions of others; (ii) the identification of the emotions of observed others; and (iii) a feeling of empathy for bodily sensations. (201)

They also argue that a fourth form of response, to the formal qualities of a work as expressed in “the gestural traces of the artist” can also be linked to the same neural mechanisms of embodied simulation (201). This analysis of paintings with regard to such gestural traces, for example the abstract paintings of Jackson Pollack or Lucio Fontano’s slashed canvas *Concetto Spaziale ‘Atteza’* could certainly be extended to an argument about the gestural traces in moving images, for example those embodied or made manifest in camera movements (movements that might be characterized as passing through, gliding over, caressing, thrusting towards), or cuts between shots, as discussed by Eisenstein in the 1920s and 30s.

What Gallese has called the “shared body states” of our intersubjective experience are clearly applicable to our reception of moving or other images of the body. Our embodied brains, through mirroring mechanisms, can reproduce somatic states seen in or implied by painting, sculpture, or moving images so that we experience similar sensations and affective states without recourse to explicit inference or conscious reasoning. This embodied understanding, I argue, is at the core not only of the pleasures of watching fiction films but also of the profound visceral impact of certain documentary images.

Testimonies of and for the Flesh

The majority of recent mainstream documentary reenactments, like the docudrama, have recourse to actors and make use of fiction film conventions in their shooting and editing style. Films like *Dialogues with Madwomen* and the films discussed below, however, have the *same* subjects who address us also enact or reenact gestures, actions, or states of being in order to show rather than tell us part of their testimony. These two approaches have vastly different implications both for film subjects and film viewers. In testimony and interview-based films, professionally acted reenactments tend to function as illustration or counterpoint to the verbal accounts. Using the conventions and language of narrative film, they enliven, elaborate, exaggerate or, more rarely, undermine an account or argument for the viewer, with little or no impact on the person who is subject of the film. However, when the subjects of the film themselves recreate or enact past moments or modes of being and feeling, using their own bodies, gestures, and expression to amplify or supplant verbal accounts, this has a profound effect on both them and viewers. It is no longer just an illustration but an embodiment. If speech is “an action performed by the body in its entirety” (Collingwood cited in Hirschkind 196), here the body in its entirety is the vehicle of “speech” in the sense of testimony. This can be especially powerful when a documentary subject is attempting to give an account of the past. As anthropologist Charles Hirschkind has noted, memory isn’t built on ideas or images “but rather on the reactivation of gestures, understood as the sensory sediments of prior perceptions. It is founded, we might say, on the body’s potential for reproducing its sensorimotor past without the mediation of thought” (156).⁶¹ While some filmmakers simply ask subjects to engage in actions or gestures to recapitulate a past moment, others have recourse to more elaborate and collaboratively staged reenactments. In both cases, the embodied performance becomes the testimony itself—what mouths cannot or do not impart, bodies can.

Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (France 1985), Rithy Panh’s *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (Cambodia/France 2002), Chen Chie-Jen’s *Factory* (Taiwan 2002), and Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre’s *Maquilapolis* (USA/Mexico 2006) each incorporate embodied reenactments that are central to the cinematic testimony of the works as a whole. For filmmakers, the integration of gestural expression is a means of intensifying the subject’s engagement with his or her testimony and with embodied memory, sensation, and affect. Through corporeal movement and gestures the films’ subjects perform the acts of remembering and recounting on a somatic rather than a verbal or intellectual level. Just as importantly, they also engage *us*, the audience, on this somatic level. How these reenactments are brought into play, and how they function for the subjects, filmmakers, and viewers, differ in the various films.

When released in 1985, Lanzmann’s nine-hour *Shoah* revolutionized the possibilities of film’s engagement with the Holocaust and with history and testimony in general. The breadth and intensity of his research, his steadfast refusal to use archival footage, and his unique interview strategies—which have been called aggressive and even sometimes

⁶¹ Charles Hirschkind discusses embodied or sense memories in relation to the work of Marcel Jousse on the “gestural subject” and “gestural reviviscences.”

violent—resulted in a work that has likely marked nonfiction filmmaking more than any other film.⁶² Among Lanzmann’s many innovations was his deliberate placement of subjects in physical spaces or environments that encouraged them to engage with the past not only through the medium of words, but through bodily sensation. Thus some of the interview subjects were brought to the landscapes and villages of their past and/or asked to perform some of the habitual actions of their existence of that time. For example, Lanzmann interviews the retired train conductor Henrik Gawkowski in the very locomotive he operated in 1942 to transport trainloads of Jews to Treblinka.⁶⁴ And he brings Simon Srebnic—one of central figures in *Shoah* who also opens the film—back to the town, fields, and church of Chelmo. Here, as an adolescent of thirteen, Srebnic had been forced to sing German songs for the Nazis and burn the bodies of thousands of Jews who had just been gassed.

Rather than try to globally summarize the effects of Lanzmann’s interviews and gestural reenactments, I will describe only one of the most powerful: that which takes place with Abraham Bomba near the beginning of the second part of the film. It begins with about a minute of simply watching Bomba at work. There is no speech, no explanation. We hear only muted background sounds of a barbershop while Bomba’s name and the interview’s location, Israel, are identified by text on the screen. We’ve seen this man briefly in the first part of the film being interviewed in the United States, so we know he is a survivor of the camps. Here, however, it is the movements of Bomba’s body in the space of the barbershop (a space complicated by multiple mirrors) and of his hands trimming the hair of a male customer, that are the focus of our attention. After more than a minute of observing him with no words, we finally hear Lanzmann’s voice: “Abraham, can you tell me, how did it happen? How were you chosen?”

As Bomba begins to speak, we learn that he was a Jewish barber and concentration camp prisoner who was forced to cut the hair of roomfuls of naked women on their way to the Treblinka gas chamber. The entire interview—almost nineteen minutes long—is conducted while Bomba, with his comb and scissors in hand, continues to actively cut the hair, or at least make gestures of cutting the hair, of the unidentified man. Even when shot in close-up (and the size of the room results in the shots being either medium or close shots) we see enough to feel the movements of his body and hands, and the direction of his attention towards the head of his client. While his speech is tense and emphatic, clearly ill at ease with having to recount his memories of this period, his hands and body seem to be on auto-pilot. At a certain point Lanzmann asks for more details saying, “Can you imitate? How did you do?” and Bomba complies by using the man’s hair as a prop to mimic the kind of fast, approximate cutting he would have done in the anteroom to the gas chamber. At about sixteen minutes, provoked by Lanzmann’s questions about the specific memory of seeing women he knew from his home town and having to cut their hair, Bomba breaks down and can no longer speak. Lanzmann somewhat apologetically refuses to stop the interview, and he continues to roll the camera

⁶² Lanzmann himself refuses the “documentary” label for *Shoah*.

⁶⁴ See Lanzmann, “Seminar With Claude Lanzmann” especially pp 87-88 for the specific instructions that Lanzmann gave to Gawkowski before filming the scene.

during the almost intolerable silence that follows. Bomba, both as a means of refuge and distraction, moves and trims, trims and moves, in silence as the camera shoots him mainly in close-up. After a minute or so, he visibly hardens himself (his musculature and posture) and then continues to speak. After a few more sentences, the interview ends.

Bomba's gestures, both as a clearly familiar bodily act which requires almost no conscious attention, and also as a form of demonstration in response to some of Lanzmann's insistent questions, create an embodied visual counterpart to his oral testimony. But the performed gestures do much more than that. Each gesture towards the head, each snip of the scissors, each motion of Bomba's body and hands is an emanation of Bomba's embodied knowledge and memory, and an expression of his experience, both past and present, which simply has no verbal parallel. As the scene opens one has no idea that the physical context for the interview has been staged (and some viewers are never aware of this), nor that the focus of the testimony will be precisely about the act of cutting hair. One thus discovers, with a kind of growing shock, that the barbershop location and Bomba's gestures, are not a fortuitous context, nor an observational interlude. Instead, they are an integral part of the testimony, its very core, its bodily anchor. The viewer, or at least this viewer, begins to feel the echo of those gestures in her own body, both the effortlessness with which they are carried out and the tension which clearly accompanies them. These gestures seem to function as a form of security (the body knows that it knows what it is doing), memory (the gestures carry the body and the mind back to specific repeated moments of the past) and distraction (from the difficulties of speech and the emotional responses to Lanzmann's insistent interrogation). Our relation to Bomba is, in large part, experienced in response to these repetitive gestures that we feel in the very muscles of our arms and hands and a certain apprehension with which his, and our, bodies becomes infused. I don't believe one can experience, or remember, this scene without some kind of bodily sensation, one that is not only a reaction to the horror of the story being told—or unable to be told—but a response to seeing, feeling, and recognizing Bomba's own body-becoming-past-becoming-present in gesture and word.

Lanzmann's film has been the subject of much debate,⁶⁵ and he has often spoken and written about the process of making *Shoah*. In his public discussions, he repeatedly denies (and denigrates) any quest for "understanding" the Holocaust. For Lanzmann there is "an absolute obscenity in the project of understanding" ("Hier ist Kein Warum" 51). Instead, "only the act of transmission matters, and no intelligibility, that is, no true knowledge, exists prior to that transmission. Transmission is the knowledge in itself" (51-52).⁶⁷ This juxtaposition of "understanding" versus "transmission," his idea of "knowledge in itself," is central to comprehending Lanzmann's strategies. What does he mean when he uses these terms? Judging from other comments he has made, understanding refers to facts, abstract numbers, causes and effects, and explanations that contain and explain events. In so doing, "understanding" thus eviscerates them of their

⁶⁵ Including searing criticism by Dominick LaCapra.

⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that LaCapra translates this line slightly differently: "It is transmission that is knowledge itself" (237).

horror and precise detail; it produces only generalities. Lanzmann states: “I have spent my whole life fighting generalities, and I think that *Shoah* is a fight against generalities” (“Seminar” 82). Shoshana Felman notes that “the film goes from singular to singular, because there is no possible representation of one witness by another” (223). This attention to the singular and to the singular *detail* of each of the accounts is central to Lanzmann’s project. In his interviewing practice, Lanzmann’s incessant questioning and request for greater and greater physical and experiential detail results in an accretion of information and sensation that cannot be reduced to any generalization. Lanzmann also has disdain for what he calls memory—for “memory is weak” (261). *Shoah* is not about the past; it is, for Lanzmann, “the abolition of all distance between the past and the present” (261). Indeed his innovative and methodical approach to the *mise-en-scène* and solicitation of each individual testimony demonstrates this. The deliberate choice of locations, settings, and accompanying actions and interactions are carefully calculated to have a profound effect both on the person testifying and on the audience.

Transmission is a term Lanzmann uses again and again; he repeatedly states that his project is “transmission,” his aim to “to communicate, to transmit” (“Seminar” 92-93). When he thinks a particular strategy or line of questioning won’t facilitate these aims, he deliberately avoids or omits it.⁶⁹ In Lanzmann’s binary of understanding vs. transmitting knowledge, it seems the abolition of distance—between past and present, and between interlocutor and us—and the refusal of generalization are prerequisite. But the abolition of distance is not via transparency of the representational apparatus, for Lanzmann’s approach—his relentless questions, his various translators and many translations, as well as the handful of carefully staged scenes—is anything but transparent. Speaking of the Bomba interview in the barbershop discussed above, he says:

It became interesting the moment when, in the second part of the interview, [Bomba] repeated the same thing but in a different way. When I place him in the situation and said to him, “How did you do it? Imitate the gestures that you made.” He grabbed his customer’s hair... And from this moment on, *truth became incarnate*, and as he relived the scene, *his knowledge became carnal*. It is a film about the incarnation of truth. (“Site and Speech” 41)

It is this carnality of knowledge, this palpable well of experience manifest in the body through its responses, movements, and gestures,⁷⁰ that seems to be what Lanzmann feels he is able to transmit, what transmits itself—to him and to us in turn. The mind-body, where our pasts and presents are tangibly intertwined, incarnates truths in ways language

⁶⁹ For example in the Yale Seminar he suggests that both extreme horror and mere banality are not conducive to transmission. Speaking of events that Lanzmann did not include, he notes that he deliberately did not ask Simon Srebnik about certain events they had discussed before because the “degree of horror was so high that this would have destroyed my purpose. My purpose was the transmission” (93). And when asked whether he considered placing the Bomba interview in a hairdresser’s shop with only women clients, he replies “I think that would have been unbearable. It would not have transmitted, I am sure. It would have been obscene” (97).

⁷⁰ Dominick LaCapra views this process as a deliberate re-traumatization of the victims in order that Lanzmann can experience it himself. (LaCapra 239ff)

cannot, and also transmits it to others in ways words do not. Lanzmann's transcript of the interviews included in *Shoah*,⁷¹ published in book form, is instructive here. Although a useful reference tool, it is a pallid and wholly unsatisfactory approximation of the film. De Beauvoir, in her preface to the French edition, commends the film for its ability to impart the ghettos and extermination camps in an entirely new way: "for the first time, we live it in our minds, hearts and flesh. It *becomes our experience*"(ii). Reading the transcripts, we realize to what extent just words are secondary to the testimony that Lanzmann creates. It is Lanzmann's meticulous use of cinema and his strategies of choreographing landscapes, bodies, and language that give *Shoah* its power to transmit embodied histories and create, at moments, something akin to shared body states between those on screen and the audience.

Like *Shoah*, Rithy Panh's *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* is a film that examines genocide and is considered the definitive documentary on its subject—in this case the torture and mass executions organized by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia resulting in the death of approximately two million people between 1975 and 1979. Also like *Shoah*, it is resolutely about the present, committed to exploring and articulating a traumatic past through the testimonies of both survivors and perpetrators of violence. As Lanzmann had done before him, Panh brings his subjects to the physical site which is both the subject of the film and the instigator of memory: the notorious Tuol Sleng Prison in Phnom Penh, otherwise known as Security Prison 21 or S-21. All but three scenes in the 100 plus minute film take place inside or on the grounds of the prison that today also functions as the Tuol Sleng Genocide museum.

Panh's approach differs from Lanzmann's in a number of ways, however. Most importantly, Panh is physically absent from the film; most scenes of testimony include numerous speakers who also become listeners; and these scenes are very deliberately choreographed in the former prison spaces. Whereas Lanzmann is a guiding physical presence in *Shoah* and his questions and provocations become a crucial anchor for the audience throughout the film, Panh is physically absent in both voice and body. The complex work of eliciting testimony is all done off-screen. One of the two surviving former prisoners included in the film, the painter Vann Nath, at times takes on the role of the questioner in relation to the other subjects, yet there is no single character who functions as audience surrogate. Nor does the camera take on this role. While many of the speakers frontally face the camera, none look at it directly. They either speak to each other or for some invisible presence, perhaps Panh who they know is listening, perhaps to an internalized audience or conscience that might be called to judge them. With the exception of shots of Van Nath, who sometimes speaks alone, other scenes include multiple subjects who speak to, or alongside, each other in the same frame. The film

⁷¹ In the book *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film*, only the subtitles we see on screen are transcribed. Thus the long sequences of live translation we hear each time speech is in a language that Lanzmann himself does not understand (such as Polish) are *not* part of the book, nor are the carefully selected settings, the *mise-en-scène*, the body movements, the rhythms of speech, the many interjections, interruptions, hesitations, and the long periods of silence—all qualities that make *Shoah* a powerful work of *cinematic* testimony.

includes two survivors of S-21⁷³—Nath, mentioned above, and an engineer, Chum Mey—as well as a number of Khmer Rouge guards, interrogators, torturers and other staff. It was easier for Panh to gain the trust of the former guards and Khmer Rouge personnel if he filmed them in groups; in this way, they didn't feel interrogated or judged as individuals. Only one scene in the entire film features a guard alone; all the others are in pairs, groups, or surrounded by family. Panh also brings former guards together with former prisoners —“victims and executioners”, as he puts it in one interview (Panh “Entretien”) but the guards, even in this case, are always in a group.

The survivor and painter Vann Nath is *the* vital presence throughout the film. Although present in only about a third of the scenes, he functions as the film's conscience, the person whose suffering gives him the moral authority to question others, to suggest that the past can, or must, be analyzed and judged. Yet even as he performs as the moral core of the film, his voice and position do not overwhelm the others. Panh gives all the subjects their own time so different perspectives can be articulated. The film certainly does not take a relativistic stance to historical truth and the Cambodian genocide, yet it acknowledges that for an event of such magnitude to begin to be understood, many perspectives on its unfolding must be sought out. Thus the different accounts are articulated through a deftly structured series of encounters or confrontations. While some scenes are constructed as meetings between different witnesses, both survivors and perpetrators of the violence, other scenes are staged as encounters between witnesses and historical artifacts/material evidence, or between diverse modes of witnessing. The physical space of S-21 plays a prominent role in the film. It is both the setting of the events being recalled and the palpable link between past events and present recollections. As such, the architecture and the numerous documents and artifacts preserved there become an instigator of memory, somatic and verbal. The artifacts include photographs, records of confessions by both prisoners and guards, procedural documents on torture, letters between Khmer Rouge administrators, guards' written autobiographies or pledges to the party, furniture used in interrogation and torture, and the like. In a more conventional documentary, these would typically be presented with an explanation in voice-over. But in *S-21* these bits of evidence of the complex “machine” of torture are held, examined by, and responded to by Panh's subjects. Presented with such physical objects, victims, guards, or torturers respond to questions or interpret texts and artifacts, all the while inhabiting the interrogation rooms, cells, and hallways of their former prison.

Panh does not engage in any direct on-screen questioning. Instead he devises and incorporates a variety of testimonial *mise-en-scène*. There are some scenes of spontaneous speech, but the majority seem clearly rehearsed or at least carefully planned in terms of who speaks and when and where they are positioned in relation to each other and the objects in the frame. Nath's testimony is often through his paintings, while several of the guards testify through embodied reenactments. Nath's paintings of events at S-21 are vital to the film because they serve as vivid depictions of specific events and also complement or stimulate his and others' verbal accounts. They suggest, already at

⁷³ 17,000 prisoners passed through S-21, with only 7 of those still alive when it was closed in 1979. When the film was made, only 3 remained alive.

the outset of the film, the communicative force of the pictorial, of *images* of memory and of memory *as* image, while at the same time asserting the complementary force of the word.

Our initial introduction to Nath in the film is through one of his paintings. As we see his brush in close-up add strokes, we hear his voice recounting his arrival at the prison. The camera slowly moves to his face, speaking and concentrated on the painting, then back to the painting and then back and forth again. In this way the words and painting intensify each other. We recognize what we hear in what we see—the painting of the blindfolded barefoot prisoners being led by a rope tied around all of their necks—, then begin to see differently through his words, hear differently through what we have seen in the painting. Each mode of recounting, the visual and verbal, adds to our ability to engage with the experience he is describing.

