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## The Moving Image: Expanded Documentary Practice in Contemporary Art

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Sztuka i Dokumentacja nr 9, 125-133

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2013

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# THE MOVING IMAGE: EXPANDED DOCUMENTARY PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Anna Raczynski

Documentary in contemporary art has a dual nature: on the one hand, it is considered central to artistic practice in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; on the other, documentary has for a long time been perceived as peripheral in the art context.<sup>1</sup> Critics such as the modernist art historian Clement Greenberg famously challenged documentary's status as art. For example, in a review of a photography exhibition he describes the inability of the photograph to "transcend its almost inevitable function as document and act as a work of art as well".<sup>2</sup> Document and art are thus divided into two separate entities.

Throughout the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, a period during which modernism and the structural film movement dominated, documentary was less prominent. Moving image artists were producing conceptual and abstract film, moving away from a documentary style that was regarded as strongly associated with narrative conventions. Throughout the eighties and in particular the nineties, such movements as the collapse of socialism, feminism, gay rights and black liberation increasingly informed the practice of video artists, who embraced documentary as a means to articulate artistically their concerns. Documentary practice has therefore begun to be positioned entirely differently within the art context. The research project "Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art" claims "that documentary practices have made up one of the most significant tendencies within art during the last two decades".<sup>3</sup> Art works realized during this period include a diverse range of forms, including "mockumentaries", film or photography essays as well as found footage reportages.

The term 'expanded' refers to the shifting role and evolving definition of documentary in the artistic context and digital age, in which the merging of documentary with other art forms such as video or performance results in entirely re-invented documentary practice. The abundance of ambiguities that surround the domain of documentary creates vast scope for theoretical debate and practical experimentation. Lind and Steyerl outline the multiple dichotomies that arise in documentary including its status as art and non-art, aesthetic and the ethic, as well as between artifice and authenticity.

It is the interplay of these opposing elements in the genre of documentary that create innovative contributions to the field of contemporary art, and demand closer analysis. This article addresses the growth of documentary practice in recent art production and the different modes in which it is created and presented, foregrounding particular techniques such as the use of the static camera, essayistic installation and documentary intervention. It will make reference to several documentary artists (namely Peter Watkins, Patrick Keiller and Phil Collins), as well as documentary discourse, referencing in particular the analysis of Hito Steyerl, who has explored extensively the role of documentary in the context of contemporary art.

## Documentary as “un-fixed” and “truthful”

It is firstly important to address the expanding nature of documentary. The shifting styles and approaches to documentary make the definition of this practice increasingly problematic. Theorists have voiced this time and again: “Documentary as a concept or practice occupies no fixed territory. It mobilizes no finite inventory of techniques, addresses no set number of issues, and adopts no completely known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes. The term documentary must itself be constructed in much the same manner as the world we know and share.”<sup>4</sup>

Bill Nichols differentiates between documentary and other film genres by clarifying simply that documentary addresses the world or society in which we live as opposed to the creation of a reality imagined by a filmmaker or artist. He makes it clear, however, that these fundamental differences “guarantee no absolute separation between fiction and documentary”.<sup>5</sup> Fiction may therefore be considered documentary in its own right, or alternatively, documentary may resemble the language of fiction owing to the use of elements such as soundtracks, re-enactments or script treatments characteristic of fiction filmmaking. In practice, the boundaries between reality and fiction are often ambiguous; their un-fixed state poses numerous problems and has attracted the attention of many artists and theorists. Okwui Enwezor has examined in depth artistic practice that alternates between the fields of art and documentary. He refers to the “condition of unhomeliness” which defines the current state of contemporary art, a term which responds to two aspects: that of “a widescale global modernity of peoples, goods, and ideas permanently on the move”, and “the withdrawal from the homogenizing tyranny of global capitalism”, namely the artist’s rejection of “the institutionalized (musealised) model of art”.<sup>6</sup> Artistic practice is therefore not necessarily bound to a conventional form or discipline, and it is useful to consider the “unhomely” status of art when analysing documentary works within contemporary art.

