

**Into the Mainstream:  
Independent Film and Video Counterpublics  
and Television in Britain,  
1974–1990**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis looks at independent film and video cultures in Britain from the mid-1970s to late 1980s. It examines a period of time in which diverse radical film- and video-makers in Britain contributed towards struggles against capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism and homophobia. New social models of film and video production and exhibition were developed, such as the film collective, and new alliances were built to campaign for changes to social policy and legislature. The study examines this moment in order to clarify the capacity for radical discourse to bring groups together and impact on dominant cultural forms such as television.

The thesis explores the interrelation between public debate, institutions and individuals. It uses public sphere theories to examine alternative reading publics, and media such as film, video and television. It argues that independent film and video in Britain at this time, including activist documentary, currents of counter-cinema and avant-garde film, was largely concerned with creating and circulating counterpublic discourses. These counterpublic discourses consolidated and expanded oppositional groups, and set out to change aspects of society as a whole.

The thesis gives an account of the diversity of the influences on independent film and video, from socialist and liberation movements, to popular radical histories and psychoanalytic and Marxist film theory. Attention is given to the Independent Filmmakers' Association as an agent of change between filmmakers and state, notably in terms of national film and broadcasting policy. There is a case study of Marc Karlin's television film *For Memory* (1986), which looks at the fate of socialist memory under televisual regimes; and a case study of Stuart Marshall's *Bright Eyes*

(1984), which looks at issues of sexuality, identity and counter-history during the AIDS crisis. The thesis argues that during this period, independent film- and video-makers helped to transform television into a vital site of counterpublic discourse.



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## Introduction

This thesis argues that independent film and video in Britain between the mid-1970s and late-1980s sought to provoke societal change by creating and promoting counterpublic forms of cinema and television. Independent film and video was fundamentally rooted in social and political movements such as Marxism, the Women's Liberation Movement, anti-racism, Gay Liberation and queer activism. It was concerned with imagining new liberatory forms of sociality, and promoting radical change at a national level through changing governmental policy and legislative precedents. Independent film- and video-makers undertook their struggles not only by creating individual films and videos, but also through the production and distribution of texts and publications, and in the founding of organisations to promote and distribute films and videos. In mapping out this context, this thesis asserts that the vitality of the period is contained within these rich eddies and flows of discourse, organisation and activism.

The thesis sets out to overcome two main problems with existing accounts of independent film and video in Britain during this period. Firstly, independent films and videos have been routinely examined in film studies outside of the complexity of their original social and political contexts. Partly, this is an effect of the dominant Marxist-psychoanalytical film theories of the 1970s, which often pitted Althusserian theories of ideology against supposedly more naïve forms of Left activism (union militancy, romantic forms of collective practice) and discourse (socialist humanism, libertarianism).<sup>1</sup> These film theories are also noteworthy for their focus on aesthetic (or textual) qualities of films, arguing that some categories of film (such as the

modernist film text) are progressive while others (such as the classic realist text) are regressive. Since the 1980s, there has been a turn towards studies of social contexts of film and video, for example in studies of early cinema, as well as audience studies in cinema and television. However, while there have been significant theoretical developments in film studies, discussions of independent film and video produced in the 1970s and 1980s have often remained focussed on the aesthetics of specific films or videos, rather than the specific cultural context of the period. Theories of affect in film studies, for example, have offered a rich analysis of canonical independent films and videos such as *Handsworth Songs* (1986, Black Audio Film Collective) in terms of a phenomenology of the embodied encounter between viewer and work (Marks, 2000), but they have not explored how the work was produced first within the context of British television (it was broadcast on Channel 4 – see my discussion of this in Chapter 2 of this thesis). While these theories are important in understanding specific cinematic encounters with individual works and the development of new intercultural forms of cinema, they do not examine these works as nodes within their original sociopolitical climates.