This juxtaposition of multiple ways of remembering and communicating is characteristic of the film as a whole. Nath testifies through paintings *and* words. The guards recount their memories, but these are juxtaposed with records, artifacts, photographic images that they are first asked to hold, read aloud, and consider. Panh’s film is full of tactility. Nath frequently touches and feels the surface of his paintings as he speaks about the events depicted. The guards also touch the documents and record books, their fingers following the text line-by-line as they read. They sit at the table where forced confessions were transcribed; they hold and carry in the chair for the interrogated; and throughout the film they palpably inhabit the space of the events being recounted.

Scenes including the guards’ reenactments stand out because of their seeming spontaneity and the directness of their address, but they are part and parcel of a film that deliberately engages all the senses and all the modalities of memory and communication of both its subjects and its audience. The three scenes that can be considered reenactments focus exclusively on the guards’ treatment of the prisoners. Panh has explained that the idea came to him when one of the guards demonstrated how he handled the inmates, after finding it impossible to verbally describe what he did. I will briefly describe two of the reenacted scenes here. In one a guard demonstrates an inspection of a large room full of several rows of shackled prisoners as another guard watches. In another, a different guard goes cell to cell, during what seems to be the night watch.

In all the scenes, no one plays the prisoners. The guards interact with empty space in empty cells. The starving and shackled bodies of the “enemy,” these bodies that (we have been told earlier) cry, make demands, or howl are only present in their memory, and slowly also in our imaginations. For Panh “gestures serve as the body’s way of speaking” and the procedures these guards had been trained to do day in and day out “had soaked into the body” (“I Make Films” 1). With the reenacted, almost ritualized, gestures, the words they used also came back. The guards talk to their prisoners as if they are there, repeating set phrases, becoming more aggressive as the scenes continue. Both these guards switch back and forth between descriptive language—as if explaining to Panh or us what is being done—and direct address to the prisoners. For example, the first single-take two-minute shot of a guard as he goes through his motions of inspecting and searching prisoners, going up and down the imaginary rows, includes these words:

When on guard duty, I inspect the locks four times. I rattle the lock and the bar [BENDING, RATTLING] I test it. All's well. I do the next row. I rattle the lock and bar. All's well. I come to the middle row. The middle, here. This row, on your feet! Hands in the air! I start the body search. I feel their pockets. I look here and there. They mustn't have a pen with which they can open their veins, or hide screws or rivets they can swallow to kill themselves. Back to the middle row. Sit! No one move! On to this row. Get up! On your feet! Hands up! I start my search. I look, I feel. Pockets. Around the waist. I feel. I check, to see if they have a pen they can open their veins with, or screws and rivets they can swallow and kill themselves. On to the middle. Sit! No one move! I turn around. You! Taking your shirt off? Without the guard's permission? To hang yourself by your shirt? Give me that! I grab it and take it away.

The later scene, a single-take four-and-a-half-minute sequence of a younger guard reenacting his evening watch involves a similar intertwining of descriptive and direct speech. As this scene progresses, the guard gets more aggressive in language and gesture, at one point showing how he hit prisoners with the can of drinking water. Nevertheless, in the larger scheme of horror of *S-21*, the treatment being demonstrated in the reenacted scenes seems relatively benign. Shackled, starving prisoners, overcrowded cells, lack of access to toilets, food, water, authoritarian guards who beat prisoners—this is nothing compared to the torture, bloodletting, and murder we learn about elsewhere in the film. The latter are described in documents and spoken about, but never reenacted, perhaps because, to use Lanzmann's word, this would have been “obscene.”

Why, then, do the guards' reenacted scenes stand out in this film, and why are they so powerful? As in *Shoah*, there is no attempt to make a realistic reenactment as would be typical of a docudrama. Bomba's gestures are clearly set in the present—we are not in Treblinka, but in a barbershop in Tel Aviv where Bomba is being prodded and pushed by Lanzmann. In *S-21* the guards are in the very spaces where they worked. Yet their gestures and aggression are aimed at invisible bodies; they turn the screws on invisible shackles; they feel the pockets of invisible clothes; they yell and get angry at invisible, now long dead, humans. While *they* clearly “see” their memories, we must use our imaginations based on what we have previously heard in the film and seen in the paintings of Nath.

S-21 exudes a palpable and painful tension throughout the film, but one that is highly controlled. The exacting mise-en-scene with its carefully choreographed bodies; the slow but overwhelming description of horror; the careful and meticulous tone that never lets raw emotion erupt—all these keep us in an unremitting state of anxiety without release. And all of Panh's subjects are also extremely controlled. Only the second prison survivor Chum Mey momentarily breaks down in tears, and he plays a small part in this film. All others—guards, interrogators, torturers, as well as Van Nath—are extremely composed. While the filmmaking process and the articulation of their testimonies are clearly an arduous experience, there is no sense that they are able or willing to break through their serious but defensive stance. And although some of the men intimate the shame they feel

for this period of their lives, only one explicitly articulates remorse, remarking on his arrogance and treatment of the prisoners as animals.

The reenactments, in this context, function as a burst of extemporaneous release in a film in which everyone and everything is extremely restrained.. Although we learn of much more horrific events and acts than what we see in the performed reenactments, they give us a sense of the physicality of the world that nothing else quite does in the film, especially when contextualized by Nath's paintings of the mass of famished and lethargic bodies in horrendously overcrowded cells. They also, in the manner of Lanzmann's work, vividly bring the past into their—and our—present. In progressively more aggressive gestures, with aggravated and angry voices repeating commands as their bodies navigate the actual and remembered spaces of the prison, we are given an intimation of how a tiny part of this whole system worked. As we observe previously gentle and composed men go through the motions of a horrifying but still present past, we, too, can feel those gestures—both of the visible guard and the invisible prisoners—in our own bodies.

But how exactly do our bodies relate to those on the screen? Can we speak of a bodily empathy created with the violent guards, or is it empathy with a situation, an event, and with many of the parties engaged in it? What forms of catachresis can we imagine taking place as we respond to these enacted scenes? Here Panh's carefully wrought structure comes into play. All the scenes in the cells take place subsequent to a scene in which we, and a number of the guards, are confronted with a painting by Nath that depicts a cell crowded with dozens of weak, prone bodies, some naked, most with shorts, that are attached with chains to the floor.⁷⁶ Nath speaks directly to the guards and torturers in this scene and as he speaks about the conditions he endured in 1978, the absence of food, the corpses left in the cells to rot for several days, the beating of the prisoners if they dared to try to eat crickets, he shows us his painting, caresses it, says "I was here," pointing to a body in the painting. He seems to want, need, some kind of expression of remorse from the guards he is addressing. "I don't understand how, with such cruelty and savagery, you who worked here could get used to such acts. How could you get used to seeing such suffering?" No remorse, apology or even sorrow is forthcoming from any of the guards at this point. As one of the guards states in answer to Nath's questions: "The Party, S21, never made arrests by mistake. They were the enemies. . . . If they said this was the enemy, I repeated, this is the enemy." Without this scene, and especially without Nath's painting, we would never be able to sense, to feel, what these cells were like, what it means to have floors covered with emaciated prisoners presided over by an all-powerful guard with a whip. We cannot help but bring this image to bear on all subsequent scenes that evoke the prison cells, thus combining the bodily resonance of the reenactments with the emotional resonance of Nath's powerful paintings of the prisoners.

The fact that the guards use direct speech in two of the reenactments, aggressively yelling at the prisoners, also implicates us as we listen to the admonitions addressed to the invisible "you," a space we momentarily inhabit. Thus we cannot help but react to:

⁷⁶ Another aspect of this scene, having to do with listening, will be discussed in chapter four.

And you! Calm down! If I come back in, you're gonna get it! You turning over, too! Why aren't you asleep? Sleep without moving, you scum! What? Relieve yourself? I'll bring the can. . . . Here, relieve yourself. Watch you don't spill it! It stinks. I have to clean it up! If you spill it, you'll get the club! What are you squirming for? If you don't listen to what I say, I'm coming in with the club.

Like a point of view shot positions us visually in a specific subject position, here the reenacted direct address positions us aurally as addressee. This sensation is combined with our bodily engagement with the guard and his movements through space as well as with our visual memory of the prisoners' bodies in the cell. The four-and-a-half-minute reenactment also comes ten minutes after a scene in which the same man looks at a picture of himself as a youth and then gives an encapsulated autobiography of his years with the Khmer Rouge. Taken as a young child to be part of a children's detail that worked raising bulls and later pigs, he was later retrained and forced to work as a guard at S-21, probably when he was not even a teenager. While he expresses no remorse or shame in the film, neither does he offer self-justifications or voice self-pity as some of Panh's subjects do. Having learned of the extremely young age at which he was forcibly inducted into the Khmer Rouge and the brutality of his "re-education," our judgment of him is mitigated and our notions of responsibility and guilt complicated.

The way in which we experience the reenacted scene is thus rendered more complex by how it has been contextualized earlier in the film and by the use of direct address to the invisible prisoners whom we can imagine thanks to Nath's painting. We can "share," to some degree, multiple bodies and multiple subject positions, both that of indoctrinated guard and subjugated prisoner. We see and feel the guard's motor memories as we watch them and the empty cell becomes full of bodies; we cringe at his orders and blows; we wonder if he wasn't, in actual historical fact, probably more violent and less solicitous⁷⁷, if he isn't sweetening even his bodily recollections as he performs for the camera. Panh's carefully wrought sequential arrangement of scenes makes for a complex viewing experience which refuses any single positioning, any pat or righteous judgment. His aim is to begin to understand how such a system of violent repression and torture came into being and how it could function. Unlike many films which explore historical horror from one side, or from the perspective of one group of historical actors only, *S-21* suggests that insight into a system must include a sober attempt to understand it from multiple points of view. Given the fact that there are so few survivors among Khmer Rouge victims, the testimony of its foot soldiers is all the more crucial. Indeed, *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* offers its audiences no relief. There is no resolution, no unambiguous remorse or forgiveness, no redemption for those who were a part of the machine nor for those who died in its clutches. The force of Panh's film is that over the course of its duration we are able to begin to understand the mechanisms, both institutional and psychological, that generated the horror and tragedy of this national cataclysm. Yet this is hardly to say that it could not happen again—in fact there is the suggestion that it could.

⁷⁷ In the scene he brings water to prisoners several times, all the while yelling at them, but still bringing it.

The last two films I examine in this chapter on the role of the body in cinematic testimony are not concerned with genocide. Instead they focus on labor. Both Chen Chieh-Jen's *Factory* and Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre's *Maquilapolis: City of Factories* present testimonies of women workers in the age of global capitalism. While not about trauma or events on the scale of the Holocaust or the Khmer Rouge genocide, they are cinematic testimonies collaboratively created with those whose voices have not been widely, if at all, acknowledged or disseminated in the public sphere. Like works of testimonio literature, these pieces bring the embodied voices and experiences of low-wage women workers into public discourse.

Chen's *Factory*, presented either as a single-channel film or as a looped installation, is filmed entirely inside an abandoned factory in Taipei. The paint on the walls is peeling off, and boxes and chairs are piled up against the side walls. Inside this space we see several women, most in their fifties or older. First we are presented with two women, whom we continually return to in different poses, holding up a product of their labor, a drab blue cotton jacket with a shiny, dark blue lining. Then we see several women, sitting at evenly spaced tables, each with its own sewing machine. Over the course of the thirty-minute piece these women are either actively sewing bits of cloth on their electric sewing machines or slumped over their workstations with exhaustion. As one woman becomes a central figure, we repeatedly see her gently guiding the cloth through her machine, painfully struggling to thread her needle, or wearily contemplating, with her head on the table, her cup of tea.

Intercut between these choreographed scenes are traveling shots of the floor of the factory in its current derelict state, and black-and-white archival images of Taiwanese factories during the industrial boom of the 1960s. The latter include newsreel shots of government figures inspecting, or proudly displaying, these sites of newly industrialized labor. This juxtaposition of the women performing the gestures of their labor and exhaustion in stylized scenes with the "before" and "after" shots of a factory at the peak and nadir of its glory suggests a narrative of global capital, its acquisition and abandonment of factories and workers in its mobile quest for ever-greater profit.

There is no speech, or any other sound, in this silent film. The sewing machines and the women, while at work or at rest, are mute. Instead of words, it is their acts, postures and gestures that eloquently speak. It is the knowledge and experience of these women's bodies — which have, perhaps, no present use or desire for words — that are channeled through the elegant choreography of the filmmaker. According to the latter, though this is not made explicit in the film, the women, all workers who had worked for years in this very factory, did not want to speak. When they trespassed, together with Chen, into the space of their past livelihood to make the film, he simply asked them to "work." It is from their spontaneous gestures that the rest of the film was developed and choreographed.⁷⁸ The placement of politically resonant objects, including a visible bullhorn in the travelling shots of the factory, might remind a Taiwanese audience of the demonstrations that followed the closing of this and many other factories in the late 1990s.

⁷⁸ From a description of the film sent by the filmmaker.

Can one call a silent film testimony? Can the articulation of years of experience and embodied knowledge occur through the visualization of space and the gestures of the body? Can the body in a series of tableaux-like scenes communicate the feel of a workplace, the inculcated and habitual motions and emotions of a way of life, the mind-body's assimilation and resistances to a regime of labor? The power of Chen's *Factory* attests to an affirmative response to these questions. The body *is* as eloquent as the words it might choose, in another context, to utter, and we respond to it with our bodies. We can "read" and feel it in our very muscles and bones. This is not to say we feel precisely what these women feel, but we replicate gestures and movements and expressions in ourselves. Of course, bodies may be as subject to misinterpretation as words, but probably not more so. If one of the aims of testimony is to convey what has been experienced by the mind-body, to give an account of a lived reality, and to "transmit" this account to others, this film is clearly testimony. Unlike in *Shoah* or *S-21*, the women in *Factory* participated from the very beginning in strategizing how to perform this bodily testimony and in deciding that they would not, did not want to, use speech. This film of women "speaking" through their poses and movements and actions is as eloquent as an oral or filmed interview focusing on their experiences would have been. This potential of incorporating the body's multiple modes of expression, without having to rely on speech, is what cinema has brought to testimony.

Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre's *Maquilapolis: City of Factories* is an hour-long film made with a group of women employed or formerly employed by some of the eight hundred maquiladoras that line the US Mexican border near Tijuana. While clearly made for a broad international audience, *Maquilapolis* is also made with and for its subjects and combines analysis with advocacy.⁷⁹ The main voice-over of the film, the voice that frames the other voices and provides facts and context, belongs to one of the women workers and organizers. Like its feminist precursors that used the testimonial form to articulate and render more visible the experiences and the politicization of women in order to in turn empower other women, *Maquilapolis* also provides its subjects with the means—here through first-person video as well as through its testimonial interviews—to have their say, to tell *their* stories of global capitalism, and to speak about *their* lives and transformations.

Visually, the film incorporates numerous elements: first-person footage shot on consumer video by Carmen Duran and Lourdes Lujan, observational footage shot by the filmmakers as well as the subjects, interviews, and choreographed scenes reenacting gestures of factory labor and metaphorically staging the women's status as objects within the system of global capital. As in Chen's *Factory*, the performances were collaboratively designed and planned with the film's subjects and shot with great care and attention to detail. In *Maquilapolis*, however, the *mise-en-scène* is deliberately *not* realistic. Here the choreography of the gestures and images of labor functions less as an

⁷⁹ The film was made in collaboration with the women of Grupo Factor X, Colectivo Chilpancingo, and Promotoras por los Derechos de las Mujeres. Video production workshops with the women were a part of the larger project of *Maquilapolis*, and the video work of two of the main subjects, Carmen Duran and Lourdes Lujan, are included in the film.

articulation of embodied knowledge and more as a meta-commentary on that knowledge and its socio-economic context and constraints.

The setting for the central reenactment is an empty lot in an area of Tijuana where factories are built and abandoned in a sporadic, and ever faster, cycle. This site of past and future factories is where the women came to work from various parts of Mexico, as one of them tells us. The choreographed scene is elaborated throughout the film in three separate segments, first in the opening credit sequence, then briefly in the middle, and again at the conclusion of the film. The women form a group, a kind of chorus, a collective but also de-individualized subject at the film's opening. Together they perform, in unison, the gestures of factory labor, the deliberately reenacted, repetitive, gestures of their economic livelihood. Their hands push, pull, turn, remove, install, package... but there is nothing there, only air. The commodities produced by their labor are absent as we watch this abstract demonstration of their knowledge, their typically invisible gestures of labor now visible, filling the empty lot. In this opening scene, there is a deliberate refusal to frame any of the women as individuals, and we can only see them as anonymous gestures, their saleable labor.

At various moments punctuating the film, other staged sequences function as visual metaphors for the women's self-described sense of their own commodification, of their status as "objects of labor." One sequence displays a television on a rotating display table that is visually deconstructed: first we see the product, then via superimposition we see its main components inside, each one disappearing piece by piece.⁸⁰ The last component we see is then displayed again, in the hands of Carmen Duran (one of the main figures in the film). Now it is she on the rotating display, with the piece in her hand, as we hear her words: "I assemble flybacks." In a later sequence we see several of the women on these rotating displays, beautifully lit and made up, with bright colored textiles behind them. As they turn towards us they state the name of one of the corporations they've worked for: Panasonic, Sanyo, Nellcor, Tocabi, Industrias Fronterizas, IFSA—the list goes on as the corporate names fill up the screen.

In *Maquilapolis* the various performed scenes of work, of the practiced and repetitive gestures of labor, are shown as if on display, similar to the choreographed display of the women themselves and their products described above. The lives of these women and the gestures of their labor are what remains invisible in the final commodity that finds its way to the international marketplace and into our homes. In the film and they thus render this invisible labor visible, and render its abstraction and alienation by the capitalist system visible as well. We see a woman's hands demonstrating the assembly of a piece of electronic equipment and a sequence of several close-ups of hands, demonstrating the specific movements of their work, followed by women displaying "their" products in front of them: a television component, a pair of stockings, a plastic notebook. All of these scenes are beautifully shot on film, professionally lit, and self-consciously stylized. Intercut with the observational and diary footage that makes up more than three quarters

⁸⁰ Though done in a very different style, the scene is reminiscent of the analysis of commodities in Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Eye* in which he demonstrates the role of labor by deconstructing the production of meat and of bread in reverse motion sequences.

of the film, they stand out aesthetically and function as a potent commentary on, and response to, global capitalism's erasure and disregard of these women.