One of the underlying areas of uncertainty in documentary is the condition of truth. The practice has been traditionally attributed to “truth” and “reality” in the field of media and the arts. In documentary discourse of the 1930s, Scottish filmmaker John Grierson defined documentary as the “creative treatment of actuality”, aimed at educating and informing the masses, and the pioneering Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov notoriously declared, “Long live life as we know it!” Vertov perceived the camera (Kino-Eye) as superior to the human eye on account of the machine’s ability to record an unbiased view of the world as it really was. The twenty-three newsreels directed by Vertov between the years 1922 and 1925 were entitled *Kino – “Pravda”*, the Russian word for “truth”. His treatment of documentary footage, namely his montage techniques, resulted in a revolutionary avant-garde form which merged art and politics. Although Vertov clearly recognised his works as documentary, and his theories emphasised the importance of authenticity and real life, his films equally demonstrate a more enhanced poetic vision of Soviet “reality”. The reality or truth of his documentary is thus layered and subjectified.

Furthermore, the growth of documentary imagery available on the Internet and mobile phone may intensify the power of documentary in media, but it also diminishes our trust in the representations of documentary.<sup>7</sup> As a result of the advancement in digital recording and editing techniques, digitally-based material in particular reminds the viewer even more dramatically than analogue film and video “how much our belief in the authenticity of the image is a matter of trust to begin with.”<sup>8</sup> In the essay “Experiments with Truth: The Documentary Turn” Mark Nash critiques the state of documentary in today’s society, claiming “it has become almost a privileged form of communication in recent years, providing a meta-discourse that questions or guarantees the truth of our political, social, and cultural life”.<sup>9</sup> This situation is particularly brought to light in Peter Watkins’ statement “The Media Crisis” and his pioneering docudrama film practice.<sup>10</sup> The English film and television director emphasises the lack of discourse about the construction of audio-visual material in contemporary media, in which the “monoform” dominates. Watkins defines this form as the primary tool employed in film and television editing and as a structure noticeable in news reports, reality shows and most documentaries. This results in “a language form wherein spatial fragmentation, repetitive time rhythms, constantly moving camera, rapid staccato editing, dense bombardment of sound, and lack of silence or reflective space, play a dominant and aggressive role”.

Watkins argues that the "truth" presented in classic documentary film and television programmes constructed according to the monofilm is dangerous because it encourages a passive audience, unaware of the persuasive and destructive manner in which information is transmitted. Watkins' own work adopted the language of documentary (the newsreel, for instance) to address the artificiality of Hollywood cinema and "media-cultivated myths of »objectivity«, »reality«, and »truth«" as early as the late 1950s and 1960s. For example, the nuclear war drama *The War Game* (1965), originally written for the BBC, depicts the consequences of a nuclear bomb that hits Britain.<sup>11</sup> The details of the catastrophic weeks that follow the explosion are told in a series of reportage-style images – reminiscent of the coverage of the Vietnam War – handheld footage (for example, in the opening scene the camera follows a policeman from behind travelling on a motorcycle) and interviews recorded in the style of talking heads. In addition, there is a voice-over as well as supplementary diagrams or titles to explain particular details.

Many of the people featured in the film were not professional actors, but simply members of the public living in the area of the film location. In the film's closing credits the BBC thanks the residents of Kent "without whom this documentary film could not have been made". On his web site (<http://p Watkins.mnsi.net/warGame.htm>) Watkins comments on his intention:

Interwoven among scenes of 'reality' were stylized interviews with a series of 'establishment figures' - an Anglican Bishop, a nuclear strategist, etc. The outrageous statements by some of these people (including the Bishop) - in favour of nuclear weapons, even nuclear war - were actually based on genuine quotations. Other interviews with a doctor, a psychiatrist, etc. were more sober, and gave details of the effects of nuclear weapons on the human body and mind. In this film I was interested in breaking the illusion of media-produced 'reality'. My question was - "Where is 'reality'? ... in the madness of statements by these artificially-lit establishment figures quoting the official doctrine of the day, or in the madness of the staged and fictional scenes from the rest of my film, which presented the consequences of their utterances?"