Secondly, the turn towards contextual studies has had an impact on studies of independent film and video, but this has not resulted in any new significant theoretical account of the dynamics of the field. Marginal and diverse histories, first-person accounts and personal recollections have been recorded for posterity or recovered from the archives, revealing some of the diversity of approaches and politics of the period. Accounts such as Margaret Dickinson's *Rogue Reels* and Julia Knight and Peter Thomas's *Reaching Audiences* have provided vital overviews of independent film and video, situating the individuals and organisations within the sociopolitical context (Knight and Thomas, 2011; Dickinson, 1999). Other recent

accounts record memories and testimonies of those involved in independent practice, including reflections on collective filmmaking in the 1970s, or the (relatively) generous flows of funding to independent producers in the 1980s through the then-newly-established broadcaster Channel 4 (Aylett, 2015; Kidner and Bauer, 2013; Rowbotham and Beynon, 2000). These accounts do not, however, set out to provide a cogent theoretical analysis of why these makers and activists came together, or how these films, videos and discourses set out to produce sociopolitical change (for example, in terms of women's rights at a cultural level, or in terms of governmental policy and legislation). If the various forms of film analysis since the 1970s (textual analysis, theories of affect and phenomenology) have tended to sideline the complex social conditions of the time in order to give a coherent theoretical position, the turn to context-analysis in film studies has generally failed to provide a cogent theoretical analysis of the sociopolitical dynamics of the field.

Another significant explanation for this continued exclusion of the historical conditions of the period is that researchers and commentators today often encounter independent films and videos in film festivals and art galleries. As such, canonical works are often understood in terms of contemporary cinephile or art debates, rather than in terms of their manifestation in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a robust but fragmented political Left. An example of this is the popularity of the term 'essay film' in recent film festivals and film studies to retroactively describe works of independent film and video (the term was not used at the time).<sup>2</sup> Another effect of this new engagement with independent films and videos from the 1970s and 1980s is that works that were originally made for television, such as *Handsworth Songs* and *Bright Eyes* (1984, Stuart Marshall), are often discussed as works of cinema, film or activism, rather than situated within the media ecologies of the time (both of

the above examples were broadcast on Channel 4).<sup>3</sup> My thesis therefore sets out to re-situate independent film and video in its original contexts (screening contexts, institutions, and sociopolitical and theoretical discourses) in order to better understand the social and political agency of these works.

This thesis thus also aims to provide a theoretical model for thinking of independent film and video as elements of larger sociopolitical discourses. Using public sphere theory, I argue that independent film and video in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s was concerned with encouraging, provoking and fostering what Nancy Fraser calls counterpublic discourses (Fraser, 1993). Drawing on Emmanuel Kant's and Jürgen Habermas's notions of a critical 'reading public', Fraser argues that counterpublics enable debate centred on the needs of marginalised groups, and that these discourses ultimately have the capacity to influence opinions, state policies and legislation.<sup>4</sup> I argue that these critical counterpublic discourses can also be found in independent film and video. For independent film- and video-makers, television was both a problematic site for ideologies (including patriarchy, bourgeois capitalism and xenophobic nationalism), as well as potential forum for a critical reflection on sociopolitical iniquities, which might ultimately change society as a whole. The struggle to gain access to television by independent makers in the 1970s is thus not mere opportunism, but is a sustained effort to engage with larger audiences and influence diverse public opinions.

The term 'independent film and video', which I use throughout this thesis, encompasses an extraordinary diverse range of practices. These include: collectively produced documentaries made to support specific social struggles, such as the Women's Liberation Movement; the avant-garde 'counter-cinema' that sought to

tackle problems of ideology in terms of narrative and language; a cinema of ‘social practice’, which called for greater discursive participation from audiences; the artistic avant-garde of the London Film-makers’ Co-op, with its materialist and artisanal concerns; and independent video practitioners, ranging from artists to community workers. These loose categories have blurred margins, and include hundreds of individuals and groups. Film collectives include two main waves – those that emerged in the late 1960s or 1970s such as Cinema Action, Berwick Street Film Collective, the London Women’s Film Group and Amber, and the workshops that emerged in the 1980s such as Black Audio Film Collective, ReTake and Ceddo. The term ‘counter-cinema’ includes works by Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey, as well as Susan Clayton and Jonathan Curling (whose work can also be considered a cinema of social practice). Independent video ranged from the socially committed community work of Liberation films in the 1970s and Albany Video in the 1980s, to Stuart Marshall’s use of the term as a means of thinking beyond the distribution networks and discourses of art (Marshall, 1985, 1983).