At the conclusion of the film, we return to the same site as in the opening, but with a different perspective. Over the course of the documentary, several women have become complex characters for us through their interviews, diary footage that they narrate, and observational scenes of their activism. We have seen their homes made of recycled North American garage doors, gotten acquainted with their children, been introduced to the chemical pollutants trickling through their muddy streets. The final sequence no longer references their bodily labor, but rather focuses on their faces, each framed in close-up, as we hear Carmen speak about her plans for her future. Finally they disperse, each taking her own path away from the group, and the filmmakers/camera metaphorically take their leave, via a wide helicopter shot that reiterates the imbrication of the women's labor and lives with the political geography of the US-Mexico border.

As with all the films discussed in this chapter, the women's performance serves as a crucial part of their testimony. It is testimony of what their bodies have been taught to do, what they have done for hours on hours, what they *must* do in order to survive and earn a living, what the system of global capital wants them to be—a series of repeated gestures in an assembly line producing commodities. In *Maquilapolis*, however, these reenactments serve another purpose as well. Positioned alongside the straightforward, naturalistic observational and diary scenes, they are a manifestation not only of their embodied knowledge but also a self-conscious and quasi-Brechtian commentary on that knowledge and its place in the system of global capitalism. The performances become less a testimony *of* a certain kind of experience than a testimony *about how the women have come, over time, to see and understand it*. In their gestures of physical work and self-display, they perform a critical consciousness of their role in the system of global labor. At the same time, because so much of the rest of the film is hyper-verbal, these scenes create a necessary space for somatic engagement on our part and function as one of the film's most compelling testimonial gestures.

“Just retelling it is not enough. They had to act it out,” said Claude Lanzmann of his interview subjects in *Shoah* (“Site and Speech” 44). In each of the films examined in this chapter, this “acting,” enacting, or reenacting functions as a means of engaging the non-discursive knowledge and remembering of the body, first of the witness/actor, then, by a kind of bodily extension, of the viewer. It is a way of bringing the ‘bodies’ back into our conception of testimony and acknowledging that we know and relate to each other and the world through our bodies at least as much as through language. The incorporation of acted or reenacted scenes by the subjects of testimony-based films emphasizes that language and talking heads are not the only—or even the best—way to transmit what is important about historical and personal experience. Whether we think of bodies’ ability to engage other bodies as a function of (or explained by) mirror neurons and embodied simulation, *Einfühlung* or empathy, catechresis, enactive thought, embodied knowledge, or simply the solicitation of our inner mimetic faculty is less important than recognizing that such engagement happens. Such engagement can develop into a felt sense of complicity with and responsibility for the world that is being shown and shared with us. This relational dynamic provoked between bodies, this “reciprocity produced by

catachresis” in Sobchack’s terms or “intersubjectivity without subjects” in Gallese’s, may be one of cinematic testimony’s most productive ethical tools.

4. LISTENING IN / TO TESTIMONY

Just as the incorporation of the body and bodily gesture, often ignored in conventional interview films, can become a crucial element in creating and conveying testimony in cinema, the same is true for attention to voice and acts of listening. Given that speech is so central to testimony-based films, it is surprising that relatively little attention has been paid to its counterpart: listening. Sound studies is a growing interdisciplinary field, and nonfiction film, as has often been remarked, depends largely on sound- and voice-tracks for its meanings. But scholars of documentary film have not yet devoted significant attention to *how* and *what* we listen to when we listen to documentary and in particular to documentary testimonies.

In this chapter I explore ways in which works call attention to and transform our listening—listening to speech, but also listening to what sound scholars call voice and the sonorous qualities that extend beyond the meanings of words. The works discussed below render listening *palpable* by creating a heightened awareness either to the affective and dialogic qualities of listening or to the vast realm of sonorous possibilities, associations, and connotations of human voice. As with the incorporation of the bodily and gestural in the films discussed in the previous chapter, here it is the attention to, analysis of, and creative play with voice and listening that expands what testimony can be in cinema. The kind of listening these works elicit encourages audiences' engagement with what philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has called the Saying [le Dire] as distinct from the Said [le Dit] (*Otherwise*) and what Mladen Dolar, Michel Chion and Adriana Cavarero in their respective works call “voice” as opposed to mere speech. Just as the Saying exceeds the Said for Levinas and is a modality not of cognition but of contact (Pinchevski 92), for the sound theorists, qualities of voice exceed the referential functions of speech and communicate affectively otherwise than through language.⁸⁵ What these works ask us to listen to and participate in, then, is not merely a series of statements about the world (although these are vital too), but also philosophically and sensuously/aurally dense ways of *relating*. At stake in such listening is the conception of testimony itself—no longer primarily focused on its referential function, these works create testimonies that emphasize or reveal the crucial role of embodied voice and ear in testimony as a situated and dialogic process—even when experienced on a screen.

Just as visual representations position the seer, audio-visual representations also position the listener and encourage or discourage certain approaches to listening. For instance,

⁸⁵ I am, of course, oversimplifying “language” by alluding here primarily to its referential functions. Many linguists, especially those of the formalist and Prague schools, consider “language” much more broadly. Given such broader definitions, some of the functions of language would be those that scholars like Nancy, Cavarero, Chion and Dolar attribute to “voice.” For instance, of Roman Jakobson’s six functions of language, the expressive, poetic, and phatic functions could be articulated chiefly through qualities of voice rather than word choice (Jakobson).

film sound scholar and composer Michel Chion claims that when we see/ listen to people speaking in films, we typically “retain only the significations [they] bear, forgetting the medium of the voice itself;” indeed, for him, synchronous voices are “immediately ‘swallowed up’ in the image’s false depth” (*Voice* 1, 3) while disembodied voices may encourage us to listen differently. While we hear words and assimilate meanings, we are generally not encouraged to listen specifically to the voice. In fact, we barely notice it consciously *as voice*. Speech functions primarily as the generator of linguistic threads holding together a narrative or an argument. In such cases, and this is especially true in many documentaries, the aim is to produce what Pinchevski, following Derrida, would call fully coherent and “uninterrupted discourse—that is, a Said divorced from Saying” (91). In many conventional documentaries the production of such “uninterrupted discourse” is taken literally as a goal: irrelevant comments, verbal asides, digressions, distractions and other such “interruptions” are explicitly eliminated for the sake of clarity or accessibility.⁸⁶ Through editing, questions are frequently excluded; responses are elided and shortened; pauses, vocal gestures, and unwanted bodily or other extraneous noises are minimized; and the camera frames (and zooms into) the face, eyes, and mouth in such a way as to highlight the pathos embedded in the referential meaning of the words. We are encouraged to listen to many documentary texts primarily as epistophiles, sucking out information and signification from the flow of extended speech.⁸⁷

The works I discuss below provoke a new awareness of embodied listening and all that lies beyond the exclusively referential functions of language. Some do this by asking us to consider the listening of others (some of the films’ subjects), while others create voice-scapes that subvert any normative conception of spoken testimony as it exists today. In so doing they transform what we think of as the substance and scope of testimony: it is not just what is related but *how* it is vocally (co-)related and received.⁸⁸ This how becomes a palpable object of consideration, in part, through the sounds and sound design of the voices and the pieces overall.

Attending to the embodied listening of others, films such as *Shoah*, *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, and Hedy Honigman’s *Crazy* (1999) position us as listening *alongside* some of their central characters. While this creates a shared listening that resonates in us differently than if we listen as sole invisible and privileged addressee, it also makes us aware that ultimately, all listening is embodied, and that each body listens differently. All of our listening is contingent on our historical and biographical situatedness, and when we are encouraged to try to listen alongside or through the bodies of others, this expands our awareness of others’ and our *own* situatedness. It reminds us that listening is a crucial but under-examined element of all testimonial speech acts, that all testimony inheres in a scene of address, and that listening is as much a part of this

⁸⁶ Essay films and experimental documentaries are of that rare species that thrives on creative disruption and interruption. Films such as Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1983)—with its single voice-over—or Agnès Varda’s *The Gleaners and I* (2000)—with its multiplicity of wry and serious interviews—are built around such interruption. This is one of the reasons they feel so vibrant.

⁸⁷ For a discussion of epistophilia in documentary film viewing see Nichols, *Representing Reality*.

⁸⁸ I say “co-related” because, as noted in the introduction, I consider the authors of cinematic testimony to be both speaker and filmmaker.

address as is speaking. Listening alongside specific characters does not constrain us to listen as we presume they do, but it encourages us to reflect on the experience and role of our and others' listening. While listening is considered a much more passive activity than speaking, it also embodies a series of strategies and choices.

The other works discussed in this chapter radically undermine the normative listening conventions of testimonial documentary. Juan Manuel Echevarría's *Mouths of Ash* (2003), Beryl Korot and Steve Reich's video opera *The Cave* (1993), and Anja Salomonowitz' *It Happened Just Before* (2006) all enhance or estrange specific qualities of voice in order to reflect on them. Echevarría does this through the use of uncut long takes of culturally specific testimonies that are not altered to fit first world film viewers' conventional listening expectations. Korot and Reich, on the other hand, fragment and restructure bits of interviews to reveal both the profound musicality of speech as well as the ideological attitudes and prejudicial affect embodied by that musicality. Finally Salomonowitz dissociates stories told from their original embodied voice in order to comment on the politics of who has the authority to speak and why in a given socio-political context. Cultural, class, and sociological variations are marked in these three works through the refusal of audio-visual testimonial norms, whether through realist or radically formalist strategies. Echevarría, Korot and Reich, and Salomonowitz carefully shape our process of listening through the technical and aesthetic possibilities of sound cinema in order to reveal some of the complexity and range of what constitutes testimony.

Sound and the Subject

Those who argue for the material and philosophical importance of vocal sound often do so in opposition to the emphasis on logos and/or vision in western metaphysics (Nancy *Listening* 2, 13; Dolar 79; Cavarero 35ff, 82ff). Sound embodies the very antithesis of permanence and stability. It is constituted by dynamic events, made up of flux and sequence, and travels. It is not a state of being but of always-*becoming*-and-falling-away. While we have developed the technology to freeze and seize the visible (through painting, photography, and film), the acoustic cannot be sliced or captured in the same way. It cannot be immobilized or extricated from its temporal flow but is accessible only within time. As Jean-Luc Nancy suggests, it also tends to be methexic: inherently participatory, shared, and contagious (*Listening* 10, 42). Spreading and circulating in waves, it affects all those in its proximity, and fades in time. Movement, transformation and decay are its very substance; thus it “mirrors the life cycle itself, evocatively duplicating the reality of our fragility and impermanence” (Stein 62). For Nancy, sound also embodies a form of communication that is “not transmission, but a sharing that becomes subject: sharing as subject of all ‘subjects.’ [...] At first it communicates nothing—except itself” (*Listening* 41). The consideration of sound, and therefore of voice and listening, as something shared in a way that vision is not, something that communicates the act of communication itself as well as the impermanence and (the potential for) change inherent in the human condition, suggests that it should play a crucial role in the creation and reception of any cinematic testimony.

As noted in earlier chapters, in the history of cinema, sound—specifically embodied sync-sound—offered the visible but mute bodies the possibility of a new subjectivity and agency. Suddenly filmed bodies could, within a framework that was, nevertheless, still under others’ discursive control, speak (ostensibly) for themselves. This proffering of voice in cinematic representation prevents subjects from being reduced solely to their visible bodies (Comolli 18) and “subjectivizes the one who emits it” (Cavarero 177). For Mladen Dolar, voice is “like a bodily missile which separates itself from the body and spreads around” while simultaneously pointing “to a bodily interior, an intimate partition of the body which cannot be disclosed” (70-71). While moving outward towards others, it refers to the inward parts of the subject that cannot be seen. The voice may symbolize authority or agency, but it can just as often represent exposure, an *appeal* for recognition to the Other. In either case, one of the crucial attributes and functions of voice is that it “ties the subject and the Other together, without belonging to either, just as it form[s] the tie between body and language without being part of them” (Dolar 103).

Thus the embodied subject’s “voice is always *for* the ear, it is always relational” (Cavarero 169). The subject of vocalized speech is never an isolated sovereign subject but one that articulates and experiences herself in constantly shifting relation to others, while using language given by others.⁸⁹ Giving ontological primacy to the subject’s voice—as opposed to thought or sight—roots subjectivity in bodies and “situates the act of reciprocal communication over and against a universal conception of language that turns the speakers into fictitious entities” (Cavarero 206-7). It also makes the semantics of language secondary to vocal gestures of address. In this way it is similar to Levinas’ distinction between Saying and Said, for just as the Saying is “the giving of a Said to another person” (Pinchevski 10) and “communicates nothing but the desire to communicate” (87), the articulation of voice (before and beyond language) also suggests communication simply as an act of reaching toward and the desire or need for address. The sonorous subject of voice, then, is always a subject engaged in address and in the expression of some form of relation. Thus, for Levinas, Cavarero, Pinchevski and others, attention to the Saying and to voice—both irreducible to their linguistic contents—has ethical implications. For Levinas, attending to language *only* or primarily as Said creates an ontological closure to the Other, while engaging with language as Saying suggests an ethical openness to the Other (Pinchevski 10).

This attention and responsiveness to voice and to the Saying occurs through acts of listening. Just as Cavarero decries much philosophy’s interest only in the Said and its tendency to ignore the relationality of Saying (220), philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy asks whether it hasn’t “substituted for listening something else that might be more on the order

⁸⁹ As Judith Butler puts it: “But if I can address you, I must first have been addressed, brought into the structure of address as a possibility of language before I was able to find my own way to make use of it. This follows, not only from the fact that language first belong to the other and I acquire it through a complicated form of mimesis, but also because the very possibility of linguistic agency is derived from the situation in which one finds oneself addressed by a language one never chose. ...” (*Giving an Account* 53).

of *understanding*?”⁹⁰ One might ask the same of many of our social and political institutions, including nonfiction film and many films of testimony. Listening—in Nancy’s, Cavarero’s or Dolar’s sense—must not only be to the *words* and content said but more importantly to *voice* and the Saying, not only to sense but also to what lies *beyond-sense* (Nancy 31). For Nancy, voice begins with the sound of the body, which “is a state of trembling, an act of oscillation between the consistency of a body and the negation of its cohesion” (“Vox Clamans” 44), and the embodied subject is like a musical instrument.⁹¹ Thus, when we listen our ear is “inclined toward affect and not just toward concept” and toward “a reserve that is anterior and posterior to any signifying punctuation” (*Listening* 26, 27). Such careful listening heightens our awareness of unique qualities of the subject, of the relations at stake, the circulation of inarticulable affect, and the complex forms of resonance between our selves and others.⁹² It attends to speech—and testimony—not as soliloquy but as emerging from a dialogic scene of address, and to the gestures and textures of Saying beyond and in addition to what is said.

In films of testimony or works structured around interviews, listening is obviously crucial and of foremost concern. The spoken accounts and exchanges that constitute the co-authored testimony are meant to be listened to and heard. Not only the filmmakers but the subjects themselves, when they appear to look at and speak directly to us, *demand* that we listen: we are positioned as the primary addressee of this speech. Many of these films are structured by a logic primarily of words—with documentarians organizing, cutting, and arranging speech before adding picture. Just as larger socio-political and technological contexts are usually eliminated from the “seen” in the interest of a streamlined and focused message, a subject’s words themselves are tailored, tightened, and trimmed to fit the rhetorical logic of the film as a whole. Such tactics emphasize verbal messages and how the filmmaker wants us to hear them. But a film’s verbal messages may not be the sole or central focus of our documentary listening experience. For some, listening to vocal utterance and its material, affective qualities, may have as great a significance to the testimony as the literal meanings of words.

Listening Visualized

I want to first focus on the rare depiction of listening in nonfiction films, before turning to works that create vocal experiences that make us listen, and conceive of listening, differently. In most nonfiction films, listening is more or less eliminated from the world we see on screen. While documentary subjects talk a lot, they rarely listen—or, to be

⁹⁰ In French one of the words for understanding (*entendre*) is the same as hearing and in the translation of Nancy’s text the distinction is sometimes expressed as that between listening and understanding, sometimes as that between listening and hearing.

⁹¹ “In a body that opens up and closes at the same time, that arranges itself and exposes itself with others, the noise of its sharing (with itself, with others) resounds” (41) and

⁹² Regarding affect, Nancy wonders whether it is “possible to separate completely an order of affects from an order of musical mimesis that would follow, or if both are not interwoven into each other and by each other (in the cry, the complaint, the groan, in the sonorous emission as such, its opening, its ex-pression, its mouth open and its body shaken...)” (*Listening* 38)

more precise, their listening is rarely observable within the cinematic frame. The speech of interviewees is presented as if it is disconnected from any but *our* listening; questioner and questions have been partly or wholly excised, and the listening intrinsic to any exchange of address is frequently rendered invisible. In addition, when there are multiple speaking subjects, they tend to be isolated from each other, separated by a film's framing and mise-en-scène. Listening, invisible and non-diegetic, takes place primarily off-screen, for us to do alone.

There are, of course, exceptions, such as the exchanges filmed in Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'un été* (1961). Here, in the numerous cinematic encounters of people from different class, ethnic, and racial backgrounds that make up the bulk of the film, the focus is as much on how one listens as on how one speaks. Because this film is about provoking dialogue *among* its subjects, the attention to listening is central. But in films focused on testimony about historical and personal trauma, the inclusion of listening is less common. Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Rithy Panh's *S-21* (both discussed in the last chapter) and Hedy Honigman's *Crazy* are unusual and revealing in this regard. Each of these films incorporates scenes in which we closely observe subjects in the *act of listening* so that we listen not just for ourselves, as outsiders, but with them, *through* their embodied responses and our reaction to the latter. Seeing the visceral and durational experience of listening calls critical attention to it rather than leaving it as an invisible and unconscious process. Listening alongside someone else's listening does not forcibly align us with the perspective of that listener, it simply heightens our awareness of this complex embodied process.

Shoah incorporates acts of listening into the core of its testimony such that not only our but also several of the subjects' listening becomes central to the film's diegesis. Listening comes to the fore in two distinct areas of the film: through the incorporation of translations of questions and answers and through sometimes lengthy scenes of subjects listening as they are spoken about. Most obviously is the way in which listening is given an important role in all scenes of address between Lanzmann and his interlocutors. This is the result of the fact that the question and answer process—including its awkward silences and moments of antagonism, irritation, pitiless insistence, or compassion—are an explicit part of Lanzmann's cinematic construction of testimony. Scenes of address between Lanzmann and his subjects are not hidden or expurgated in this film; they are rendered as nakedly as possible. When translation is a part of the question and answer dynamic, this too is included. It becomes a crucial part of the temporal and sonorous experience of listening in this film. Any interviews conducted in languages that Lanzmann did not himself speak (for example Polish, which has a major place in the film) transpire with the help of woman translator whose voice becomes an important mediating element in the testimony itself. Unlike a lot of conventional documentary filmmakers who would have cut not only the questions but the lengthy two-way translation process of both questions and answers, Lanzmann first keeps them all in the film for us to experience and secondly does not subtitle the language (e.g. Polish) except that which he himself was able to understand. In other words in an exchange that went from Lanzmann to translator (into Polish) to response (in Polish) to translation of that response (into French), only Lanzmann's French and the translator's final translation (of Polish into French) have subtitles on the screen. On the one hand this places us firmly in

Lanzmann's listening position as he grasps and responds to only the *translations* of his Polish interlocutors; on the other, it gives us as audience the opportunity to listen to just the textures and melodies of voices—those Polish voices that are intertwined with, but also independent of, the literal words that precede our and Lanzmann's comprehension of their meaning. The temporal duration of the translation process in each of these exchanges also provides us with many moments of simple observation of the faces and corporeal presence of those being interviewed as they wait between each question and answer for the translator to sew voices and meanings together.