His work, a lot of which was made with the support of television companies, precedes and coincides with much of the experimental documentary practice and concerns that feature in contemporary moving image art. Moreover, owing to the collapse of television support for experimental film practice, Nash argues that "one might speculate that the interest in documentary in an art context sprung in part from the failures of broadcast media over the last decade"<sup>12</sup> Filmmakers such as Patrick Keiller are representative of this shift from television to the art context. Documentary in its more expanded form has therefore shifted to the realm of art galleries or artistic screenings. Artists are now attempting to react to the monofilm process, characteristic of mainstream media, embracing the potential of documentary as a means 'to inject a new realism into contemporary art'.<sup>13</sup>

Aware of the problems surrounding documentary filmmaking, documentary art practice can often be referred to as "reflexive documentary", in which issues such as the problematic presence and influence of the camera or particular narrative techniques can in fact be made use of within documentary art practice. Nichols explains that this type of documentary "arose from a desire to make the conventions of representation themselves more apparent and to challenge the impression of reality (...) the viewer's attention is drawn to the device as well as the effect".<sup>14</sup> It is a common device used among documentary artists such as Peter Watkins and Patrick Keiller. There are several ways in which the aspect of reflexivity can be examined.

## Stillness and The Invisible Protagonist

In contrast to the constantly moving camera and rapid editing described by Watkins in his definition of the monofilm, long and static shots are often adopted in ethnographical filmmaking in an attempt to achieve a less problematic recording of reality. Favouring the "authenticity" of spatial realism over editing, the static perspective allows subjects to emerge in front of the camera, as opposed to following them.<sup>15</sup> The

camera is, however, never unbiased, even if it is static; the apparatus is positioned by whoever is recording, and it creates a very precise effect, of which – in many cases – an artist/filmmaker is conscious. The fixity of the observational camera and extended duration of shots create a distinct film viewing experience, which reduces the traditional emphasis on character agency and action, present in what Gilles Deleuze terms cinema of “movement- image”. The employment of the static camera and long take encourages the viewer to focus on details such as the soundtrack or mise-en-scène, the foregrounding of which conforms to the qualities of Deleuze’s concept of “time-image” which is based on the slackening of “sensory-motor situations” and the rise of “optical and sound situations”.<sup>16</sup>

The British avant-garde filmmaker, documentarian and theorist Patrick Keiller makes full use of the long, static perspective as an analytical tool to document the UK landscape in his film essays. The Robinson Trilogy *London* (1994), *Robinson in Space* (1996) and *Robinson in Ruins* (2010) examines in a series of journeys the scenery of Great Britain in an attempt to “better understand a perceived »problem« by looking at, and making images of, landscape”, thus offering socio, political and economical insights into the country.<sup>17</sup> All three parts of the trilogy may be read as a critique of the impact of the Conservative government ruling between 1979–97 and the Labour government led by Tony Blair, thereby linking landscape with politics. Whereas *London* addresses the problems of the capital city, and *Robinson in Space* deals with problems besetting the entire country, *Robinson in Ruins* focuses thematically on the problem of dwelling, namely the definition of “home”.

All three films, each resembling a semi-documentary travelogue, feature a voice-over. The first two are voiced by a fictitious, anonymous character who is joining his ex-lover Robinson (the unseen protagonist of the film) on a research trip that initially takes place in London, and then around the entire country. The third film also refers to Robinson but the narrator is no longer the same (previously voiced by the actor Paul Scofield). In the last part of the trilogy, the female voice describes Robinson as “a mysterious, itinerant observer from the social margins” and informs the viewer of his disappearance since 1995. The most recent film has thus supposedly been reconstructed from nineteen canisters of film and a notebook belonging to Robinson found in a burnt-out caravan. Keiller creates an elaborate fictive narrative and combines this framework with a “real” commentary by referring in the monologue to events that have happened in British politics. He visually examines and documents landscapes, buildings and streets among an array of rural and urban environments located in the United Kingdom. These include, for example, the ports of Bristol, Liverpool and Hull, and their storage, distribution work areas, or the streets of Oxford and Reading, as well as isolated military bases and roadside countryside. The idiosyncratic static camera positions result in stark imagery, reminiscent of the documentary photography of Bernd and Hilla Becher.