It is clearly beyond the purview of any single thesis to cover all of these areas in any depth. Because of its specific focus on the formation of publics in the British context, this thesis has therefore bracketed out a number of possible lines of research.<sup>5</sup> For example, I have not been able here to examine in detail transnational counterpublics, such as the interplay between British and European film cultures and funding, or the solidarity between filmmakers with anti-colonial struggles in Latin America and Africa. Nevertheless, in examining the British context, this thesis does undertake an analysis of the specific local meanings of a wider transnational intellectual, cultural and political moment influenced by the New Left, libertarianism, anti-psychiatry, the Women’s Liberation Movement, Leninism,

Trotskyism, and emergent discourses of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. My research shows that British public intellectuals, including socialist feminists and culturalist historians such as Sheila Rowbotham, Christopher Hill and E.P. Thompson, had a profound impact on independent film. Intellectuals within *Screen* were influenced by elements of Leninism and vanguardism, in which a small cadre of intellectuals would lead society to revolutionary consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Differences, such as those between libertarianism and Leninism, were not necessarily reconcilable, but rather coexisted in an unstable, agonistic dynamic.<sup>7</sup>

This research has developed out of my interest in documentary practice, television and the possibility of public and political forms of independent film and video. Since late 2006, I have worked as a freelance art writer and editor, contributing to a number of magazines and journals such as *Art Monthly*, *Frieze* and the *Moving Image Review and Art Journal*. Over the years, I have come to have two main interests, both in relationship to an engagement between moving image practices and expanded publics. Firstly, I had become interested in what has been called the ‘documentary turn’ in art exhibitions (Nash, 2008): the display of independent documentary films and videos in galleries, museums and biennials.<sup>8</sup> This development is related to the increased valorisation of cinema in gallery-based art practices since the 1990s (Balsom, 2013; Connolly, 2009).<sup>9</sup> As I began this research, I was, however, less interested in these documentaries as installations or filmic works of art, than in their potential function beyond the gallery or the cinephile audience. Looking into the history of independent film, I became fascinated by the involvement of independent filmmakers with television in Britain in the early 1980s, in particular with the arrival of Channel 4 in 1982. For me, the potentially much-wider audiences of television



seemed like a richer challenge than the contexts of the art gallery or film festivals, whose spaces are visited by a relatively small and elite social minority.

My second main motivation in undertaking this research four years ago was an interest in video art, and in particular its relationship to television. As I began my research, I found that in many of the introductory accounts of video art in Britain, television was considered as determined by coercive ideological structures.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, major works of video art by Nam Jun Paik, David Hall and Richard Serra (to name only a few) clearly attacked and subverted television.<sup>11</sup> These accounts seemed to offer an analysis that was at odds with my own frequently positive experience of watching television as a child in the 1980s and early 1990s. Growing up in rural Wales, television had been a major way of encountering diverse ideas and experiences outside of my own limited frame of reference. Even filtered through the Welsh language channel (S4C), I experienced Channel 4's wild energy as an escape and a worldly education. In a pre-internet era, television gave access to a plenitude of attitudes, dreams and desires, and provided a conversational springboard for both gossip and political debates.

Some time before beginning this PhD in October 2012, I began looking deeper at video art histories and discovered that some practitioners had, indeed, used television as a site for widened public debate since at least the early 1980s. I was particularly interested in the work of Stuart Marshall (1949–1993), a leading British video artist in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as a co-founder of London Video Arts, an organisation that distributed and advocated for artists' video in Britain. Marshall made a number of innovative programmes for Channel 4 on issues relating to AIDS, gay histories and queer activism in the 1980s and early 1990s, such as *Bright*

*Eyes* (1984), *Desire* (1989) and *Comrades in Arms* (1990). I was fascinated by Marshall's activist use of television, and wrote a short text for the journal *Afterall* on Marshall's work (Perry, 2010), as well as an essay for *Art Monthly* on contemporary artists' work for television (Perry, 2011). Unfortunately, neither of these texts successfully declared my experience of television as an affective and educative encounter; the latter text was, in particular, still dominated by a theory of television-as-ideology.<sup>12</sup> It was clear that further research was needed to understand this territory. This formed the basis of my interest in writing a PhD on independent film and video.