One of the most powerful scenes in the nine-and-a-half-hour film is an extended collective interview set in front of the Catholic church in Chelmo. Replete with numerous interjections and translations, the length and loose structure of the interview gives us ample time to listen and to attend to others' listening as well. As in the scene with Abraham Bomba described in the last chapter, Lanzmann's very astute selection of both the site (the front steps of Chelmo's Catholic church) and *mise-en-scène* (Simon Srebnic standing and being recognized by villagers who are gathered there after mass waiting for the procession of the Virgin) plays a crucial role. It is only as the scene unfolds, ever so slowly, that the uninformed viewer begins to realize, with shock, that this is the very church where Jews were rounded up, locked in, and then taken out only to be gassed inside the vans that transported them to the fields where their bodies would be burned by Srebnic and other prisoners. Not only does our own slow realization through the process of listening transform how we view and relate to the space and those speaking, but the scene then transforms into a remarkable and excruciating instance of what it means to participate in someone *else's* listening. Srebnic stands in front of the church with townspeople gathered and hovering around him, welcoming him, exclaiming how they remember him and his singing as a child. Then, partly in response to Lanzmann's prodding and partly perhaps due to their own need for exculpation, some of the men and women begin to "explain" the extermination of the Jews. During the lengthy exchange in which the church organist explains what "a Rabbi" had said—that the extermination of the Jews was God's punishment for the crucifixion of Christ—and several of the townspeople seem to agree, Lanzmann holds the camera on Srebnic standing alone in the center of the clamoring crowd. As the animated discussion over who should be blamed ensues, wrapping its sonorous blanket around him, he stands, silent, as if once again unable to speak or feel or think. The camera closes in on the absolute stillness of his body and face, then on the distance of his facial expression—as if this banal but horrific resurrection of the past following so quickly on warm words of welcome has made him leave his body entirely. *Watching* him listen, become still, dissociate from these voices and words—as the film compels us to do at length—calls forth our own listening in a new way. We listen *through* him, through his affective response to the language and voices around him, our own bodies also becoming stiff as the discussion turns from random villagers re-inventing history to the experience of men and women once again annihilating one's past, one's sense of self, one's very existence.

A similar experience of listening "through" someone takes place in Rithy Panh's *S 21*. This film is unique in that almost the entire work—with the exception of a few scenes with the central subject Van Nath or with former guards who enact past acts—consists of testimonies presented in group settings. In other words, when one of the subjects speaks,

others are in the same shared space, listening. This includes former guards and torturers listening to other former guards and torturers, each presenting their testimony in turn, as well as the survivor Van Nath and the guards listening to each other give each of their own accounts of a “shared” past. Thus a kind of diegetic listening, presented as an intrinsic part of his carefully composed *mise-en-scène*, is a crucial component throughout Rithy Panh’s work of cinematic testimony. The fact that the guards often are seen listening to each other, to their seemingly affect-less detailed descriptions or justifications of actions and occasional moments of painful self-consciousness or remorse, gives the film a remarkable power as we listen to them *listening* as well as speaking. It also suggests that the work of the film is not primarily for us, an anonymous public, but in a much deeper sense, for the participants themselves and their potential transformation not only through their efforts at speech but through the sometimes painful work of their own listening as well.

While this collective listening of the former Khmer Rouge guards becomes integral to the texture of the work as a whole, *S 21* also attends to moments of antagonistic listening in scenes between painter and survivor Van Nath and the Khmer Rouge torturers. In one scene that is similar to Lanzmann’s depiction of Sreblic’s listening discussed above, Nath challenges the guards to express their feelings about their brutal acts only to hear them deny, yet again, any responsibility because “the Party was never wrong.” As the film gives visual form to Nath’s embodied listening, it shapes our own listening; it is through Nath that we listen to the litany of disavowals. In the scene, three of the former guards are positioned on one side of a former cell with Nath standing alone on the other side, next to one of his paintings depicting skeletal prisoners lying in rows on a overcrowded cell floor. Nath, with his painted recollection of the experience of Tuol Seng and his verbal account of hunger, of diarrhea, of desperately eating insects and being beaten for it, is juxtaposed with the carefully choreographed group of guards who speak of their ruthless cruelty with little affect and no obvious remorse. As one guard, in response to a query from Nath, explains once more that they did not, could not, think anything was wrong with the punishments they were meting out, Panh cuts to close-ups of Nath. We see the subtle tightening of his face and jaw as he listens, the closing down of his expression suggesting excruciating frustration or anger. Here again, we listen *through* him, directed by the camera to observe and respond to his stiffening musculature, the hardening of his very being, his frustration at *still* not being recognized or “heard” by those in the room with him. As in *Shoah*, this listening that we do through or next to a visible embodied human presence—a man we have come to know in whatever limited fashion through the film we are watching—transforms and expands our own experience of listening. It is not a substitute for our own, more distanced, non-diegetic listening, but it adds resonance and depth to the process as we are encouraged to listen and engage with words and voices through more ears than just our own.

A very different kind of documentary, Hedy Honigman’s *Crazy* (1999) also turns visual depictions of listening into a central focus of the film. In *Crazy*, however, the listening is not to the voices of other humans but to music. Honigman interviews a number of Dutch UN peacekeeping soldiers about their experiences in Bosnia, Rwanda, Lebanon and other global hotspots. Then, at the culmination of each interview, she asks each of her subjects to listen to the piece of music that best evokes that experience for them. This is shown in

two to three-minute scenes in which we observe the former soldiers simply listen, with shots of their own footage from tours of duty interspersed among the images of them listening. Because these scenes follow significant interviews in which the soldiers speak to Honigman about their wartime experience and their responses to it, we already have a sense of how each former peacekeeper verbally and gesturally expresses or hides his or her feelings and grapples with what, for many, was clearly profoundly traumatic. Our understanding of the experiences and feelings of the subjects, based on their interactions with Honigman and her questions, is then complemented by their choice of music to encapsulate that experience and by our listening to that music *with* them, while observing them. This is not to suggest that their subjectivity does not remain in many ways opaque, but simply that we are given new ways to engage with and imagine it.

Music, of course, has long been used in non-fiction films to create affect, mood, narrative tension and release. Examples that stand out include Hanns Eisler's music in Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1955), Mussorgsky's in Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983), or more recently Phillip Glass' or Danny Elfman's scores for Errol Morris' documentaries. Today there is also a growing tendency to slap a continuous music track onto an entire documentary (including over or "behind" the interviews) as if to dispel moments of void and create a unifying aesthetic or affective thread where there may be none. But Honigman's *Crazy* is the only nonfiction film I know where the music is diegetic, chosen by the film's subjects, and where we are all (audience *and* subjects) conscious that its presence is there precisely to distill and elicit emotion, and to provoke a bodily and affective engagement with the past. Honigman's interlocutors and we, her audience, are both given this time to simply perceive and let emotions coalesce and release. As we observe and engage with each of the subject's act of listening, we experience it as a part of their testimonies about the impact of war. This listening—shared with us through the subjects' embodied responses—is also an expression of what could not be articulated in words. As with other bodily gestures discussed in the previous chapter, the micro-movements of the face and body communicate some of the subjects' affect and, at the same time, combine with their previously verbalized descriptions of their war experience. These scenes provide an entirely non-verbal register of emotional expression that is also conveyed to the audience. The film communicates that which cannot be articulated verbally but can become partially accessible through shared listening and our visceral engagement with both the music and the soldier's reaction to it. The innovation of Honigman's piece is not to point out something we already know and take for granted (the emotional and affective force of listening to music), but to grant this listening crucial significance as a central part of their testimony.

The above examples are concerned with the explicit depiction of listening *within* the diegetic space of documentary. They draw attention to our aural perceptions of and engagement with voice and sound through observations of those perceptions in others. They make us aware of the voice and sound's time-based processual nature, its flux, its close ties to affect, and its ability to be shared (across the screen). In the films of Lanzmann and Panh, scenes of listening are primarily tied to the meanings of the words being spoken by others, both in terms of their immediate referential function and their larger affective significance for the listening subject's sense of self and reality. In Honigman's work, it is not the effect of words and voices, but the emotional charge of

self-selected music that we observe as it sinks into and is responded to by each of her subjects. As observers/participants in all of these scenes, we watch and experience the somatic and affective impact of listening on verbally silent yet still very expressive bodies. We learn to listen with, and not only to, others.

Listening to Voice in Testimony

The question of how a cinematic work can draw our attention to voice rather than speech and focus on qualities of the Saying as well as on contents of the Said is a rather complex one. Indeed how can one “focus” on sound? I propose the notion of an aural haptics to assist in describing some of the ways in which works shape and concentrate voice and our listening to it. The term haptics, frequently used in art history and more recently in film and media studies, refers to the sense of touch; when used in regard to images, it suggests the textural, tactile, and two-dimensional decorative qualities of visual representations. The haptic and optical properties of a work of art refer to how that work expresses or provokes us to experience space—whether primarily through distanced vision or through kinesthetic touch.⁹³ Film scholar Laura Marks has popularized the terms haptic and optical in her discussions of contemporary video work. For Marks, optical visibility is linked to the depiction of spatial depth in the tradition of Renaissance perspective—what has become accepted in the western world as visual realism. This model of perspectival representation places the viewer at a privileged viewpoint outside the image. Haptic visibility, on the other hand, calls attention to the two-dimensional surface qualities and the materiality of visual representation. The way in which an image is fashioned and space depicted—whether painted, filmed, or video-taped—places the viewer in proximity to the surface in a way that we cannot stand completely outside it at a distance. As Marks puts it, haptic visibility pushes our look to the surface of the image thereby questioning the illusion of three-dimensional representations of reality; in so doing it “enables an embodied perception, the viewer responding to the video as to another body and to the screen as another skin” (4).

To use the term haptic in relation to aurality—and even orality—suggests that sound, and here I focus on exclusively on voice, can become a complex medium of relation, affective contact, and even touch. We can listen to its abstract, textural, and emotional qualities and experience them as we might listen to music or see color or shape. Just as the haptic is juxtaposed with the optical in discussions of visual representation of spatial relations, one might contrast haptic aurality with a linguistic or referential aurality in terms of how each provokes us to experience speech—whether our attention is focused on sonorities or on signification. Haptic aurality is not solely concerned with signification; instead it de-emphasizes the linguistic referents of speech (what the aural points to out in the world), in order to call attention to the non-referential and non-verbal aspects of spoken language—its melodies, rhythms, timbres, accents, and patterns. These qualities of voice

⁹³ In the 1890s art historian Alois Riegl distinguished between the haptical and optical properties of art in order to refer to the knowledge of artistic space through the sense of touch and/or vision. Riegl’s contemporary, Adolf Hildebrand, believed we perceive space in two modes: visual when at a distance and kinesthetic when we are near or it. See Lant for a full discussion of the idea of the haptic in late nineteenth century art history and its subsequent application to early cinema.

engage us aesthetically, but also transmit affect and attitude. Haptic aurality prioritizes the Saying rather than the Said in order to say (figuratively) something about the Saying. It gives precedence to our sensory reception of the vocal over and above the signifying property of words. If haptic visuality pushes our looking to the surface of images, we might say that haptic aurality pushes our listening to the surfaces of sounds and the non-semantic qualities of vocalized speech. It makes us aware that our ear “is inclined toward affect and not just toward concept” (Nancy 26) and that listening also “invests the body with affective potentialities” (Hirschkind 79).

As noted earlier, film sound scholar Michel Chion claims that sync-sound tends to engulf qualities of voice on film. He argues that when attached to visible bodies, voice is overlooked, “swallowed up,” in favor of the words and their messages. Chion differentiates between a number of possible image-voice relations. In addition to synchronous voices attached to on-screen bodies—what he called “embodied voice”—there is the voice that has *no* body on screen. This he terms the “acousmêtre” of which there are three types: the complete acousmêtre; the already visualized acousmêtre (“more familiar and reassuring”); and the commentator-acousmêtre (“he [sic] who never shows himself but who has no personal stake in the image”) (*Voice* 21).⁹⁴ These acousmatic voices are favored by Chion because their severance from visible bodies encourages listeners to appreciate and experience their material presence—for example their textures, tones, and musicality—more deeply. If the embodied voice is that of ordinary mortals, the acousmatic voice evokes, for Chion, our experience during the first months of life, and even before birth, when “the voice was everything, everywhere” (*Voice* 27). Disembodied narration itself is a common documentary device, most often present as the “commentator-acousmêtre” (as in all the early expository “voice-of-god” films, or, when *with* a stake in the image, the essayistic voice in the works of Chris Marker) and the “already visualized acousmêtre” such as the first-person voice in many personal films. However, films structured around testimony or interviews usually give bodies to their voices, for, as pointed out in the introduction, bodies are crucial to the meaning of testimony, and it is precisely sync-sound that binds voice and (visible) body together. The instances in which the camera leaves this body behind tend to be for strategic reasons—primarily to hide a cut (and temporal elision or rearrangement of speech) or to insert a cutaway that serves as illustration, evidence or counterpoint to the spoken words we are hearing. A few films, however, like Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993), make a point of deliberately *not* giving visibility to the speaking and testifying body, or they delay this visibility to the point where we are not sure it will ever become available to us.

The almost image-less first-person film *Blue*, made as Jarman was dying of AIDS, consists of a single blue screen which we watch for the full length of the eighty-minute piece. Given this visual minimalism, we develop an entirely different relation to the complex soundscape as we aurally enter a dense lived world created entirely through

⁹⁴ The origin of term acousmatic comes from a Pythagorean sect who listened to their master speak without seeing him. He spoke from behind a curtain so that the disciples, not be distracted by his physical appearance, would pay better attention (Chion 19). It is perhaps ironic that Chion chose this term since one supposes that the point was for the disciples to listen to the verbal message and not to the also potentially distracting aesthetic and material qualities of voice.

descriptive sounds, multiple voices that embody characters, and the I-voice of a first-person narrator. Interwoven throughout the sound-track is this acousmatic I-voice, standing in for Jarman himself—here a “complete acousmètre” in Chion’s terms, for the voice is never given visible flesh. For Roger Hallas *Blue* liberates the speaking voice through its visual and aural disembodiment. Refusing to figure the narrator’s body and incorporating a number of secondary speaking voices and an array of non-verbal sound effects, the film encourages a synaesthetic process of what Chion calls corporeal implication. With no visual distractions and the closely miked and intimate textures of the narrator’s voice surrounding us, *Blue* “makes us feel in our body the vibration of the body of the other” (*Voice* 53). This use of the disembodied, never visible, acousmatic voice also has profound political implications in this film: “In foreclosing my ability to imagine the body of the person with AIDS ‘out there’ and thus as wholly other, I come to witness the witness through my very own body” (Hallas 45). The objectification and othering that seems to frequently occur in visual representation is refused here. Instead it is replaced by the intimacy of a purely acoustic relation. In a sense Jarman’s film functions as an illustration of the role of listening versus seeing in our relation to the world and to others. As Hallas makes clear, the affective and relational qualities of listening to this acousmatic voice are different from what we would experience if we saw Jarman, or another body, on screen. Refusing to fix words to a body *can* encourage us to bond with the voice and its subjectivity more intimately than if we were given a visualized body, and also to extend this shared subjectivity to many or multiple possible bodies. If, as Nancy proposes, “voice is always shared; in a sense, it’s sharing itself” (“Vox” 41), it is possible that in some cases the insertion of visible bodies—that we relate to from the outside while through voice we may relate more directly to an inside—interferes with or diminishes the spectrum of such sharing.

Nevertheless, I question Chion’s denigration of embodied voice and the suggestion that visual embodiment necessarily detracts from our ability to appreciate and engage with voice in general. Certain works do attend to voice more than others, often through a kind of aural haptics. These enhance our experience and conceptualization of voice as something that exists alongside, and sometimes in juxtaposition to, the verbal contents of speech. The incorporation of the body and strategies that emphasize embodiment in cinematic testimony can be consistent with a profound and detailed attention to the material and sensory qualities of voice. Here I will discuss three works that foreground voice, but in unique ways that are extremely different from each other. The most minimalist and austere works in this regard is Juan Manuel Echavarría’s *Mouths of Ash* (2003), already briefly described in my introduction.

Mouths of Ash is comprised of seven individual testimonies that refer to three distinct events—two separate massacres and a forced displacement of an entire village—resulting from the armed conflicts between guerrillas and paramilitary forces in the Choco region of northwestern Colombia. Each testimony is sung, and each song is presented in a single long take that begins with the opening of the song and holds until its end with the singer standing still, looking directly at the camera. The melody is based on traditional songs of the area and feels rather upbeat to this North American ear. There is no instrumental accompaniment and the effort of staying in tune sometimes makes itself felt through the rawness and unpolished quality of most of the performances. Visually the

work consists solely of seven single, fixed-frame, frontal close-up shots of each singer's face (from forehead to chin) against a white background.⁹⁵ Those of us unfamiliar with this form of recounting personal or collective tragedy through songs written to traditionally inspired melodies (which I presume is most of the audience) are immediately struck by the raw force of these performances.⁹⁶ The size of the close-ups makes the singers appear monumental. Their faces, the older ones scarred or wounded and the younger ones a bit anxious, look at us directly as they begin to perform a song that they composed giving their own intimate, personal account of political violence in rural Colombia. The singers express little emotion through their facial expression, although tiny gestures, even a lone tear, suggest the difficulty of doing so. As each sings, we feel the tension between the control afforded by the song and the uncontrolled raw pain that seems to inhere in its composition and performance, shaped and folded into this very song.