Keiller demonstrates aspects of reflexive documentary in a number of ways: firstly, the voice-over is a clear reference to documentary practice as often presented on television. The audience is continually reminded in the narrative that the material presented in the film is part of a research project. The fictitious element of these films is arguably a reference to Jacques Rancière’s claim that “Art does not do politics by reaching the real. It does it by inventing fictions that challenge the existing distribution of the real and the fictional”.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, the extensive shot draws attention to ethnographical filmmaking; the viewer often waits and contemplates what is being presented to them as opposed to being driven from scene to scene. The distinct positioning and framing of the camera, as well as long-durational shots, are presented in a montage style similar to the structure of a video-slideshow. The voice-over that illuminates the content of these images and the occasional series of close ups are arguably the most lively elements of Keiller’s overall film style. In *Robinson in Ruins* there is a particular moment when the camera moves closer in a series of static shots to record details of a motorway road sign, revealing small patches of moss growing on the surface of the sign. It is a surprising detail, highlighting how even relatively mundane features of the urban landscape can be presented in a nuanced way. Ivone Margulie explains the impact of the exaggerated appearance when focusing “on mundane details of reality” in hyperrealist art: “The emphasis on surface details intimates an estrangement, an excess – one sees more than one needs to in order to »read« the image”.<sup>19</sup>

Although the shots in his films may seem void of movement and evoke a sense of extreme – or in some cases “excessive” – stillness on first encounter, this stasis in fact tells a different story. The narrator in *Robinson in Ruins* claims: “Robinson had once said he believed that, if he looked at the landscape hard enough, it would reveal to him the molecular basis of historical events, and in this way he hoped to see into the future.” The geographer Doreen Massey argues that “we live, we are constantly told, in an age of flow”.<sup>20</sup> She notes that, despite the film’s extended shots that create the sense of stillness “in the midst of the rush and flow of globalisation”, these “stills (...) are about duration. They tell us of »becoming«, in place”.<sup>21</sup> The stillness in Keiller’s documentary art therefore represents motion and functions as both an aesthetic style as well as analytical tool in his work.

In combination with the camera, the invisibility of the characters renders a particular narrative that reinforces the time-image concept of Deleuze, in which “objects and settings” are emphasised.<sup>22</sup> This corresponds to the plot of the film; a research project that examines specific geographic spaces and what these landscapes or buildings are capable of revealing. Additionally, although the film is told within a voiced narrative, the absence of certain elements typical of “movement-image” (i.e. film narratives that employ character agency and action) offers a certain distance and open perspective for the viewer to read the images. We never see or directly hear the mysterious Robinson, and visually we are only presented with images of landscape. The technique may be tantalising for the audience but it continually reminds the viewer about the presence of what lies beyond the camera frame, that is: what the audience cannot see, in this case the protagonist and narrators. The viewer is free to imagine who these characters may be. Particularly in non-fictitious documentary filmmaking the invisibility of characters creates a complex relationship between viewer and the research material. Jan Verwoert questions how documentary art “can be used as a site for contesting conventional notions about the space of memory”.<sup>23</sup> The aspect of invisibility and the invitation for the viewer to “read” the “truth” according to his/her interpretation create a liminal space in which mental and physical memory are merged. Verwoert argues that the absence of the narrator’s face in documentary film practice has a strong impact on the space of memory, it is in fact “in a third space emerging in the rupture between the visible and the audible, personal memory and collective history, fact and fiction”. He concludes: “it seems that, paradoxically, a time-based medium like documentary video or film offers interesting possibilities for dissecting notions about the space of memory”.