In Chapter 1, I examine how independent films and videos in Britain during this period set out to engage viewers with pressing sociopolitical realities. The chapter begins with an analysis of dominant film theories of the 1970s, examining how terms such as 'documentary' and 'empiricism' were rendered problematic during this period in journals such as *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Screen*. The chapter then argues that, while these terms were problematized, many independent films and videos nevertheless sought to draw viewers into contemporary sociopolitical discourses, rather than providing an entertaining vision of a fictive or distant world happening elsewhere (Nichols, 1991). Diverse independent works present arguments about sociopolitical realities using rhetorical forms common to documentaries, the work of Bertolt Brecht, and the discursive practices of collectives and consciousness-raising groups. The notion of 'documentary rhetoric' is used in this chapter as a means of understanding the ways that independent film and video address the viewer in order to persuade, polemicize and promote ideas. This chapter does not assert taxonomies or definitions: while many independent films and videos can be described as documentaries, many others are hybrid forms that blur traditional genre boundaries. My assertion is that, even if they used fiction and melodrama,

independent films and videos tend to address the viewer in a polemical manner, returning viewers to the sociopolitical present in order to rethink it or change it.

Chapter 1 also addresses the dominant theoretical frameworks of 1970s film theory, which D.N. Rodowick, following Sylvia Harvey, has called the discourses of 'political modernism' (Rodowick, 1994; Harvey, 1982): a fusion of discourses influenced by French poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, Marxism and Brechtian critiques of realism. Rodowick's analysis offers an overview of the ways in which these theories permeated both the counter-cinema and the artistic avant-garde. While recognising the widespread influence of discourses of political modernism, I argue that the influences on independent film and video were much broader. Film- and video-makers read widely, drawing on other published books, magazines, journals and pamphlets circulating through the Women's Liberation Movement, the Troops Out Movement, Big Flame, International Socialists/Socialist Worker's Party, the Gay Left Collective and the Race Today Collective (among many others). Here, I use public sphere theory as developed by Jürgen Habermas, and modified by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, Miriam Hansen, Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner to examine these interconnected counterpublics (Warner, 2002; Negt and Kluge, 1993; Fraser, 1993; Habermas, 1992). Throughout the thesis, I argue for the need to examine how independent film and video practices developed in response to, and contributed to, these diverse counterpublic discourses.

In Chapter 2, I examine the influence of British socialist historians such as Christopher Hill, E.P. Thompson, Sheila Rowbotham and Raphael Samuel on independent production in Britain. I argue here that one of the major overlooked areas of independent film and video is the intellectual heritage of New Left histories

and practices of social and oral history. These social histories were, I argue, public discourses that did not fit neatly within the discourses of political modernism, but which nevertheless had a wide influence within independent film and video. They were also discourses that set out to rethink social attitudes in the present through an active engagement with the past. These socialist historical discourses opened the past up as a site for contemporary struggle, with moments of earlier radical action called on as inspiration for contemporary sociopolitical movements: the seventeenth-century Levellers and Diggers suggesting an earlier form of back-to-the-land counterculture; the General Strike of 1916 reverberating in the industrial disputes of the early 1970s. In this new history, the past was also examined as a site of continued oppressions: of the origins and causes of patriarchy, homophobia and racism (Weeks, 1977; Rowbotham, 1992). On the other hand, the New Left's historical thought had nostalgic and nationalistic tendencies, which were critiqued in the 1980s by writers such as Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer (Hall, 1996; Mercer, 1994) and became manifest in films such as *Handsworth Songs*. The complexities of these debates are, I assert, part of their vitality as evolving counterpublic discourses.

The ambition of independent film- and video-makers to reach new audiences and create new publics is also evident in the self-organisation of individuals and collectives into larger, national, organisations. The time-period covered in this thesis begins in 1974 with the establishment of the Independent Filmmakers' Association (IFA), and ends in 1990 with the collapse of much of the institutional support for independent film and video-makers.<sup>13</sup> Chapter 3 looks at the IFA as a counterpublic organisation that acted as an umbrella for diverse film and video practitioners who campaigned to have better funding, as well as access to show their works on television. The group expanded throughout its existence as it sought new alliances

and influences: in the 1980s, the association incorporated video-makers and photographers, and in the process become the IFVA and then the IFVPA. For simplicity, I refer to the organisation throughout this thesis as the Independent Filmmakers' Association or IFA.