This tension, and the affect underlying it, is strongly expressed through voice. Each singer has his or her unique story to tell, whether of the massacre they somehow survived or their forced displacement from their homes, and each song is articulated somewhat differently. While some are addressed to specific individuals (including "Señor Presidente") or villages, others are more general but include a "you" as addressee. All are a plea to be heard, to have their painful experiences and the political violence destroying their communities recognized by others. Although the song-form may be culturally coded within the community, these individual voices and the words they have chosen to describe their experience and grief are unique. Each voice has its own aural expressiveness; using variations on traditional melodies, each emphasizes specific aspects of their accounts through melody or refrain and occasionally sing out of tune in a way that makes the pain they recount all the more searing. While the details of the stories recounted are significant, it is the haptic qualities of the voices themselves that engage us most strongly. Their rough unaccompanied textures, the occasional crack or trembling of high or low notes, the emphasis on certain words or syllables, together convey the singers' affect and become the living and breathing force of the testimony, the evidence that in spite of the pain and suffering they have experienced, they are alive and still singing.

The use of song, of music, is a powerful means of releasing, structuring, and articulating some of the qualities of voice inherent in testimony, as shown in *Mouths of Ash*. Another work that uses music to demonstrate the workings of voice, but in a completely different manner, is Steve Reich and Beryl Korot's video-opera *The Cave*. Rather than presenting testimony that is already song, Reich and Korot create song *from* interview fragments, thus illuminating and emphasizing the musical qualities that pervade and underlie all human speech. A live performance for seventeen musicians (instruments and voices) and

⁹⁵ The work is presented either as a film (one song after the other) or as an installation in which the individual testimonies/songs are projected on large screens in a gallery space.

⁹⁶ See Pinto Garcia for a discussion of the political role of these songs as responses to conflict in northwestern Colombia. According to her, music has been used in other violent periods of Colombian history "to contribute to the memory of conflict" (29). In *Mouths of Ash* Echavarría does not explicitly mention that the songs have a cultural or historical function.

five video screens, Reich and Korot's *The Cave* is a powerful aesthetic experience that also illuminates how speech and voice intertwine to express affect and cultural and ideological attitudes as much or more than the literal meanings of words.⁹⁷ *The Cave* explores the biblical story of Abraham, his wife Sarah, his concubine Hagar, and his sons Ishmael and Isaac as interpreted by a number of people with diverse points of view. Its central element, around which the rest of the work is woven, is a series of video-taped interviews that the artists conducted in Israel, East Jerusalem, and the United States. The resulting video and musical piece consists of excerpts from almost fifty interviews and is divided into three movements. Unlike Echevarría's *Mouths of Ash*, which presented the entirety of each subject's song, the speech from interviews in *The Cave* is cut, copied, and re-structured into an elaborate musical score. It incorporates repeated fragments of video-taped sync-sound speech and uses these to compose an elaborate musical performance comprised of recorded speech, live song, and acoustic and electronic music. This aesthetic of the repetition of the fragment suggests a strategy parallel to the visual close-up, for there are not many ways to isolate and examine the "details" of vocal sound.

The three movements of *The Cave* are divided by the identities and locations of the respondents. The first movement is constructed around the responses of those who define themselves as Jewish, and were conducted in Israel; the second movement around the responses of those who define themselves as Arab, with interviews conducted primarily in East Jerusalem; and the third movement around responses of those who live in New York City and seem to have no strong religious affiliation. The "cave" of the title is the Cave of the Patriarchs, also known as the Ibrahimi Mosque, in Hebron where Sarah, Abraham, and others in their lineage are buried according to the Book of Genesis. In the piece, this is referred to primarily through visual interludes in which we see parts of the site patrolled by Israeli soldiers. Situated in the West Bank, taken from Jordan by Israel in 1967 War and ostensibly governed by the Palestinian Authority after the Oslo Accords of 1993, Hebron has been the site of numerous riots, attacks, and massacres—of Jews (the earliest massacre in 1929) and of Arabs (most recently in 1994—a few months after Reich and Korot's piece had its premiere in Vienna). Home to a number of highly controversial Israeli settlements, Hebron is a divided city controlled partly by the Palestinian Authority and partly by Israel. The site of the cave, and the mosque and synagogue above them, is patrolled by the Israeli Defense Forces. We see this, but without any explanation or context, in some of Korot's images.

The questions that Korot and Reich ask their subjects are, therefore, highly charged. Ostensibly simply referencing Old Testament history and interpretations, there is a clear political subtext with regard to Abraham's burial site in Hebron.⁹⁸ For some audiences

⁹⁷ *The Cave* is sometimes exhibited as a five-screen installation piece with recorded sound and has also been released as a music-only cd. My discussion here is based on the live music and video performance of *The Cave* as it was initially presented in Vienna in 1993 and when I saw it in Paris in 2007.

⁹⁸ The full force of this "sub"-text—suggesting it is not a subtext at all but rather an ur-text—with religious histories deployed as a kind of ideological superstructure, became most clear to me in the angry and frustrated response of a Palestinian filmmaker to Korot's video installation as presented at the 2009 Flaherty Film Seminar. Kamal Al Jaafari's objection was that rather than addressing the precise political situation of Palestinians and Israelis in the city of Hebron, *The Cave*, like much contemporary discourse

this is more palpable than for others. In addition to the few images of patrolling soldiers, it is addressed and revealed most saliently in the work's probing and sculptural approach to speech and voice. No context is given to the audience at the outset concerning the questions or the identity of the speakers or interviewers, and the subjects answer questions one at a time, facing the camera more or less directly in medium shot. It is only as the performance progresses that one becomes aware of the religio-cultural grouping that defines the three movements. In each we hear several of the same questions answered by the three groups, each time beginning with the question "Who is Abraham?" The story is "collectively" re-told by each group, although this "collectivity" is one that is constructed and articulated through the artists' editing. This structure, emphasizing the differences in attitudes, associations, and cultural sympathies (or lack thereof) of the three types of interlocutors, becomes a driving force of the piece. While each voice and respondent is utterly unique, we realize how speech and voice are inflected by a strong sense of self- and group-identity.

Steve Reich has long been known for his pioneering work with tape loops of human voice, from his early pieces *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966) to *Different Trains* (1988). He also created the tape loop which serves as the soundtrack for experimental filmmaker Gunvor Nelson's *My Name is Oona* (1969). *The Cave*, however, is the first time Reich and video artist Beryl Korot worked exclusively with sync-sound interviews that then become the central visual *and* audio elements in a complex symphony of sound and music. All other musical and vocal elements in the piece were composed in relation to these responses to questions about the Old Testament biblical account. Speaking about the musical score for *The Cave*, Reich says he "followed the speech exactly—as they spoke, so I wrote. [. . .] [E]verything (and this is the ethos of the piece) comes out of the documentary material, musically and visually" (Reich and Korot). As such, one can think of *The Cave* as an elaborate nonfiction commentary on various community's cultural interpretations of and attitudes toward a historical text and a highly contested political present through the study of voice.

Writing about Reich's earlier tape loop pieces, David Schwarz has commented that they explore the relationship between sound and language and even capture "the way we first hear language as pure sound, then as words, phrases and sentences with meaning" (43). For Schwarz, "music can remind us of phases in our development when we crossed from imaginary to symbolic experience, and . . . the musical representation of such threshold-crossing produces listening subjects" (26). Reich's early pieces do this through their use of multiple repetition and distortion to strip words of their meaning, rendering them strange, even uncanny. *The Cave*, however, works somewhat differently. Among the five large video screens that are its central visual element, at least one screen always depicts a speaking subject (shot in sync-sound) whom we both hear *and* see and who is addressing an interlocutor behind the camera. The piece thus never loses its attention to the fact that these excerpts of speech are responses emerging from an interview process; indeed it

about the Israel, deliberately ignored a the political to focus solely on seemingly intractable cultural/religious differences. While I appreciate this argument, I also see *The Cave* as precisely a work that allows the ideological and affective charge of certain versions of "history" or Biblical "literature" (however one conceives it) to be deeply felt and analyzed through the kind of listening that Reich and Korot generate..

constantly reminds us of this through the visual presence of the questions (for example “Who is Abraham?”) on a large LED screen on stage. Yet *The Cave* offers us the opportunity to also to focus less on actual words and to carefully listen to deeper affective and ideological inflections suggested by the melodies and intonation patterns in which these words are embedded. Through Reich and Korot’s strategies of musical mimesis, fragmentation, and repetition, one can listen in a radically new way to the melodies, rhythms, timbre, stress and intonation patterns of each voice as the speakers articulate their passionately, or not-so-passionately, held beliefs and their unspoken prejudices, judgments, and cultural perspectives.

After an opening percussive prelude, *The Cave* utters its first words. These words are presented in synch sound, and they are the only significant block of “unmediated” speech—by which I mean naturalistically presented and uninterrupted by musical accompaniment, cutting, or looping—in the entire two-hour performance. Their meaning, however, suggests the stakes of all the language that will follow. In response to the question “Who is Abraham?” Ephraim Isaac responds on-screen:

Abraham, for me is my ancestor—my very own personal ancestor. I was brought up to think like that, and I still, I guess, think like that. It stuck in my mind. My father, when I was a young person, well, actually a child, used to count all the names of our ancestors starting with Adam going all the way down to the twelve tribes. And I remember how we used to learn: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Yared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noach, and then we would go on down, Noach, Shern, Arpachshad, Shela, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nohor, Terah, Abraham, and then we used to say, Abraham, Yitzhak, Ya’acov, and then we used to say the Twelve Tribes, our ancestors’ names, just memorize all of them, Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naftali, Gad, Asher, Josef, Benyamin, and then go all the way down and come down to my great, great, great grandfather whose name was Shimon, and then Shalom and then Shalam and Harun and Mesha, and Yitzhak and myself. So for me there is a chain of ancestral relationship to Abraham.

Speech here is about naming and claiming, about articulating and locating one’s identity in a paternal lineage, in the language, literally, of the father. The response to the question about Abraham is one of relation, a relation that is also proprietary. He is “*my* ancestor,” a response that resonates ever more meaningfully as the piece continues. In contrast, more than half an hour later, the first words of Movement 2 are: “Abraham is neither Jew nor a Christian. He was a Moslem.” And in Movement 3, the same question—Who is Abraham?—gets a more light-hearted, and decidedly secular, initial response: “Abraham Lincoln?”

Following this initial speaker of *The Cave*, the habitual expectations we may have of language, and in particular the verbal responses to interview questions, are thwarted. Speech is reconceived and transformed into something other than, something in addition to, statements about the world. It becomes sound, in all its immense melodic and rhythmic complexity. As the speech is fragmented into sentences, phrases, and

sometimes even single words, speakers change, and answers to the same questions are compiled and orchestrated into groups that form a kind of musical unit.⁹⁹ *The Cave* is perhaps one answer to the question of how one might examine, focus on, and attend to the details of voice, the vocal properties of spoken language, *in* the medium of the vocal. Reich and Korot have created something akin to “close-ups” on sound through strategies of fragmentation and isolation, repetition, and the mimicking, complementing, and sometimes re-arranging of vocal properties by acoustic and electronic instruments. Such an aesthetic de- and re-construction of the speaking voice forces us to move away from our most common and habitual relation to speech – understanding and reacting to words – to pay attention to the more subtle, less conscious but just as significant qualities of voice. For Guy Rosolato, in “music’s echo of presymbolic experience we hear into the spaces between symbolic convention and presymbolic sound; this is the listener’s space” (26). Indeed, in *The Cave* it is this “listener’s space” that is suddenly opened to speech through the musicality that is found and re-presented in the voice. In a sense extracting and re-framing the musical aspects of speech that are a part of voice, the piece makes us strikingly aware how immensely powerful and expressive the vocal is—even when speaking, we are, in a sense, singing.

Those who speak in *The Cave* recount their interpretations of one of the most well-known Old Testament narratives for the “people of the book.” The tale of Abraham, his wife, servant, and children can, of course, be interpreted and told from a number of perspectives and with different sympathies and attachments, most obviously to Sarah and Isaac if one is Jewish (and possibly Christian), to Hagar and Ishmael if one is Muslim. The artists’ selection of spoken phrases frequently suggests such contested interpretations; several statements we hear seem imbued with values, attitudes, and judgments. These are expressed, sent forth, through word choice, but also intonation patterns, stress on specific words, and non-verbal sounds that are echoed, replayed. The speech, as it has been segmented, opened up, re-framed and responded to by the artists, allows feeling and affect to seep out through the musical qualities of voice, and it is this musicality that is in the foreground. Thus *The Cave* makes us aware not only of the individualized, unique qualities of voice, but also some of the culturally inflected means with which we use voice to create, convey, and perceive affect.

It is impossible to adequately describe *The Cave* without recourse to a musical notation system that would articulate melody, rhythm, timber, accent, and intonation. This impossibility attests to the crucial role of musical (re-) composition in this creative examination of the voice in speech. Nevertheless I will cite the words of two passages in an attempt to vaguely suggest how the fragmentation and repetition of words and phrases is performed. Without the musical and video accompaniment to and between these bits of vocalized speech, however, not even a small part of the gamut of sensations and affects produced. I have written down the words from two of the sections on Hagar (and her relation to Sarah); the first time a phrase is spoken by an interviewee it appears in bold, when it is repeated through playback or song, I have put it in italics. Between and

⁹⁹ It is impossible to verbally describe the listening that ensues; and the cd, without the visuals, cannot convey anything of the experience of seeing and hearing human voice. I can only refer the reader to a small YouTube excerpt from a taped performance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLoc8VTg__Y

under the language there is also has musical accompaniment mimicking, harmonizing with, or responding to the voices.

Excerpt from Response to Question about Hagar in Movement 1:

NS: Very pathetic

SPOKEN SYNC *Very, very pathetic*

SPOKEN SYNC *Very, very pathetic*

and a little

SPOKEN SYNC *and a little*

SPOKEN SYNC *and a little*

SPOKEN SYNC *and a little aggressive*

US: Hagar 'rose her nose.'

SPOKEN SYNC *rose her nose*

SPOKEN SYNC *Hagar rose her nose*

So I won't judge Sarah so severely,

SPOKEN SYNC *So I won't judge*

SPOKEN SYNC *So I wont' judge Sarah*

SPOKEN SYNC *so severely,*

SPOKEN SYNC *So I wont' judge Sarah so severely,*

It was very daring of her,

SPOKEN SYNC *It was very daring*

SPOKEN SYNC *It was very daring*

SPOKEN SYNC *It was very daring of her,*

to let another young woman

SPOKEN SYNC *let another young woman*

SPOKEN SYNC *to let another young woman*

into the bed of her husband.

SPOKEN SYNC *into the bed*

SPOKEN SYNC *of her husband.*

SPOKEN SYNC *into the bed of her husband.*

Excerpt from Response to Question about Hagar in Movement 2:

AB Sarah and Hajar were not on good terms.

Sarah and Hajar

KA Hajar has no alternative,

SUNG *no alternative*

SPOKEN SYNC *no alternative, but to accept*

SUNG *accept*

KA but to accept the decision of Sarah and Abraham to send her far

SUNG *To send her far*

SPOKEN SYNC *To send her far from Palestine*

SPOKEN SYNC *Hajar has no alternative.*

MM She's been used

SUNG *She's been used*

SPOKEN SYNC *She's been used and she was ready to sacrifice and give.*

SUNG *she was ready to*

SPOKEN SYNC *she was ready to sacrifice and give.*

IZ I believe that was for a special purpose from God.

SUNG *I believe I believe that was*

SPOKEN SYNC *for a special purpose from God.*

MW She did not resist in anything.

SUNG *She did not*

SPOKEN SYNC *She did not resist in anything.* She accepted everything.

SUNG *She accepted*

SPOKEN SYNC *She accepted everything.*

SK She lived in a tent—as a refugee [self-conscious laughter]

SUNG *She lived in a tent-*

SPOKEN SYNC *as a refugee I think [self-conscious laughter]*

SPOKEN SYNC *in a tent*

SPOKEN SYNC *in a tent*

Alongside *The Cave*'s de- and re-composition of recorded sentence fragments and sound phrases, the visual (and, importantly, sync-sound) images of speaking subjects are also fragmented and repeated. However, such fragmentation and repetition are constructed quite differently in visual and aural media. Korot presents her images simultaneously across five very large video screens that are part of the performance. The images deployed range from images of text, of the site of Abraham's cave, and for the most part, shots of talking head medium close-ups (from the chest upwards, face turned almost directly toward the camera, slightly off center in the frame) and a number of small fragments of the original talking head images. The latter range from an extreme close-up of a background detail, such as bit of texture of the speaker's clothing against the background wall to strand of their hair, or a bit of their neck and background. We have to work to decipher these fragments; in these images there are no faces, nothing that signifies "speaking subject." Instead they depict the contingencies or excesses (or "noise") of the talking head shot, the uncontrolled details of color and shape with little or no informational value simultaneously repeated across multiple video screens. One might consider them to be like the pauses, breaths, or other non-verbal sounds that are part of the speech we hear. The use of occasional mirrored images in addition to these reframed fragments renders what has already become abstract even more so. Korot, a pioneer in the field of video installation art with her early piece *Dachau* (1974), is strongly influenced by textile art, and the video screens of *The Cave* become similar to elements of a tapestry with the echoing, repetition, and mirroring of aesthetic details and design.

This textural use of visual space across the multiple screens, the attention to and repetition of the incidental pattern, the flattening of space into almost two-dimensional details that complement and accompany the traditional "talking head" shots, recalls, again, the haptic, especially as this concept was used by nineteenth century art historians such as Alois Riegl. The emphasis on pattern, repetition, and abstracted form creates an aesthetic distance from the verbal messages and their visual register at the same time as it provides a tactile experience by accentuating the flat visual surfaces that comprise the architecture of the work. Just as the sound composition accentuates the melodic and rhythmic patterns found in (and then abstracted from) the interviews, the visual work similarly accentuates patterns found

in two-dimensional screen-representation over and above an exclusive focus on the meaning- and message-generating talking head. Korot's haptic approach to visual representations of the interview pushes us to focus on their quality as representation rather than as an objective image of the world just as *The Cave's* haptic aurality refuses to allow us to focus exclusively on the literal meanings of words. Instead *The Cave* creates a nuanced and heightened experience of the expressive power of voice—an expressive power that can belie or accentuate the meanings of words and eloquently articulate affects, assumptions, and attitudes, whether part of the speaker's conscious intent or not. In this way one might say that it reveals aspects of the Saying that transcriptions of words certainly do not and cannot.