## Essayistic Installation<sup>24</sup>

The manner in which documentary art is presented to its audience (i.e. the technological means and context in which it is positioned) is one of the most significant elements impacting upon the expansion of documentary art practice. Ursula Biemmen proposes that, because of the development of recent digital production, practitioners are now even more concerned with the organisation of material in addition to the documentation of reality. It is possible to trace the various stages of media art – such as performance art, video art and installation – in line with the advances of technology, beginning as early as the invention of photography. As many theorists have acknowledged, the definition of art has been significantly shaped by these developments. The practice of video installation presents a number of different situations in comparison to the single channel video or film; as explained by Michael Rush, it is “a recognition of the space outside the monitor” and offers a means of exploring the notion of time.<sup>25</sup>

Video Installation introduces an entirely new context in which art can be viewed. As aspects of sculptural practice were employed in the presentation of video works, the context and content became interchangeable. An artist such as Nam June Paik famously used methods characteristic of sculptural art practice in his television set installations. Video installation has also been adopted as a way of deconstructing conventional narratives. The surveillance art installations of Bruce Nauman, for example, confront the passive relationship between audiences and the screen. Rush explains how “installations took an active role in energizing the viewer to respond to the object viewed”. Significantly – in the context of documentary art – Verwoert argues that “a key motive for the spatial display of research material in installations was the attempt to criticize and find an alternative to sequential organization and subsequent commodification of history in linear narratives”.<sup>26</sup>

Once again, we can refer to the artist Patrick Keiller whose works were recently presented in the form of an art exhibition in the central atrium of the Duveen Gallery in the Tate Britain in London. The show, entitled *The Robinson Institute* (2012), explored thematically the current economic crisis in the United Kingdom and included his films, paintings and other found artefacts (made by other artists and taken from the Tate archive), books, songs and industrial objects. His film works, including *London* (1994), *Robinson in Space* (1996), *The Dilapidated Dwelling* (2000) and *Robinson in Ruins* (2010), were projected on screens in various parts of the exhibition space. The spatial organisation of projections, glass cabinets and installations resulted in a more flexible – and sometimes unexpected – viewing and listening experience, significantly impacting upon the manner in which his documentary work was perceived by the audience. Art works were displayed using a hand-made aluminium angle support structure. The non-linear manner in which elements of his research were presented allowed the viewer to explore the artefacts, art works and films in more depth if they so wished.

For example, in between the art works, Keiller provided original book editions or pamphlets about themes such as the workers revolt and the radical leftfield politics which the artists of the works were sympathetic to. Other, more modern editions of this literature were made available for viewing on a few study desks. The overall layout conforms to Rush's claim that installation is "rooted in expanded notions of »sculptural space« in Performance art and the trend toward greater viewer participation in art", and is "another step toward the acceptance of any aspect or material of everyday life in the making of a work of art".<sup>27</sup> The audience is invited to contemplate Keiller's investigation of landscape and to deepen its understanding of the economics and meaning behind it. The structure of the exhibition thus resembled more of an informative archive, in which visitors could trace aspects of the current economic crisis in the United Kingdom. Unlike "the linear logic of a scientific paper", the distribution of different types of material in a space, or more specifically an installation, renders an environment that is "discursive without having to follow the consecutive structure of academic reasoning in which propositions are followed by arguments which lead up to conclusions. Rather, (...) installation works like a network of cross-references".<sup>38</sup> Installation art and the context in which it is presented is an important tool for the fields of documentary and political art, which often aims to break down simplistic linear processes, otherwise considered inappropriate for such complex subject matter.

## Documentary Intervention

"Intervention art" exists as a term for the interaction by artists with artworks, venues and audiences, and forms an additional branch of participatory art practice previously mentioned in relation to installation art. It can also refer to art practice that enters a situation outside the art world, thus attempting to change existing circumstances (i.e. economic or political), or simply voice awareness of a situation or condition that people had previously never considered. Throughout history, documentary is said to be a form "that emerges in a state of crisis" or trauma, and it often offers one of the most appropriate methods "for the discussion of social content".<sup>29</sup> As a result, the definitions of intervention art often correspond to aspects of documentary art practice. In order to examine the incorporation of art intervention in documentary art practice, this section will examine the project *Marxism Today* (2010) by British artist Phil Collins, demonstrating the trend in using intervention as part of documentary practice.