Chapter 3 examines how the IFA campaigned for independent filmmakers to have access to television in order to spread socialist thought and foster counterpublic debate. It examines how television was a prime site for struggle in independent film and video in the 1970s, for campaigning groups such as the Media Workers Group, as well as the IFA, and how this relationship shifted with the arrival of Channel 4 in 1982. This chapter also includes a close analysis of the publishing activities of the IFA and its newsletter, as well as its work lobbying the government's Annan Committee (which was charged with creating a policy for the future of television broadcasting in Britain), as well as lobbying of the British Film Institute and the Arts Council for funding and distribution opportunities. The chapter closes with a reflection on the differences between two main notions of publics: that of a reading public (as developed by Kant, Habermas, Fraser and Warner); and the spatial notion of a public that gathers in streets, town squares or the cinema auditorium (this is the concept of the modern urban public developed by Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, and Hannah Arendt).<sup>14</sup> These ideas are important because, I argue, the notion of the film collective can be seen to draw from the 'spatial' model of the political meeting, while the potential to distribute work on television corresponds to the 'reading public' model of distributed and circulated texts. I argue that these two models should not be seen as irreconcilable, however, since many spatial counterpublics also utilise publishing and distribution, and vice versa.

Chapter 4 is a case study of *For Memory* (1986) a film made by Marc Karlin (1943–1999), which was commissioned by BBC-2 and broadcast in 1986. While the chapter is an in-depth analysis of a single work, the emphasis is on its relations to contexts including changing social attitudes to history, memory and television. Karlin was one of the key figures in the independent film community in Britain since the late 1960s, and a member of the Berwick Street Film Collective, a group that made a handful of influential avant-garde documentaries in the 1970s, including *Nightcleaners* (1975). Karlin was an early member of the IFA, and was active in campaigns to have independent works shown on the new fourth television channel. In the 1980s and 1990s, Karlin wrote and directed films that examined the fate of socialism in the late twentieth century that were shown on Channel 4, including *A Dream From the Bath* (1985), a series of films on revolution in Nicaragua (1985 and 1991) and *Utopias* (1989), among others. Broadcast on BBC-2 in 1986, *For Memory* is a reflection on the representation of history within television and nationalist heritage culture, with contrasting examinations of the memorisation of workers' histories and socialist pasts in memorial sites and rituals, which Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989). My chapter reflects on *For Memory* as a form of what I call 'counter-television': it is a work that sets out to critique television, as well as develop new forms of thinking and encountering the past on television.

Chapter 5 is a case study of *Bright Eyes* (1984), a documentary by Stuart Marshall on the media representations of the AIDS pandemic in the early 1980s, which was commissioned by, and broadcast on, Channel 4. Because of his background in video art (and experimental composition) and his queer activism, Marshall is not normally associated with independent film. Instead, accounts of his work are more often given in histories of video art, or accounts of queer media activism.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless,

*Bright Eyes* was part of the wider culture of independent film and video as it engaged with television in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The video is influenced by the discourses of political modernism, as well as by counterpublic historical discourse on sexuality (Weeks, 1991; Foucault, 1998). This chapter includes reflections on key motifs of documentary practice developed in Marshall's work such as the figure of the 'witness', and suggests how these notions may dovetail with ideas drawn from poststructuralism, such as the notion of the speaking subject in Julia Kristeva's writing (Kristeva, 1986). While it is a very different work to Karlin's *For Memory*, Marshall's *Bright Eyes* can be seen as an example of the use of television as a site for the discourse of counterpublic histories and memories.

In tracing this history, I build upon a number of informative accounts of independent film and video in Britain, which provide rich insights into the main participants, organisations and institutional developments, including those of Margaret Dickinson, and Julia Knight and Peter Thomas.<sup>16</sup> This research has also involved in-depth engagements with film theories of the 1970s and their development in the 1980s, especially those writers who contributed to journals such as *Screen*, *Afterimage*, *Ciné-Tracts*, *Cahiers du cinéma* and other journals of the period. Both Stuart Marshall and Marc Karlin died in the 1990s, so my research into their work has relied on their films, videos, writings, and a series of informal interviews that I have conducted with their friends and colleagues.<sup>17</sup> I have undertaken research at the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins, which contains archives related to Stuart Marshall and the Independent Filmmakers' Association, and the IFA/IFVPA archives held by Sheffield Hallam University, and at the British Film Institute's document archives in London.<sup>18</sup> I have also undertaken film and video viewings at archives including the British Film