The last work to be discussed here is one that takes yet another radically different approach to its representation of and commentary on our relation and attitude to voice. It is through the substitution of the material presence of one voice for another that we are forced to reflect on what roles—both aesthetic and political—voice plays in regard to testimony. Anja Salomonowitz' *It Happened Just Before* (2006) is an Austrian experimental documentary centered around five testimonies. It begins with elegantly shot images of a European highway border crossing. After a few minutes of shots of customs' offices, a highway, and a number of cars passing through, the camera moves into one of the glassed-in offices to concentrate on a young male border guard. When he speaks to the camera, he begins to recount a story of having been persuaded by a boyfriend to get a ride with some others to make the trip to Austria. In spite of some moments of tension at the border crossing, they make it into Austria only for her to discover that her boyfriend has sold her to these men who then force her to work as a prostitute, take her money, and threaten her with turning her in to the police. As the story is being told in the first person by the border guard, we see him going about his daily duties, typing up reports, completing his shift, taking off his uniform in a small dorm-like room while he periodically pauses to continue his account. He addresses us directly, speaking in a straightforward but seemingly rehearsed manner and with almost no affect. As listeners and viewers we are initially confused and then slowly become aware of the deliberate disjunction between the tale and the telling, the Said and the Saying.

The young border guard's first-person account is, we discover, that of a young Albanian woman who was the victim of trafficking. Four more accounts follow: "by" a brothel owner, an elderly neighbor woman, a consular official (who is a relatively well-known political figure in Austria), and a taxi driver. Each speaker goes about their own daily life and tasks, but periodically addresses the camera to recount "their" (or rather the forcibly invisible female body's) story of illegal trafficking and prostitution in the first-person. Salomonowitz's interviews with a number of trafficked women were transcribed, edited, and then performed by others—actual people (non-actors) whose livelihoods, if not lives, are in one way or another imbricated with those of the women whose stories they recount. Because they *are* more or less politically and legally invisible in the world, these women remain so in the film, while those others who cross—and to some degree even determine—their invisible paths perform their speech for them. In her film Salomonowitz has forcibly detached the *content of speech*, the Said, from its *voice*, its Saying. What we are given

to listen to in the film is the non-realist and unsettling *performance* of a voice: the distilled speech of the trafficked women inserted into the bodies and voices of those whose lives intersect with them and whose visibility and audibility is not politically precarious. The uncanny and unexpected Brechtian performance of embodied voice in *It Happened Just Before* heightens our awareness of the *absence* of the women's voices, of the political and cinematic *erasure* of the bodies whose testimonies we hear.

Listening is a crucial yet almost invisible part of testimony. Without it testimony, and the scene(s) of address that constitute it, doesn't exist. All of the works discussed in this chapter draw attention to listening, whether by giving the process of listening diegetic presence or by using creative cinematic means to frame and focus on specific qualities of voice that are as much a part of cinematic testimony as its verbal message. By showing listening and asking us to listen alongside others in works like *Shoah*, *S-21*, and *Crazy*—and to notice how words, voice, music and their associated affects inscribe themselves on the actively listening body—these works heighten our awareness of our own listening's power and scope, of ways in which it might be shared, and of what it is that we actually attend to when we listen to testimony and other accounts. By manipulating the audience's own listening practice through the use of various unconventional cinematic techniques in *Blue*, *Mouths of Ash*, *The Cave*, or *It Happened Just Before*, cinematic works and installations can make us newly aware of the powers of voice, both in addition to and as distinct from speech. Through the experience of these works, the pivotal but often forgotten role of voice in cinematic testimony emerges and remain present. The physicality and musicality of voice, the sonorities, sensations and associations it conveys above and beyond the signification of the specific words deployed, is an intrinsic part *of* the other for Cavarero (46) and ties us indelibly *to* the other for Dolar. As a mutual act of relation, cinematic testimony is constituted by voice as much as by words, by how we speak as much as what we speak about, and by our attitudes toward listening as much as those to speech.

5. TESTIMONY'S CHARGE: ETHICS AND FORM

In this chapter I turn to the question of ethics in cinematic testimony and whether and how nonfiction films can embody ethical relations within the films as well as between the films and an audience. I argue that in moving image media, aesthetics and ethics are intertwined and that the former—aesthetics—shapes the latter—ethics.¹¹² If this is the case, then there is a need for further attention to how this shaping takes place. I ask what ethics is, how it is manifest in film, and more specifically how, through the construction of cinematic testimony, moving image works can create, depict, and model the ethical relation. Referring to the work of a number of writers, including Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, and Emmanuel Levinas, I explore how an ethical relation might be structured in and through cinematic testimony. After discussing the tension between an approach to ethics based on maintaining the alterity of the Other and one grounded in empathy for the Other, I argue that ideally the ethical relation would fluctuate between the two. Examining the very different aesthetic strategies of two films, Abraham Ravett's *The March* (1999) and Mohammed Malas' *The Dream* (1986), I suggest that it is when formal strategies are used in ways to make cinematic testimony come alive, or become “creature” in Levinas' terms, that profound ethical relations can be produced.

For Vivian Sobchack, documentary in and of itself is, by definition, “inscribed as ethical space; it stands as the objectively visible evidence of subjective visual responsiveness and responsibility toward a world shared with other human subjects” (261). This is part of our “documentary consciousness,” which is aroused when we are presented with images of a world that we believe is shared extra-cinematically with those on the screen, a world in which an image of death or slaughter means that death and slaughter actually occurred. Indeed according to Sobchack documentary consciousness is experienced as a kind of embodied physical response, what she calls the “charge of the real,” (and what Bill Nichols called the “indexical whammy” in *Blurred Boundaries* (8ff)). This charge is also, for Sobchack, “an *ethical charge*: one that calls forth not only response but also responsibility—not only aesthetic valuation but also ethical judgment” (271).

What precisely is the meaning and effect of this ethical charge, and what part do “aesthetic valuation” and “ethical judgment” play? In the same essay Sobchack suggests that the experience of watching documentary films can be distinguished from experience of watching fiction by the fact that aesthetic values (dominant in our experience of watching fiction) are diminished while ethical ones are heightened (261). I argue to the contrary. I believe that aesthetics are as or even *more* crucial to documentary than to fiction film, precisely *because* they impact, and can amplify or diminish, a film's ethical charge. Cinema aesthetics—the embodiment of a work's formal, textual, or rhetorical

¹¹² Or as Jean-Luc Godard put it: “Between the ethical and the aesthetic, one has to choose. That's understood. But it's also understood that each of these words contains a part of the other. And whoever chooses one will necessarily find the other at the end of the road” (my translation).

strategies—are integral to how documentary films, including cinematic testimony, are received. In other words, the *how* of cinematic testimony (its construction, shape, and transmission) determines its potential ethical force.

In the following discussion of the relationship and intertwining of aesthetics and ethics in cinematic testimony, I wish to separate ethics from the judgment that Sobchack (and many others) see as inherent to it. Instead, I refer to an idea of ethics similar to that proposed by Gilles Deleuze in a lecture on Spinoza. In such an ethics one does not judge: “Somebody says or does something, you do not relate it to values. You ask yourself how is that possible? How is this possible in an internal way?” Moral judgment (which, of course, plays a crucial role in the social fabric of any community), has no part here. This ethics does not posit a universal system of values; it remains in an interrogatory mode. “[Y]ou relate the thing or the statement to the mode of existence that it implies, that it envelops in itself. How must it be in order to say that? Which manner of Being does this imply” (Deleuze)? Here the ethical is a kind of questioning (of oneself as well as others) and a dwelling alongside people, events, ways of life. It engages a hypothetical, projective, but always interrogative meeting of another’s mode of existence. The emphasis is on a possible relation to another human being with a focus on openness, compassion, curiosity, and recognition without objectification or judgment. The question is then whether and *how* cinematic testimony can produce this kind of an ethical attitude in viewers and listeners, an attitude that *may* subsequently extend to other people and events in the world and even provoke a transformation in the self.

In the concluding chapter of his book *Representing Reality*, Bill Nichols raises the question of how to “conjure or restore for the viewer those orders of magnitude appropriate to the full dimensionality of the world in which we live” (230) and “how to represent another person, when any representation threatens diminution, fabrication, and distortion” (231). He suggests that what is needed is vivification, or “rendering *felt* what representations only allude to” (233 [emphasis added]).¹¹³ But how is such vivification created by the nonfiction filmmaker? How can nonfiction representation engage and touch us so that we do not fall into habitual and comfortable responses? Nichols writes about the experience of vivification as fostered through techniques that incorporate reflexivity or the formalist concept of *ostranenie*:

There is not merely the flat announcement of something more that escapes the frame, but the subjective experience of excess, the discovery—usually unanticipated, sudden, or dialectical—of a magnitude of existence beyond containment. [...] Interior, subjective dimensions, given external form by cultural production, present contradiction, paradox, and dialectics with experiential force.” (262-3)

¹¹³ Nichols makes a point of distinguishing such vivification from “spectacle.” Spectacle, for him, is “an aborted or foreclosed form of identification where emotional engagement does not even extend as far as concern but instead remains arrested at the level of sensation,” while vivification is “aligned with a felt sense of contradiction, dilemma, or existential paradox.” Vivification engages “participatory, conditional, and subjective states of being (what it would be like if...and so on)” (233-234).

Not all documentaries, not all representations of the historical world, have such an experiential force. I will argue that certain kinds of vivification create this force—the very “ethical charge” of which Sobchack speaks. Cinematic testimony’s “charge” then, its mandate, is to embody, create, and transmit this ethical charge, and it does so through its aesthetic and rhetorical strategies.

A Taste of Trauma

In a paper on the cultural memory of human barbarism and trauma, Homi K. Bhabha discusses what he calls an ethics of memory. This ethics of memory demands that the memory of barbarism be passed down; but it also demands specific kinds of representation for its transmission. These are not the kind of representations that offer mere resemblances to the past, but rather representations that create a recognition, and indeed what Bhabha calls a “re-cognition,” of such a past *in the present* (Bhabha “Global Memory”). His emphasis on the *re-* in recognition suggests awareness, acknowledgment, but also a knowledge/understanding that is doubled, re-awakened or somehow renewed. This memory-as-re-cognition is vital, he claims, because in order for us to act ethically, we must maintain a “taste” of the trauma as something present, animate. “[I]f we did not have some taste of the trauma as something that was *alive*, not something that was archival, then we would not be able to ...ethically act in a way to avoid it” (Bhabha interview [emphasis added]).¹¹⁴

This possibility of re-cognition of a past in the present, the trauma that can be “tasted,” is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s notion of the now-time or *Jetztzeit* as discussed in “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” For Benjamin, this is a time that runs counter to the homogeneous, empty time posited by historians; instead this time “blasts open the continuum of history”(262). Bhabha refers to works—memoirs, films, photographic series that grapple with memories of Rwanda, the Holocaust, and the Palestinian diaspora—that create what he calls “testamentary nows,” which allow us to re-cognize the past in the present. This can occur when a part of the past is “touched by” the present thus producing a reconstitution, a re-cognition of it. Bhabha emphasizes, however, that the reconstitution is also a translation. What is crucial is the “ability to *recreate through translation*... at the level of enunciation, the linguistic and discursive and philosophical, phenomenological moment of the trauma yet again.” Such a translation can give form to:

not a new knowledge but a *now* knowledge, not a knowledge that simply reflects or repeats what has happened, but in its inarticulacy, the way in which it creates a caesura in speech, the way in which it actually defies testimony, creates another temporality. And it’s in that temporality, in that encrypted temporality, *which*

¹¹⁴ In Bhabha’s interview with Julie Copeland, the passage is as follows: “The morally vigilant thing to do is at the point at which you think you’re forgetting, to remind yourself, and at the point at which you are remembering, to make yourself forget. That’s what I call the ambivalence of global memory, and it’s a very complex state of being. If we were completely traumatized and tied to the trauma we couldn’t get anywhere, but if we did not have some taste of the trauma as something that was alive, not something that was archival, then we would not be able to ... ethically act in a way to avoid it.”

draws you in, which you have to actually then encode, that the great stain of barbarism and its transmission is created. (“Global memory”)

What is most compelling about Bhabha’s understanding of the “now knowledge” and the “re-cognition of the now” lies in his notion of the encrypted temporality that draws us in, that we (viewers/listeners/interlocutors/readers) encode, or to put it in terms better suited to my own analysis, not so much *encode*, but *incorporate* and *embody*. This “anxious and impossible temporality” is a temporality of the body, and it felt in, and through, the body. The re-cognition of the now is a bodily event. Now-time is, *must be*, bodily time. The present tense is always experienced through the living body, even if other temporalities simultaneously course through it and reverberate with this present now. Just as Benjamin’s terminology of blasts and shocks in his discussion of the *Jetztzeit* suggests visceral, embodied sensation and meaning,¹¹⁵ Bhabha’s “re-cognition” is in fact a *re-sensing* of another’s now. It is the experience of a *re-sonance* throughout the body. Being drawn in to someone’s “testamentary now” is, in many ways, the experience of its re-sonance in us, akin to what I’ve described in chapter three as a temporarily shared bodily state.

The aim of testimonial forms and artworks, in terms of Homi Bhabha’s analysis, is thus to create for others this ethically productive and physically resonant “testamentary now,” one that we can actually “taste.” It is not about being given transparent access to a past, a historical trauma, or life events. It comes through representation; it is, as he emphasizes, a recreation *through translation*. Something must be translated, enunciated, in whatever the medium of representation so that it becomes alive. In the case of *cinematic* testimony, I argue that a double enunciation occurs, first as part of the pre- and pro-filmic engagement between filmmaker and subjects, and then in the shaping of the cinematic work which will be shared with the world. Both these levels of enunciation involve recreation through translation—decisions concerning aesthetic and rhetorical form—and engage all the means of cinema: the materiality of the medium, *mise-en-scène*, framing (and framing *out*), cinematography, editing, and rhythm. It is *how* cinematic testimony is enunciated, how it is vivified in Nichol’s terms, that gives it its force.

The Priority of Rhetoric

In the introduction to this dissertation, I invoked Judith Butler’s notion of “giving an account of oneself” as a possible paradigm for the self-narration that is at the core of many forms of what is today called testimony. For Butler, these accounts or testimonies are necessarily embedded in and conditioned by what she calls the scene or mode of

¹¹⁵ For example, Benjamin writes: “The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called “once upon a time” in historicism’s bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to *blast* open the continuum of history” (262). And: “Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a *shock*, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist . . . takes cognizance of it in order to *blast* a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history—*blasting* a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework” . . . (262-63 [emphasis added]). Even Benjamin’s example of how Robespierre and his followers adopted the clothes and attitudes of imperial Rome hinges on the experience and deployment of the body in accessing a notion of the past.

address. Because accounts are always “given to another, whether conjured or existing,” what Butler calls the scene of address constitutes a “primary ethical relation” (21). If for Bhabha ethics demands representations that allow us to “taste” barbarism and its trauma, for Butler ethics resides in, and is constituted by, the relation any formulation of speech or representation depends on—that between addressor and addressee. It is through such address, both received and given, that we become constituted as subjects, subjects who are always opaque to themselves and who thus depend on others for this constitution.

Shaped by social and linguistic norms as well as by the specific demands or expectations of the one requesting the account, the scene of address fundamentally conditions testimony and even “structures the way in which moral questions emerge” (134). Butler writes: “no ‘I’ can begin to tell its story without asking: ‘Who are you?’ ‘Who speaks to me?’ ‘To whom do I speak when I speak to you?’ If this establishes the priority of rhetoric to ethics, that might be just as well” (134). Perhaps it is not so much a matter of asserting the priority of rhetoric of ethics, but rather suggesting that there is such a complex imbrication that the two can never be severed from each other. In other words, it is futile to try to detach testimony from the encounter and address that initiates it; and it is also futile to try to detach ethics from the rhetorical conditions through which ethical questions and relations emerge.

Above, I suggested that in cinematic testimony there is a double enunciation, and thus a double scene of address: that between filmmaker and subjects and that of the cinematic work to its future audiences. While fundamentally different, these modes of the address are of equal import in their constitution of cinematic testimony. Thus the embodied linguistic and social modes of address between humans, which may or may not be partially visible in a given film, and the aesthetics and rhetoric of the moving images which gives testimony a cinematic shape, are both crucial to and constitutive of the ethical force of a work.

Butler argues that, ethically speaking, the ostensible accuracy or adequacy of the testimonial account is less important than the fundamental realization that every ‘I,’ being inherently obscure to itself, can only be constituted in relationality and is thus ethically implicated in the lives of others. This realization leads to the following:

As we ask to know the other, or ask that the other says, finally or definitively, who he or she is, it will be important not to expect *an answer that will ever satisfy*. By not pursuing satisfaction and by letting the question remain open, even enduring, we let the other live, since life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it. If letting the other live is part of any ethical definition of recognition, then this version of recognition will be based less on knowledge than on an apprehension of epistemic limits (42-43).

If there is an ethics for the practice of soliciting testimony and accounts from others, it might by this.

Shuddering: Between Alterity and Empathy

In film studies, recent discussions of the ethics of representation suggest a polarity between those who advocate for the explicit articulation of the limits of possible knowledge and an emphasis on the Other's alterity (as suggested by Butler above) and those who advocate for cinematic strategies that create feelings of empathy or empathic identification with those depicted on the screen. The philosophical critique of empathy—already present in the work of Emmanuel Levinas who championed the idea of the transcendent alterity of the Other as the ethical ideal—has been particularly harsh. Both Levinas and Cavarero argue that empathy is, like knowledge, appropriative, aggressive, and reductive; the self, in recognizing itself in the other, subsumes the latter. By denying the other's alterity, empathy destroys this other as other (Levinas *Outside* 38; Cavarero *Relating* 91).

Film scholar Sarah Cooper explicitly criticizes the claim that all documentary is inherently ethical. Resisting what she sees as an overemphasis on the spectators' recognition of their own world, she argues that the ethical attitude in documentary would be “*not* to see the face of the other as our own” (12 emphasis added). Platitudes about “understanding” others are misguided; instead it is a Levinasian recognition of distance and irreducible alterity that is crucial for Cooper. When documentary film subjects can be “seen to resist reduction to the vision of the filmmaker who fashions them, aligning this irreducibility with the asymmetrical relation to the Other in Levinasian thought” (5), then one can speak of an ethical relationship. This can only happen when the perceiving subject cannot assimilate the Other to itself (24). To be ethical a cinematic representation must maintain the subject's potentially disruptive specificity and challenge the viewer's (and filmmaker's) mastery. “Transcendence is a function of the encounters the films make possible with spectators (rather than being associated with the position of the spectator), all of which hinge on the irreducibility of those viewed to the viewing subject” (8). Countering psychoanalytic film theory's 1970s model of the viewing subject, Cooper argues that it is we—viewer and filmmaker—who should experience transcendence *by* a documentary's subjects, not vice-versa. In other words, we must be made to feel that the people we see on the screen cannot be contained or subsumed by the filmmaker's frame nor by our inquisitive, sympathetic, or judgmental gaze. In this way, “the ethical cuts through the certainties of the subject who sees, creating a selfless encounter through which we might begin to see differently both in the cinematic space and beyond” (93).