It is firstly important to return to the concept of "truthful" representation of reality in documentary because the term "intervention" implies a certain degree of influence and input on the artist's behalf. It appears that it is characteristic for documentary practice to "express the desire to get rid of the author or creator" in order to maintain an unbiased portrayal of the subject.<sup>30</sup> Olivier Lugon questions the methods used to ensure this depiction: "Should the creator vanish behind the subject in apparent neutrality, or his presence necessary for the credibility of his evidence? Is aesthetic formalization desirable or reprehensible, does it reinforce or crush the documentary content of the image? Does the 'true documentary' not consist of an accumulation of evidence that is defined entirely by its subject matter, without necessitating the slightest creative work or signature from the maker? Is it not, by definition, a joint project?"<sup>31</sup>

The art practice of British artist Phil Collins addresses many of the questions posed by Lugon. What happens in the project *Marxism Today* by Phil Collins is interesting because it truly becomes a collaborative effort between artist and the participants of the documentary (particularly in the second film). The project can be divided into two parts. In the first section, Collins interviews former teachers of Marxism-Leninism, investigating what happened to them after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This is presented in the form of a video entitled *Marxism Today (prologue)*. Altogether, sixty teachers replied to an open call, ten of whom were interviewed on film, and eventually the monologues of three teachers were selected for the final version of the prologue. In all three interviews the trauma of the reunification process and loss experienced by these women/teachers? quickly becomes clear. The East German education structure became entirely absorbed into the western school system. Historian Richard Evans explains the rapidity of this transformation: "Publishing houses have disappeared, school textbooks have been replaced, [...] whole research institutes abolished, university departments shut down — the scale and pace of the transformation is simply dizzying."<sup>32</sup> In light of this, the first interviewee describes the revolutionary life she led as an educated, independent woman married to an African husband. This happiness quickly ended following the suicide of her husband shortly before the fall of the wall, the collapse of the GDR and her subsequent unemployment.

The interviews feature the use of many close ups, such as the detail of nervous hands and facial expressions, or domestic settings, in effect creating an intimate relationship between the interviewees and camera. The remaining two interviewees include a former teacher whose daughter used to be an Olympic gymnast, now struggling to transform from the life of a competing gymnast to an average teenager in reunified Germany, and a lecturer who completed her Ph.D. on neoliberal theories of unemployment, and subsequently worked as a financial analyst in West Berlin. Their interviews are complemented with extracts of footage from educational propaganda films produced by the GDR state-run film studios DEFA, including, for example, the film *Kontakt* (1968), which features the situation of a staged classroom in which a teacher and school pupils discuss the notion of exploitation. The discussion is gradually faded out and replaced by an eerie sound track of a guitar and vocals, leaving their classroom actions in suspension "by absorbing the final moments of the scene into the non-narrative quality of musical abstraction".<sup>33</sup> The prevention of their discussion from continuing, imposed by the musical overlay, is symbolic of the swift changes that occurred after Germany's reunification.

In the second part of the project – entitled *Use! Value! Exchange!* (2010) – the artist actively intervenes and invites one of the teachers to conduct a lesson in Marxism-Leninism to a contemporary class of economic students, thereby asking "what would such a lesson look like and what might it mean to an art public better versed in the aesthetic-philosophical tradition of Western Marxism than the orthodox doctrines of Soviet-style bureaucratic socialism?".<sup>34</sup> The experiment takes place in the form of a seminar on Marx's *'Das Kapital'* (1867) at Berlin's University of Applied Sciences (Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft). This effectively takes the documentary project further by introducing the element of art intervention and involving a situation outside the art world, in this case the setting of an academic seminar on the topic of economics for students more familiar with a western capitalist society. In *Use! Value! Exchange!* Collins simply presents the documentation of this seminar, which is intersected with footage of a Marx sculpture located in central Berlin being removed by a crane. Both the prologue and *Use! Value! Exchange!* were shown together in the British Film Institute (BFI) in London, screened in the setting of reconstructed classrooms, for which original GDR classroom furniture had been transported.