Institute, LUX artists' moving image and Maya Vision (for research on Stuart Marshall), and the Marc Karlin Archive, also in London.<sup>19</sup> Online archives have also been invaluable, including Knight at Thomas's Film and Video Distribution Database and the British Universities Film and Video Council's digitisation projects.<sup>20</sup>

While no part of this thesis has been published previously, my participation in a number of research events and schemes has informed the writing here. The first part of Chapter 1 is developed out of my participation in a writer-in-residence programme at LUX in 2014, although the text as it appears here itself is significantly developed from my original writing.<sup>21</sup> My research into Brecht's notions of modernist historiography, which permeates a number of chapters in this thesis, was enriched through being invited to contribute a chapter on this subject to a forthcoming publication edited by Laura Mulvey and Susan Clayton (Perry, 2017). I have also contributed papers on Marc Karlin and Stuart Marshall to conferences, which have helped to crystalize my ideas.<sup>22</sup> The historical interest of my research has also been enriched by conversations with peers. In March 2015, I worked closely with Dr Claire Holdsworth at Central Saint Martin's to organise a conference on histories of artists' moving image.<sup>23</sup> I have also benefitted from speaking with other researchers who are currently looking into independent film and video work of this period, including Nick Helm-Grovas, Ed Webb-Ingall, Clarissa Jacobs, Dan Kidner and Conal McStravick.<sup>24</sup> While our research areas cover a similar time period (the 1970s or 1980s) from a diversity of perspectives, we share a common interest in the radical potential of moving image cultures of the recent past.



My use of public sphere theory in this thesis helps to fill a gap in the account of independent film and video by providing a framework for understanding how counterpublics can come together, expand, and potentially influence the mainstream. While the framework of public sphere theory has been used in film studies previously, notably in Miriam Hansen's work (to which I am indebted), it has not been applied in depth to the field of independent film and video in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, or the interaction between such practices and television during this period (Hansen, 2011; Negt and Kluge, 1993; Kluge et al., 1981). Public sphere theories enable insights into the relationship between marginal forms of film or video and larger publics, the interplay between debates, theories, practices, and institutional activities. Theories of counterpublics explore how embodied and desiring publics create discourses that promote new forms of engagement, affect and discourse. These theories clarify that publics are not static or monolithic entities; they are mobile, historical and discursive in nature. Counterpublics are formed to oppose mainstream publics, and, in turn larger publics can be influenced and changed by those alternative discourses. This thesis sets out to make a contribution to knowledge of independent film and video in Britain, showing how it contested the mainstream of television in order to reform it as a platform for counterpublic discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> I examine these tensions throughout this thesis, especially in Chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>2</sup> The 'essay film' as a term seemed limited for my own research interests, since its focus is on the literary, artistic or aesthetic qualities of a work rather than its sociopolitical contexts. This is not to dismiss the valuable work that has gone in to distributing and discussing essayistic films in recent years. Festivals devoted to the essay film include: Jean-Pierre Gorin's 'The Way of the Termite: The Essay in Cinema 1909–2004' at Vienna Filmmuseum (2007), a similarly titled series at TIFF Cinémathèque in Toronto (2009–2010), *Coutisane* festival (2016), and the Essay Film Festival (2015–ongoing) at Birkbeck, University of London, and Institute of Contemporary Art, London. Films by Marc Karlin were screened at the *Courtisane* festival (2016) and videos by Stuart Marshall screened at the 2016 edition of Birkbeck's 2016 edition. See also publications on the essay film such as: Corrigan, T.