While this notion of viewers having their certainties and complacency undone by cinematic representations is powerful, the severity of criticism aimed at any suggestion of empathic relation seems excessive. Lisa Cartwright has proposed a model of what she calls “empathetic identification,” anchored in a concept of projective identification which is a two-way process that entails an “intersubjective mobility.” In the context of cinema spectatorship, the viewer/listener engages as *both* a recipient and an agent of projective identifications, with empathic identification as a potential outcome of this process. For Cartwright, in empathy “I do not need to know about you or identify with you (or any given object of my attention such as an image of you). I do not see from your position.” Instead, “my knowledge comes from the *force* of the object (‘you,’ the image, the representation), and my reciprocal sense that I recognize the feeling perceived in your

expression. ‘You’ move me to have feelings, but the feelings may not match your own” (24 emphasis added).

Although she does not reference neuroscientific research, Cartwright’s “force” of the object is compatible with Gallese’s discussion of the process of empathy as an embodied “matching between what the other is expressing by means of ostensive behavior and what we would feel were we expressing those affective states ourselves” (Gallese 147). Affect is central to Cartwright’s discussion; it is affect that animates objects and images “by giving [them] the power to ‘make me’ feel” (47) and, “through actions and impressions that include vocal sound, expression, and gesture” (35), mobilizes and vivifies representations which in turn moderate our projections. Cartwright even attempts to reconcile her theories of affect and empathic projection with the ethical project of Levinas when she suggests that the subject experiencing affect puts herself in the same position as Levinas’ subject “who grants priority over the self to the other” (47). Cartwright’s (and Gallese’s neuroscientific and embodied) empathy is thus not the same as the solipsistic empathy that assimilates, even annihilates, its other and that is vilified by Levinas, Cavarero, Cooper and others.

I would argue that a notion and experience of alterity alone cannot anchor an ethical attitude. It is crucial to have both a sense of the other’s transcendence of our own knowledge and experience, and at the same time, the possibility of empathy, of an inter-subjective sharing of some aspects of existence and the life-world. Only in such a way can one perceive or imagine what another’s being-in-the-world might feel like. Only through a form of empathy can we attempt to engage through our own mind-bodies with another’s experiences or “taste” an existence and a “now-time” other than our own.

Testimony Becoming Creature

Critical of empathy, “which is a form of knowledge” (*Outside* 38), Levinas writes that the ethical relation is “a shuddering of the human quite different from cognition” (*Otherwise than Being* 87). Perhaps this ethical relation can also be thought of as a vacillation or vibration that moves between moments of empathic affect and shared subjectivity (like those defined by Cartwright and Gallese) and a sense of profound alterity, without being able to rest at either pole, since both self and other are in constant transformation. In the same way that he is suspicious of knowledge (and therefore empathy) as a mode of ethically engaging with the other, Levinas is deeply suspicious of the image. The ethical relation is not compatible with any form or act of representation because the Other—and the “face” of the Other—is irreducible and cannot be represented. In fact “the face of the Other destroys and surpasses at every moment the plastic image that it leaves behind” (*Totality* 51). Images imitate and immobilize being, they aestheticize.¹¹⁶ The Other is defined precisely by *not* being able to be represented; the Other transcends any and all representation and perception.

¹¹⁶ I would argue that *moving* images do not necessarily immobilize. In fact, if any art or representational form has the capability of conveying the mobility and constant transformations of becoming rather than the fixity of being, it is cinema.

Speech, however, holds a special place for Levinas. If the presence of the Other cannot be shown in an image, it *can* manifest itself in words, in the processes of speaking and listening. He writes that the presence of the other can be “fulfilled in hearing, and draws its meaning from this originally transcendent role played by the proffered word” (*Outside* 148). Thus speech—and testimony—*can* embody the other’s transcendent presence. Unlike Levinas’ dismissal of images as a medium for an ethical relation, speech can transmit the unique presence and alterity of the other. In fact Levinas writes that when the other speaks to me, “he wrenches experience away from its esthetic self-sufficiency, from its *here*, where it rests in peace. By invoking it, he transforms it into a creature” (148).¹¹⁷ No longer a thing, it comes alive.

This notion of experience becoming “creature” through the act of one human speaking, articulating, to another serves as a powerful analogy for the kind of cinematic testimony I am discussing here. This is experience coming alive through speech-as-address, vivified through being offered and recounted. It is not fixed in reified images. It is not representation, but ex-pression that is imparted to others through the movements of human voice. Testimony, verbal or cinematic, can then be thought of as a complex, constructed and irreducible *creature* that emerges from a specific and tangible scene of address. “The subject who speaks does not place the world in relation to himself, nor place himself purely and simply at the heart of his own spectacle, [...] but in relation to the Other” (Levinas, *Outside* 149). And this speaking/being spoken creature may lead to a re-cognition in the listener; in the creature she can taste another’s now-time, taste a story of lived experience in fragmentary and sensual textures—not as a “definitive narrative but [...] a linguistic and social occasion for self-transformation” (Butler 130).

Another crucial insight about testimony can be found in Levinas’ distinction between the Saying and the Said, discussed in the previous chapter. While one can think of the *Said* as the content of speech or communication, the *Saying* is its precondition, its embodied gesture. It is “a condition for all communication, as exposure” (*Otherwise* 48). While essential to and a part of the said, it is never reducible to it. In Levinas’ words

The unblocking of communication, irreducible to the circulation of communication which presupposes it, is accomplished in saying. It is not due to the contents that are inscribed in the said and transmitted to the interpretation and decoding done by another. It is in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability.” (48)

Thus the saying can be thought of as the ground of all utterance, the primordial gesture of any address, the offering of signs to another, or the very “signification of signification itself” (Pinchevski 10). If testimony is experience become “creature,” it emerges from the intertwining of the saying (as a risky, performative act situated in a specific scene of

¹¹⁷ In French the word “creature” resonates much more explicitly with “creation” (because both are articulated as 3 syllables with the “a” pronounced) in a way that may only be an afterthought in English. This creature is also creation, as if both independent of yet also partly determined—created—by the conditions of its utterance.

address) and the said. And if the ethical relation is, for Levinas, a “shuddering,” it is also a shuddering of re-cognition (in Bhabha’s sense) of this creature. This re-cognition comes through a synchronous but alternating empathic engagement and sense of absolute uniqueness and irreducibility of the Other. As the embodiment of relation, the creature born of speech, of certain forms of address, provokes a sense of response-ability to the Other and to the world.

While Levinas might cringe at the thought of mere representations—in the shape of recorded moving images and sounds—having a significant role to play in the constitution of any ethical relation, I hold that certain representations have the power to model and to constitute such relations for us. Cinematic testimony can also be experienced as creature, as something alive and transformative. Its Said and the Saying exist both in embodied speech and in how that speech is given presence and temporal shape in cinematic form. There is no catalog of norms or aesthetic forms that guarantees the vivification of an account, or the transmission of a “testamentary now.” Cinematic Saying is made up of an amalgam of strategies that together create a unique cinematic creature that reaches outward to its audience. In the two films discussed below, the filmmakers make use of very different aesthetic approaches to create their powerful ethical charge.

Marching, Dreaming

Both Abraham Ravett’s *The March* (1999) and Mohammed Malas’ *The Dream* (1986) present unique and deeply ethical approaches to testimony about historical and present day trauma as they evoke large-scale historical events through small voices and bodies that encompass and are encompassed by history. Each work, in its own ways, produces a delicate balance between empathic identification and the sense of our interlocutor’s absolute transcendence of our own possibilities of understanding. Each work allows us to deeply appreciate, and “taste,” something of their subjects’ modes of being. Their approaches to time, both the times of testimony and the times referred to by testimony, enrich and complicate idea of a “testamentary now” for both the testifiers and for us.

Abraham Ravett’s *The March* begins with the following written text on a black background:

On January 18, 1945, the German high command ordered the evacuation of Auschwitz. Inmates were forced to march in mid-winter to either a nearby railway junction from which they would be taken to other camps and sub-camps in western Germany or for hundreds of miles—on foot—to other destinations.

Source: [The Holocaust](#) by Martin Gilbert

The film that follows can be thought of as a response to this text and to this mode of articulating history and conveying the past. If this passage represents a “big” voice of history, one that recounts not from the ground but from the omniscient vantage point of temporal and spatial distance, then Ravett’s film represents an almost desperate need to evoke and amplify a “small” voice of this same (family) history. This small voice may

stumble, and perceive/re-member in extreme close-up rather than wide shot, but in this myopic, fragmented stumbling it evokes an entire world of sensations, of embodied experiences filled with the rough textures, bodily needs, and raw emotions of the lived. Hunger, cold, bread, despondency, woolen underwear, milk, gratitude, corpses, and generosity resonate in this melodious and intimate voice that doesn't necessarily want to be speaking or remembering.

In the first images of the film, we see a man and an older woman. He is setting up a shot, asking her to clap her hands: "Ok mom." "Yes darling?" "Can you clap your hands?" Once she has clapped so the synch tone is recorded, he then begins to ask her a question in Yiddish. She responds with surprise and tells him she doesn't feel comfortable speaking Yiddish, she wants to speak to him in English. He wants to know about "the march." And she begins to speak to him, to us, perhaps a bit reluctantly but clearly desiring to please this man we have learned is her son.

When, when the Russian already are was near the border of by Kracow.
So they liquidated the Auschwitz camp. And each of us got a whole loaf of bread, a blanket, and a, a, a... can of meat. Conserved, conserved meat. So who ate that meat? Probably [?] right away ... I gave away that can of meat, and I got in return a piece of margarine. So I had a piece of margarine for my bread. That's all what we got. A blanket we turned away. I personally turned away the blanket, because we start marching. We marched... uh, how many weeks? From January to, to May. No, not so far. I don't... We start marching... No, first of all when they liquidated that Auschwitz, we..., they put us in such trucks like animals, animal trucks. And you know with that uh piece of bread we had and whoever ate that meat... and you know a lot of people died in the trucks. But that was January you know, it was cold.

Already in the first minute of the film we are given the familial and affective context in which this account of Fela's experience of 1945 is embedded: the demand from the son, the intimacy and informality of the encounter, the son's desire to place himself in what are, for him, the empty spaces of the mother's past as evidenced by his attempt to have their dialogue in Yiddish, the cinematic constructedness of their dialogue, the mother's wish to please, the force of her vivid images and tactile bodily sensations overwhelming any chronological narrative.

The March is shot over thirteen years, and over thirteen years Ravett repeatedly and insistently asked his mother, Fela Ravett, to tell him about her experience as one of the thousands of concentration camp victims forced to go on a death march across Germany and Poland at the end of the war. Over the years we see Ravett setting up his interviews with his mother in various and—sometimes unlikely—places: porches, highway rest stops, parks, in her home, at the hospital after her stroke. In between scenes of him asking the same question year after year and Fela responding, we see other images: optically printed 8 mm images of Fela out of focus; some of the terms or phrases she uses written out on the screen (strepches, blanket, Estucha was her name) in anticipation of or as an echo to her spoken words; what seem like handwritten lists of things or names

somehow related to her ordeal; and handwritten markings of the years that pass as the interviews continue. We are also presented with numerous material traces of the filmmaking and testimonial process: images of light flares on the 16mm film; black frames marking the interruptions and lacunae of her accounts; Abraham's repeated process of creating a synch tone, often by asking his mother to clap her hands; the sound of questions he asks her and the occasional frustration she sometimes expresses before beginning once again to tell him a bit of this story; and additional images of her when the sound recording has failed or she is simply waiting, sitting, wordless. Again and again, between the years 1984 and 1997, fragments and anecdotes of her experience emerge from this dialogue between mother and son. Each one is different, with some images that repeat or overlap. We slowly realize that there is no coherent or exhaustive narrative to be had, either by Abraham or by us. Time and memory have blurred events, chronology is no longer (or never was) relevant for Fela in whose body and mind the fragmented experiences are lodged. Fela's recounting, her memory of "the march," is more durational than chronological in Lawrence Langer's terminology, a quality often associated with memories of trauma. Durational time is "a constantly *re*-experienced time [that] threatens the chronology of experienced time. It leaps out of chronology, establishing its own momentum, or fixation" (Langer 194). Fela Ravett's most vivid anecdotes are related to bodily experiences, feelings, people, or things: the friend with whom she traded sugar for underwear who later emigrated to Australia; her strepches, the open wooden shoes she wore all winter; the can of meat traded for another's margarine; freezing in a barn at night; the "corpuses" [sic] that lined the roads.

Fela Ravett's voice—with its accent, its non-American syntax, the particularity of its intonation patterns, and an affective charge (suggesting intimacy, love, and a desire to please) triggered by the fact that the address is to her son—evokes an absolutely unique being and presence. This voice and the fragmented images it conjures and repeats carries us into Fela's now-times—the now of her address to Abraham, of her slowly aging body, as well as the now of the crowded truck for animals, the cold Polish night, the woolen underwear, the lack of food, the friendship with Estucha. The voiced images pull us into the world of fragments of past, while scenes of their mutual address push us toward gaining a sense of her now-relationship with Abraham. At the same time, Abraham's deployment of specific words and phrases transcribed on the screen act as echo and/or foreshadowing of her durational, fragmented memory-images as well as a means of creating a rhythm between Fela's speech and silence (during which her words are allowed to resonate visually). As Jeffrey Skoller has remarked in his insightful analysis of the film, Abraham Ravett's use of written words "call[s] attention to certain parts of Fela's testimony, and they also work to pull the viewer into her process of speaking. We wait attentively to hear her say the word that was written, hoping it doesn't slide by" (144). Not only does this seeing then hearing or hearing then seeing, "assert the temporal quality of narrative formation," but it also engages us, the viewers/listeners, in participating in the repetitive "return to image[s] of her past" (144).

Both Abraham and Fela Ravett have allowed their experiences to become "creature" for us, to come alive. Fela recounts to Abraham and Abraham recounts that recounting through and in film. This process draws us in through fragments of sense experience, though gestures between mother and son, through rhythms of intonation and patterns of

speech and silence. These qualities provide the opportunity for us to begin to engage empathically, to project our own experiences and bodies onto others and incorporate theirs into our own experience and understanding of the world. At the same time, the very particularity and distinctiveness of Abraham and Fela's life-worlds, of the events they seek to convey to each other and to us, constantly transcend and elude this ability to empathize or "understand." The inability (theirs and ours) to package, generalize, or complete some definitive narrative keeps us acutely aware of how slight our sense of understanding actually is.

Rather than exploring one encounter again and again as Ravett does, Mohammed Malas' *The Dream* consists of a series of twenty-odd short accounts given to the camera by almost as many people. The individuals in this film are not identified by name, origin, location, profession, or anything else. Most speak only once, sometimes twice over the duration of the work. The scenes of address could be categorized as pseudo-monologue (Nichols), as we almost never hear a question and certainly never see the questioner. However, those whose words we hear are clearly responding to a gaze and a solicitation to speak. The presence of a receptive and engaged interlocutor is palpable in all the subjects' address.

The film begins, before any title, with a young woman on a small concrete balcony addressing the camera directly in a very matter of fact voice.¹¹⁸

I saw it raining and cold. Then it was light and the sky was filled with Koranic verses. I read every verse that appeared. After a while I saw a big crowd. A woman in white came to me and said: Why aren't you praying? I said: I don't know how. Teach me. She did and I prayed and noticed the crowd. I said: God! What is the matter? They said: It is victory! We have won! I asked myself: Is it possible we've won so soon?

This is followed by the title *The Dream* and then a lengthy exploration of tiny twisting streets, alleyways, and make-shift, cramped concrete houses. The camera then comes upon a large family that greets us in their courtyard, as if we were expected. Wandering slowly into and through their house, we and the camera finally come to linger in the outdoor kitchen with a young woman who begins to speak. While she slowly stirs a huge pot that could feed dozens, she tells the camera about her parents, each of her sisters and their husbands, and her brothers, one of whom has been martyred. Most of the men live or work elsewhere, from Saudi Arabia to London, while the women live there, in this house we have just traveled through.

We cut to the seaside where an older man with a broken foot sits and looks out at the sea. He begins to tell us his story with "In 1948 we left Jafa on a fishing boat, tugging behind us my felluca 'Yafa.' We came by sea to Tyre. We barely made it." He continues his

¹¹⁸ Malas seems to have added a slight reverb to her account here, though he does not do this to any of the other testimonies, including hers when he comes back to her. It is as if, just this once, he wants to emphasize the recounting is coming from a space of the imaginary, of hallucination, of individual and collective desire.

story, telling us about his life and difficult livelihood. This is the only time in the entire film that the year 1948 and the Palestinian exodus is directly alluded to. After a sequence of traveling shots through dry semi-populated landscapes, we move back to domestic interiors. Inside a home, an older woman comes to greet us carrying a rifle wrapped in sheaths of plastic. She proudly unpacks it and holds it with ease, showing the camera how to fire it, as she begins to speak about her son who made the rifle and then, several years later, died as a martyr. We move back into another home, starting in a courtyard where two women sit pulling the leaves off of a huge mass of what looks like basil, through rooms and back out again. One of the women begins to talk: “In my sleep I saw myself walking along the street where we used to live...”

Although they are given no names or context-clarifying labels in the work, each person inhabits his or her unique space in Malas’ film, a space gently observed and often explored by the camera. We become guests, invited into each occasionally intimate, occasionally public place—a kitchen, a bedroom, a tiny vestibule, the sleeping quarters of a military outpost, a classroom, an office. It is not through captions, intertitles, or summary statements that we begin to make sense of our experience, nor even through—at least at first—the subjects’ words. Rather, it is the way in which subjects dwell in or move through these particular spaces, as well as the objects or images that surround them or that they show us, that provide us with an intimation of personal biography and, perhaps even more importantly, the manner in which that particular biography intertwines with a collective history. Slowly we realize we are being confronted with the double nature of the dream—both the future aspiration and the night-time communion with our unconscious—and that these two facets may not be as distinct as one first thinks. Between the two lies the reality of daily lives: struggles, traumas, family gatherings, work, lack of work, remembrances of the dead.

Between the segments of testimony and speech, Malas provides us with visual details that further complement our understanding of the speakers and their words. Many of these scenes without speaking subjects are dedicated to simply exploring inhabited spaces: the interiors of homes, narrow streets with their scrawled signposts and inhabitants (mostly women) looking out windows or doors, forest encampments and military outposts, a slaughterhouse, a printing press where tributes to the recently dead are being printed, a graveyard. The camera travels through these spaces. It invites us to see and feel, to take in this palpably physical world. It may stop, holding on individual people, if and when there is the possibility of an encounter, and something to be said.