In an interview, Collins comments he has "always been interested in the othered".<sup>35</sup> Jeffries defines Collins' construction of othered as "not the other, but the othered; peoples reduced to something they are not, by our presumptions – presumptions that Collins challenges". Collins' project offers a different perspective on the collapse of communism; that of the abrupt overnight disappearance of official beliefs and values held by ordinary people in East Germany. The seminar and the presentation of the project in the BFI create interesting situations that add meaning to the initial research stage presented in the interviews and archival material used in the documentary film. The seminar on Marxism-

Leninism is less emotive in comparison with the prologue. The modern-day German students react confused in response to the tutor's lesson on Marxist economics, in which she outlines certain aspects such as use, exchange value and the role of surplus. Once the lecture has finished, students are able to ask questions; one student queries, "Why are things ordered to the disadvantage of the worker?" Collins ends the film on the last questions: "Where will we be in 50 years?" or "Where should we be?" The placement of the project firstly in the context of a modern German classroom, and finally in the United Kingdom, re-evaluates the present and future. The re-position of the othered in the environment of an institute situated in central London and Manchester re-contextualises the material. In fact, the ideologies and propaganda apparent in *Marxism Today* make British audiences reconsider their own education. Collins comments: "Ask yourself how the British education system structures itself. Marxism is always connected with brainwashing or taboo or infection, but here the hegemony is invisible: we're never explicitly told about the ideology we're being taught, while in eastern Europe it was at least overt."

The interventional approach employed by Phil Collins is integral to his documentary practice, creating both complex and fascinating results in the final presentations of their art works. On the one hand, it is important not to overlook the problematic nature of this method. Hito Steyerl makes it clear in her article "Documentary Uncertainty" that even when an artwork is explicitly critical – as demonstrated in socially engaged collaborative works – the documentary genre represented in these projects maintains a dubious "claim to objectivity and historical verisimilitude".<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, despite this ambivalent nature, the issue of "whether what we see is »true«, »real«, »factual« and so on", Steyerl emphasises that "this uncertainty is not some shameful lack, which has to be hidden, but instead constitutes the core quality of contemporary documentary modes as such".<sup>37</sup>

The interdisciplinary nature of documentary art attracts the attention of researchers outside the realm of art; Patrick Keiller, for instance, is described as Britain's "most original geographical and political thinker".<sup>38</sup> Marta Kosińska argues that film has a long history of being used as a research tool or process, forming a significant part of "art as research". Not only are artists evaluating the language and meaning of film, and specifically documentary, but they also seek to expand its form outside traditional contexts, i.e. beyond the confines of a cinema theatre and into art galleries or academia.<sup>39</sup> The broad field of contemporary art allows for documentary to advance into various forms and practices, as exemplified by the works of Peter Watkins, Patrick Keiller and Phil Collins. One other major area that has not been included in this article is the impact of the Internet on documentary art. How material is viewed and produced online (e.g. the various interfaces, online streams and the viewer's freedom to navigate across websites) is of course extremely influential on art practice and has been central to the work of many artists. The topic is worthy of a separate investigation entirely. In addition to technological advancements and the continually evolving notion of contemporary art, the expanding nature of documentary art, as emphasised by several scholars and practitioners, lies in the very ambiguity of the term "documentary". The complexities and problems that arise as a result of documentary's uncertainty serve as one of the most appealing aspects for artists and theorists.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, eds., *Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1: The Greenroom* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008).
- <sup>2</sup> Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2: *Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 60.
- <sup>3</sup> Lind and Steyerl, eds., *Reconsidering the Documentary*, 16.
- <sup>4</sup> Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 12.
- <sup>5</sup> ———, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), xi.
- <sup>6</sup> Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights, and the Figure of »Truth« in Contemporary Art," in *Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1: The Greenroom*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), 66.
- <sup>7</sup> See Lind and Steyerl, eds., *Reconsidering the Documentary*, 13.
- <sup>8</sup> Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, xvi.
- <sup>9</sup> Mark Nash, "Experiments with Truth: The Documentary Turn," *Anglistica* 11, no. 1/2 (2007): 33-34.
- <sup>10</sup> Peter Watkins, "The Media Crisis," [http://pwwatkins.mnsi.net/part1\\_home.htm](http://pwwatkins.mnsi.net/part1_home.htm). All quotations come from the same web site.
- <sup>11</sup> The BBC, however, was not ready to broadcast the production until 1986, claiming it was too brutal and horrifying for television transmission. The scenes were perceived too realistic for the British audience (see <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/topics/war-game.htm>).