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- (2011) *The Essay Film. From Montaigne, After Marker*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rascaroli, L. (2009) *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*. London: Wallflower Press; Kramer, S. & Tode, T. (eds.) (2009) *Der Essayfilm: Ästhetik und Aktualität*. Konstanz: UVK.
- <sup>3</sup> Roger Hallas's very insightful text on Marshall's *Bright Eyes* traces its influences on queer activism, but not its situation in terms of television. See: Hallas, R. (2009) *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Most authors have written of *Handsworth Songs* without analysis of its original screening on Channel 4. See, for example: Marks, L. U. (2000) *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- <sup>4</sup> See: Kant, I. (1996 [1784]) 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', in James Schmidt (ed.) *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. pp. 58–64.; Habermas, J. (1992) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- <sup>5</sup> I hope to return to these areas in future research: see the Conclusion to this thesis for a discussion of these possibilities.
- <sup>6</sup> For the classic text on vanguardism, see: Lenin, V. I. (1961) 'What is to be Done?', in *Lenin's Collected Works*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House. pp. 347–530. [online]. Available from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/> (Accessed 29 July 2015).
- <sup>7</sup> For arguments regarding agonistic democracy, see the writing of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. In particular, see: Mouffe, C. (2013) *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London ; New York: Verso Books.
- <sup>8</sup> For example, the major exhibition Documenta 11 (2002), which takes place every five years in the city of Kassel, Germany, featured a section on artists films curated by Mark Nash, the former editor of the journal *Screen*. Since the 1990s, and increasingly since the early 2000s, filmmakers such as Isaac Julien, John Akomfrah, Chris Marker and Harun Farocki, have exhibited and distributed their works through gallery networks, with the film festival and independent film network becoming relatively less important.
- <sup>9</sup> Balsom traces this development to the 1990 exhibition *Passages de l'image* at the Centre Georges Pompidou, curated by Raymond Bellour, Catherine David, and Christine van Assche.
- <sup>10</sup> This notion, clearly influenced by the film theory of the period, can be seen in particular in discussions of David Hall's canonical films *TV Interruptions*, 1971. For example, A.L. Rees writes that 'Hall's notion of 'the spectator' embraced the greatest passive audience of all, who were watching TV rather than avant-garde films'. See: Rees, A. L. (2011) *A History of Experimental Film and Video*. London: British Film Institute. p.98. See also: Hamlyn, N. (2003) *Film Art Phenomena*. London: BFI Publishing. pp73-77.; Elwes, C. (2005) *Video Art: A Guided Tour*. London: I.B.Tauris. p121.
- <sup>11</sup> For example, see Nam June Paik's numerous television sculptures of the 1960s, David Hall's *TV Interruptions (7 TV Pieces)* (1971), and Richard Serra's *Television Delivers People* (1973).
- <sup>12</sup> In her book *TV Museum*, Maeve Connolly rightly pointed out the limitation of my argument in the *Art Monthly* essay (Connolly, 2014, pp.14, 16) – television is potentially a space for knowledge, affect and the performance of identity.
- <sup>13</sup> This collapse was the result of Thatcherite attacks on bodies that supported independent film and video, including the Greater London Council and the Regional Arts Associations. Channel 4 was by this point the principal funder of workshop groups, but it could only sustain this support through co-funding. The channel would continue to encourage and support independent film and video until the late 1990s.
- <sup>14</sup> See, for example: Benjamin, W. (1966), 'What is Epic Theatre [First Version]' in Benjamin, W. & Mitchell, S. (2003) *Understanding Brecht*. London: Verso Books.
- <sup>15</sup> See, for example: Hallas, R. (2009) *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

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<sup>16</sup> See: Dickinson, M. (1999) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90*. London: BFI Publishing; Knight, J. & Thomas, P. (2011) *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image*. Bristol: Intellect Books.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewees include: Holly Aylett, the co-ordinator of the Marc Karlin archive; Neil Bartlett, who knew Marshall and appeared in his video *Pedagogue* (1988); Simon Blanchard, who oversaw the activities of the IFA in the 1980s; Jonathan Bloom (previously Collinson), the cinematographer who filmed a number of Marc Karlin's projects; Anne Cottringer, the cinematographer who filmed *Bright Eyes*, among other independent films; the video artist Dave Critchley who knew Marshall as a colleague and friend; independent filmmaker Jill Daniels; Barbara Evans, a filmmaker involved in the London Women's Film Group; Rebecca Dobbs a founder member of Maya Vision, the company which produced a number of Marshall's television works; Paul Marris, who was a significant presence in independent film groups such as the IFA, the Other Cinema, Faction Films and Trade Films; Laura Mulvey, the filmmaker and theorist who was involved in the IFA from its early meetings in the mid 1970s; Sheila Rowbotham, the socialist-feminist historian who was at the forefront of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s, and who was a close friend of Karlin; and Jeffrey Weeks, the historian, activist, and theorist of sexuality.