In spite of this emphasis on the inhabited environments surrounding the film’s characters, the film’s subject is not dwelling but rather the dislocation that has given rise to such dwelling. As we listen, we realize that the people we see and hear are all Palestinians, refugees who have been displaced from their homeland, most speaking to us from “temporary” homes in camps, whether military or refugee. The immensity of this dislocation and the affect and emotion that accompany it are slowly revealed. One of the questions raised by the film and its testimonies is precisely the question of how one dwells in long-term collective displacement, and even, sometimes, despair. How can one manage to dwell there—physically, politically, and psychically? Malas explores and renders tangible the spatial and temporal qualities of such dislocated dwelling with its

implicit and explicit references to lost pasts, often resurfacing in night-time dreams, and anticipated futures.

For the most part, in this film we (the audience) are addressed by those speaking, but without knowing what the solicitation or the question was. We simply come upon someone via the camera's journeying, and they begin to speak. This erasure of the question(er) is unsettling, for we are caught in, and are partner to, a scene of encounter without being privy to its aim, without the luxury of preparation but also without the complacency that accompanies knowing expectation. In fact, we are caught up in a history, a series of exchanges, that we cannot anticipate because we are unsure of the parameters. Each exchange dislocates *us*, because once again we are not sure where we are. We know we are *here*, a tangible, unambiguous, and inimitable here, but *where* is this here? Who will locate it for us? Sometimes we are in the territory of autobiography or the factual accounts of past events, sometimes in that of large-scale political aspiration, and yet others in that of dreams, nightmares, or personal and collective desires.

Such an untidy mix of reality and dream, fact and fantasy—mundane, extraordinary, private, and political—is hardly typical in filmed testimony, and certainly not a usual subject matter for political documentary. As the film moves through spaces and from account to account, we lose both our physical and intellectual bearing, often unsure when we are listening to an account of the past, a dream, or a wished-for future. Sometimes the dreams and the realities are remarkably similar, as when young men give accounts of bomb explosions and people dying, or when they imagine or dream of returning to their homes now in Israel. For example a young man, positioned in front of a framed, red Che Guevara poster that is slowly revealed when the camera moves to one side, tells us:

A bomb fell on the vegetable market. I was next to the strawberry stand. I froze for two minutes, immobilized. People were paralyzed, unaware whether they had injuries. Some fell, others screamed. ... It was terrifying. A different kind of bomb that splintered in all directions making grotesque wounds. The strawberry man was killed, he was all bits and pieces. No complete corpses.

This is then followed by an even younger man, with a voice like that of a boy-child but dressed in military garb, surrounded by a wall of sandbags and his rifle. Standing at what we presume is a military outpost, he recounts:

I saw houses collapsing and people dying. I ran to a two-year-old child and carried him and ran. The plane was after me. I hid under an olive tree. I asked someone: 'What happened to you?' He said: 'The planes shot us.' As I ran the child cried out for his mother. I saw myself in a forest of olives. I was shot in the chest. I ran. No blood came out of my chest and I ran.

We presume, after the fact, that the first account is "reality" because of the way that time is expressed, while the second, announced as a dream, feels just as real. In the midst of listening (and/or reading subtitles, as the case may be), we are not necessarily sure, we lose our sense of certainty. Did the first man say dream? Did the second dream end and

reality begin somewhere without our noticing it? This almost seamless intertwining of daily realities and nightly dreams, both for the speaking subjects and for us as we listen to the chain of short testimonies that make up this film, gives Malas' *The Dream* its disconcerting power and cruel poetry.

Other of Malas' subjects reflect on, imagine, or dream of: the land they used to have; the missing or the dead who come back to visit; humiliation at the hand of Israeli soldiers or of prison guards who beat them; Egyptian President Nasser coming to lead them; Abu Ammar (aka Yasser Arafat) sleeping next to them or rallying them to persist in the struggle; leading a coup d'état and having to write a declaration for democracy with a huge, unmanageable pen. As the film continues, the cutaways between testimonies continue to show small slices of domestic life, but also butchers at work in a slaughterhouse, men in wheelchairs gazing at the sea, and a long segment in a graveyard intercut with a printing press churning out thousands of flyers that announce the deaths of young fighters. These latter scenes carry symbolic and/or affective power at the same time as they document the horizons of the lives with which we've become acquainted. Malas' film ends with a barely visible shot of armed men walking away from the camera in pre-dawn light, followed by the sole explanatory text provided by the film, which reads:

These characters were filmed in the camps of Sabra, Shatila, Burj al-Barajneh and Ain al-Hulweh in Lebanon in 1981, before the Israeli invasion as a result of which the Palestinian fighters departed from Beirut and the Sabra and Shatila massacres, and other massacres, were committed. At present, we do not know anything about the fate of these characters.

As we watch Malas' film, we realize again and again to what extent lived experience, dreamed experience, individual reverie, collective visions, and political aspirations are not impermeable realities, but rather symbiotic and mutually constitutive. *The Dream* allows this not only to surface, but to be palpably enacted and felt. Interview or testimonial documentaries rarely, if ever, shift register in this way—moving from biographical account or anecdote, to the recounting of dreams, to visions of a collective future, all without explicit cue or clarification. Here, however, the past, present, and future, the ideal and the real, the intimate and the distant, participate on equal footing and with equal time in the multiple narratives offered by Malas' interlocutors. We experience the profound intertwining of the affective and the political, the personal and the historical, in what becomes a collective dream.

Like almost no other film that I know, Malas' film is able to convey the "envelope of being," the material and affective lives of a diverse group of people without sentimentalism, sensationalism, or objectification. He doesn't make his individual subjects subservient to any argument while he weaves a tapestry of stories whose rhetorical trajectory we cannot quite grasp as it is taking place. The contextualization provided by the film is exclusively visual, never verbal; it emerges through Malas' mise-en-scene of the testimonial scenes and his cutaways to place or landscape. Arising from the visual, it does not overwhelm or overdetermine the subjects' words in ways that a documentary voice-over or filmmaker's reflexive commentary could. We have to engage

to “make sense” of this context because we aren’t given lists of carefully arranged facts. Never sure exactly where we are going, we remain in a state of openness, expecting only to be surprised. Such a state of uncertainty prevents us from rushing to judgment or conclusions; as such it is ethically productive.

The originality of this film is due first, to its reaching beyond rational or tactical accounts to articulate a kind of collective unconscious, and secondly to its resistance to our expectations of what a testimony film should do. Malas’ film refuses any verbal articulation of focus, context, or explanation for its journey as well as the naming of its subjects or labeling of their identities, locations, etc, until the last frame. It also erases the visible presence of an author/interviewer. Yet that presence is physically felt in the embodied movements of the camera through space, its physical approach towards many of its subjects, and a certain ease and intimacy in the address that we are privy to. As viewers we walk, and watch, on unsure ground, repeatedly shifting expectations and giving up normative logic as we listen to personal or collective images, fears, or fantasies that catch us unawares. The series of encounters that make up *The Dream* are contextualized not through language, but spatially, through the camera’s exploration and incorporation of a series of spaces, fragments rather than a cohesive whole. In each encounter we are faced with someone who offers us a story, one we initially have no idea how to classify. Shifting between the real and the oneiric, the forcibly lost and mourned and the urgently wished for, we, too, are positioned so as to perceive this liminal space between the crushing force of Palestinian history and the overwhelming potency of affect and desire.

A thoughtfully elaborated and meaningful mise-en-scene, overflowing with sensual details of daily life, combined with the unpredictability and unconventionality of the testimonial speech and the scene of its address is crucial in both Ravett’s and Malas’ works. While Ravett includes himself and his insistent, sometimes grating, prodding at his mother’s memory year after year, Malas—both in body and in voice—disappears behind the camera but manifests a presence through its physical gestures of seeking/searching. In each case, what is framed within the screen—the setting of the characters, the carriage and placement of their bodies in space, the ways in which they move to respond, how and what they speak about—is intensely revealing. Fela Ravett’s gestures to her son, how she sits on his porch waiting for his questions, her demeanor waiting in a park beside a highway, how she uses her lazyboy or addresses the camera from her hospital bed with an oxygen mask covering her face, all situate past events—that she cannot spit out whole but only in fragments—in her embodied, time-bound presence. For her son, with whom she is sometimes impatient, she re-iterates again and again a past “now” that is embedded within her present, that is not completely accessible to her and never will be to him (or to us), in spite of his intense desire for it. We engage with her, feel her being change over more than a decade, while we also realize that the now-time that Abraham desperately seeks to experience, to grasp and hold on to if only for a moment, is only available through our embodied imagination as it responds to Abraham and Fela’s vivid cinematic testimony. We can gather up some of the shards that Fela offers us, feel those remnants in her embodied presence today, but the fixing of our understanding will always elude us.

Malas' film brings a very different attention to the scene of address through his unorthodox approach to the testimonies of Palestinians. *The Dream* builds not through repetition with difference, but through differences that accrue, possibly confusing us along the way, to create a portrait of a community united in aspects of its history and aspirations, but distinct in its individual modes of being and expression. Again the fragment plays a crucial role, but here it is as if each person's testimony, each person's dream, is a tiny facet of some ineffable, unknowable, historical event-in-progress. For Malas, whose characters are never identified, the staging and setting of the testimonies are a crucial part of them. The camera's engagement with (and frequent movement around) place stands in for a dialogic partner/observer, and the depiction of how his interlocutors inhabit these spaces is much more eloquent and memorable than a label. Thus a desk with a large picture of Che Guevara on the wall directly behind the speaker's head, the small room and bed of the man lying in it with a lost limb, the piles of sandbags and arms that flank the soldier with the voice of a child, or the colors and décor of interior of a family house where television news is being watched, all articulate and suggest modes of being.

Regarding *The March*, Jeffrey Skoller has commented that the film is the "testimony of Ravett's obsession to know, more than ... Fela's desire to tell" (146). Fela, indeed, doesn't seem to have any "need" to testify, yet the impact of *The March* nevertheless lies in the dialogic encounter between the two and the ways in which Fela Ravett responds to her son's insistent query. Even though Malas is physically invisible throughout his film, he also makes his presence tangible through his camera's felt movements and the deliberate ambiguity of his subjects' address. Thus *The Dream* is also about Malas' desire to understand the suffering and aspirations of a community that holds a significant place in his own world,¹¹⁹ and to understand it not through facts but through the many folds of conscious and unconscious being. In both works, viewers are placed at the site of dialogic encounters, without being allowed to fully assume the role of the addressee. We are not the primary audience, and we know this. Instead, we are interlopers in exchanges with people we will never be able to fully understand. *The March* and *The Dream* engage our sense of the subjects' unique presence of which only a tiny part is given to us, as well as the inexorable and persistent impact of 20th century history on their individual lives. In addition, both films make time a crucial element—Ravett through the time we "see" passing through and transforming his mother's body, through the differences in her retrieval and connection to memory over a period of thirteen years; and Malas through his questions that engage speakers in recalling a sometimes idealized past or an imagined future in the context of a complex tapestry of dream states and political realities. In these two films, the "now"—the presence of the past and the passing of the present—is both vividly felt and simultaneously fleeting, irretrievable. It ebbs and flows over time and between day and night. We are able to "re-cognize" the speakers' past nows for instants, but the films' "anxious and impossible" temporalities can never rest or settle, neither in the past, nor in the present, nor in an imagined future.

¹¹⁹ Malas is Syrian; his family was displaced from Quneitra in the Golan Heights. See Malas for more background on the making of the film.

As Skoller has said of *The March*, these cinematic testimonies of both Ravett's and Malas' films "defy the closure of the pastness of conventional historical narratives" (148). They also defy any reification of historical or embodied experience: historical events, memory, identity, dreams, and emotions are presented as multifaceted, impossible to seize, and ever-transforming. The detailed mise-en-scène of each instance of address is a crucial element in the testimonies of the films' subjects, pulling us into the affective qualities of a specific relationship (Ravett) or the tangible spaces and activities of daily life (Malas). The filmmakers' attention to affect—that manifested in subjects' relation to each other and to their environments, in their contexts and ways of speaking, in the inclusion of the realm of unconscious as well as conscious experience and desire—shapes our relation to the speakers and films, to the modes of existence they embody and imply, and to the historical circumstances that have shaped those modes of existence.

Clearly the ethical cannot be segregated from the form in which it is made manifest. The formal choices of filmmaking, the aesthetic and rhetorical construction of a film in space and in time, create the channel for our engagement with the subject matter. The fact that we attribute meaning and relevance to something at all is linked to the use of (or play with) rhetorical conventions. The experience that something or someone stands out, marks us, or encourages us to reflect and question is at least partly the result of the form of its enunciation and an aesthetic shaping that breaks through the armor of habitual thought and the already known. Aesthetic choices provoke the circulation of affect and stimulate imagination. As Cartwright suggests, it is through affect that representations—and we, ourselves—are mobilized. It is thus due to and in light of aesthetics that we can experience the epiphany of the other, the other as epiphany (see Green in Cartwright 43).

To argue that in moving image media, aesthetics and ethics are intertwined and that the former shapes the latter suggests the need for further attention—in theory *and* practice—to how this shaping takes place. Obviously there is no neat formula or list of prescriptions and proscriptions: each complex mix of aesthetic and rhetorical strategies will create its own effects and affects. The impossibility of identifying causes-and-effects, however, is no reason to dismiss this crucial relationship. While it is impossible to know to what extent documentaries can "form viewers who relate differently to others *beyond* the cinema" (Cooper 91), it is certain that the media's modeling of testimonial speech, relation, address, and the prospects of personal or social transformation have an impact on our mores and sense of what is possible. As seen through the films discussed in this chapter, aesthetic and rhetorical choices can shape testimonies to foster forms of ethical spectatorship—a non-judgmental and questioning engagement with others that includes empathic responses as well as the explicit recognition of our own epistemic limits.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have endeavored to explore what I call cinematic testimony. First I looked at cinematic testimony's relation to the larger cultural discourse of witnessing and testimony, then at the history of documentary practices and theoretical approaches to the filmed interview and testimony. I examined a number of specific films and moving image installation and performance works that incorporate *mise-en-scène*, bodily gesture, and attention to voice and listening in innovative ways. These works demonstrate that moving images have transformed testimony into something that extends far beyond "talking head" interviews and recordings of verbal statements about what one has witnessed for a public.

This is not to say that the latter don't continue to exist. Indeed, I began this project from a sense of frustration with conventional interview forms and a desire to understand what made most filmed interviews or verbal accounts addressed to a camera/ audience so terribly bland and uninteresting while a handful of them were among the most exciting and profoundly moving examples of nonfiction cinema. Lengthy—or even brief—cascades of words, whether spontaneous or carefully planned, don't tend, in and of themselves, to make good cinema, even if the subject matter is compelling. What does make good cinema is when the medium uses its own creative voice to take conscious aesthetic and ethical responsibility for the visual and aural testimony it co-creates and when it recognizes that to be powerful testimony must say something as yet unheard—both in its content *and* in its cinematic form. There are no rules for this. As the films discussed at length in this dissertation have shown, widely divergent strategies emerging from very different scenes of address can create powerful cinematic testimonies that convey complex accounts of history. The most powerful of these also raise crucial questions about what it means to relate such accounts to each other and for posterity through the medium of moving images.

Cinema has remarkable flexibility and range in its possibilities of conveying experiences, personal and historical accounts, and world-views through a combination of images, sounds, language, movements within and across frames, and the reconfiguring of blocks of duration and time. In its nonfiction forms it can use that flexibility to foster the lucid and complex articulation of some of the many voices and experiences calling out to be heard. While the works discussed in the previous pages clearly partake in *minor* rather than mass media,¹²⁵ I believe they play a crucial aesthetic and political role. As they guide us towards and shape the voices and stories of others, they provide us with a sense of the world we do not otherwise have. While they illuminate the human relation to and struggles with articulation, they also convey that meaning is not exclusively, or even first and foremost, expressed through language. As philosopher Mark Johnson asserts, "[t]o

¹²⁵ See Deleuze and Guattari's "What is a Minor Literature?"

discover how meaning works, we should turn first to gesture, social interaction, ritual, and art, and only later to linguistic communication (*Meaning* 208). Cinema is the medium *par excellence* for conveying such breadth of meaning, and the works discussed show the versatility of its many strategies for doing so.

Cinema is also a medium in which the complex articulations of embodied and cinematic testimony can be experienced and shared, in Levinas' terms, as "creature." Through the constitution of non-totalizable moving testimonies, intimations of another's present/ce and now-time can be shared and potentially transformative. These creatures offer us a glimpse, whether through our eyes, ears, mirror neurons, and/or skin, of each other's worlds, of the scope of what is human. Given that such testimonies, conveyed and circulated through an ever-increasing variety of channels, are one of the important ways that we communicate to publics over distance, time, and cultural and ideological difference, it is vital that we take seriously their role not only as purveyors of knowledge but also as ethical models of human relating, dialogue, and exchange. For this reason critical debate and analysis of testimonial forms are also fundamental.

In the last few years nonfiction films and installations incorporating interviews and various forms of testimony have seen a surge of interest, both by artists and documentarians and scholars. Forms of address to filmmaker and/or audience, and the filmmaker or artist's address to us, have taken many shapes. The desire to vivify verbal testimony and to engage viscerally with embodied experience has led to the incorporation of animation and many more approaches to reenactment than those I was able to discuss here.¹²⁶ The growing interest in the subjectivity and experiences not only of suffering minorities and victims but also of perpetrators of genocide has led to new ideological and ethical debates.¹²⁷ The vast increase in access to (and decrease in size of) the means of audio-visual production (such as in phones, soldiers' helmet-cams, and google glass) and channels of circulation like YouTube also suggests that our conception of testimony and its expressive tools and language will continue to shift. While some forms of testimony may indeed be and become anachronistic, it seems to me that the "small voices of history" will continue to try to be heard, to "expose" themselves in Levinas' sense of the term, and others will urgently want to listen. As listeners and viewers and scholars it is important that we continue to attend to how these testimonial creatures are formally and ethically constituted and to see that, whenever possible, they embody a broad scope of the Saying (whatever that may become with our new tools of communication) rather than reducing mediated testimonies to mere bytes of the Said.

¹²⁶ The most notable documentaries or installations that have a testimony or testimonies at their core and that have also generated ample critical response include Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), Omer Fast's *5,000 Feet is Best* (2011), Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012), and Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* (2013).

¹²⁷ This isn't new—for instance Barbet Schroeder's *General Idi Amin Dada: A Self Portrait* was released in 1975. However, the innovative and in some cases controversial forms of the more recent testimonies and enactments of crimes—especially in *The Act of Killing*—has led to considerable critical debate. For example, see the special dossier dedicated to *The Act of Killing* in *Film Quarterly's* Winter 2013 issue (67:2).

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