- <sup>12</sup> Nash, "Experiments with Truth: The Documentary Turn," 34.
- <sup>13</sup> Mark Nash, "Reality in the Age of Aesthetics," *Frieze*, no. 114 (2008), [http://www.frieze.com/issue/print\\_article/reality\\_in\\_the\\_age\\_of\\_aesthetics/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/print_article/reality_in_the_age_of_aesthetics/).
- <sup>14</sup> Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 33.
- <sup>15</sup> The concept of 'spatial realism' refers to the fundamental cultural belief system that asserts: "the eye does not lie" in Kathleen Kuehnast, "Gender representation in visual ethnographies: an interpretivist perspective," *CVA Review* (Spring 1990): 21-30.
- <sup>16</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Continuum, 2005), 1-12.
- <sup>17</sup> Patrick Keiller, *The Possibility of Life's Survival on the Planet* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 9.
- <sup>18</sup> See William Raban, "Politics and Experimental Film - A Personal View," *Sequence, no.w.here*, no. 3 (2012): 35.
- <sup>19</sup> Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 1996), 46.
- <sup>20</sup> Doreen Massey was commissioned to write an essay entitled 'Landscape/space/politics: an essay,' <http://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/> in line with Patrick Keiller's research project: The future of landscape and the moving image.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 4.
- <sup>23</sup> Jan Verwoert, "Research and Display: Transformations of the Documentary Practice in Recent Art," in *Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1: The Greenroom*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), 201. Subsequent quotations are from p. 202.
- <sup>24</sup> This is a term borrowed from the above mentioned Jan Vorwoert's article, in which he explores the presentation of the archive in contemporary art.
- <sup>25</sup> Michael Rush, *New Media in Art (World of Art)* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 124. Next quotation comes from p. 132.
- <sup>26</sup> Verwoert, "Research and Display," 199-200.
- <sup>27</sup> Rush, *New Media in Art*, 124.
- <sup>28</sup> Verwoert, "Research and Display," 198.
- <sup>29</sup> Lind and Steyerl, eds., *Reconsidering the Documentary*, 12.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>31</sup> Olivier Lugon, "»Documentary«: Authority and Ambiguities," in *Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1: The Greenroom*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), 31.
- <sup>32</sup> Richard Evans, "Germany's Morning After," *Marxism Today* (June 1991): 20-23.
- <sup>33</sup> Michèle Faguet, "Sympathy is a Bridge for Ideology: Phil Collins's Adventures in Marxism," *Afterfall*, no. 11 (2011) <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.27/sympathy-is-a-bridge-for-ideology-phil-collins-s-adventures-in-marxism>.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> See Stuart Jeffries, "Fastest! Tallest! Marxist! The visual art of Phil Collins," *The Guardian* 6.02.2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/feb/06/marxist-visual-art-phil-collins>. Subsequent quotations come from the same interview.
- <sup>36</sup> Faguet, "Sympathy is a Bridge for Ideology."
- <sup>37</sup> Hito Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty," *Re-Visiones*, no. 1 (2011). <http://re-visiones.imaginarra.net/spip.php?article37>.
- <sup>38</sup> Owen Hatherley, "How Patrick Keiller is mapping the 21st-century landscape," *The Guardian* 30.03.2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/mar/30/patrick-keiller-robinson-tate-exhibition>.
- <sup>39</sup> See Marta Kosińska, *Ciało filmu. Medium obecnego w powojennej amerykańskiej awangardzie filmowej* (Poznań: Galeria Miejska Arsenał, 2012).

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