<sup>18</sup> Much of the IFA material has been scanned by Julia Knight and Peter Thomas as part of their AHRC-funded project, the Film and Video Distribution Database. See: <http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk/>. (Accessed 12 May 2016).

<sup>19</sup> The Marc Karlin Archive is coordinated by Holly Aylett and maintained by Andy Robson. See: <https://spiritofmarckarlin.com/>. (Accessed 12 May 2016). See also: Aylett, H. (ed.) (2015) *Marc Karlin: Look Again*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

<sup>20</sup> See: <http://bufvc.ac.uk/> and <http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk> (Accessed 4 June 2016)

<sup>21</sup> My five texts for LUX are titled 'What was British independent film?', and are archived on their website. See: <http://www.lux.org.uk/tags/colin-perry>. (Accessed 12 May 2016)

<sup>22</sup> These include a paper given at the conference 'Artists' Moving Image Practice in Britain: From 1990 to today' at Whitechapel Art Gallery on 6 November 2015, and participation in 'Stuart Marshall—Queer History and Public Activism: the TV essay, the public sphere and the visibility of AIDS in 1980s television' at Birkbeck, 3 June 2016.

<sup>23</sup> 'Doctoral Symposium: Writing Histories of the Moving Image', Central Saint Martins, 26 March 2015. See: <http://events.arts.ac.uk/event/2015/3/26/Doctoral-Symposium-Writing-Histories-of-the-Moving-Image/> (Accessed 12 May 2016)

<sup>24</sup> Conal McStravick is an artist and researcher looking into the work of Stuart Marshall. Nick Helm-Grovas, Clarissa Jacobs and Ed Webb-Ingall are pursuing PhDs at Royal Holloway, University of London. Helm-Grovas is looking at the writing and films of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen; Jacobs is looking at American feminist film in the 1970s; Webb-Ingall is looking at community video in the 1970s in Britain. Dan Kidner is a curator undertaking a PhD at Reading University, looking at independent film in relationship to ideas of community and communism, including Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of the 'inoperative community'. See: Nancy, J.-L. (1991) *An Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.



## Chapter 1. Rhetorics of Persuasion, Desire, Experience and Counterpublics

What was independent film and video in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s, and what conceptual tools might best be used to examine its protean and varied aspects? In this chapter I argue that it was, above all, a set of discourses of persuasion and argument about sociopolitical realities, often centred on issues of labour, gender, race or sexuality. Historical events and their accompanying debates, in both the mainstream and alternative press, clearly motivated independent filmmakers. The early 1970s to late 1980s was a time of great social and political struggle, a seismic period in the shift of the British economy from industrialism and social democracy to post-industrialism and neoliberalism. It was also a formative period of social struggle for previously disenfranchised or discriminated-against groups, with the Women's Liberation Movement, the Gay Liberation movement, and struggles for Black rights, which were only partly accommodated in legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Race Relations Act (1976). Independent film must be understood as grounded in these historically specific discourses, struggles and experiences.

The two decades taken together can be seen as one of extremes, with great wins for socialist causes at the outset of the 1970s followed by great losses by the end of the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher's government's relentless onslaught. The early 1970s also witnessed strikes by dockers, coal miners and factory workers. Cinema Action's early work, such as *Arise Ye Workers* (1973) were campaign films, designed to be screened to workers at meeting halls and factory floors, and to not only document but also encourage industrial action. In *Fakenham Occupation* (1972) the

London Women's Film Group similarly worked closely with the women who had occupied, and cooperatively operated, a shoe factory in Norfolk in defiance of forced redundancies. In 1973-74, industrial strikes by the National Union of Miners led to a three-day week and the eventual downfall of Edward Heath's Tory government. The miners' struggle is captured in Cinema Action's *Miners' Film* (1975), a film that conveys the voices, experiences and arguments of workers whose views were routinely excluded from the mainstream news media. In this period, a sense of the achievability of socialism permeates independent film: strikes could lead to stunning success. By 1984-85, the miners were on the back-foot, with the government sending in shock troops to break nationwide strikes by coal workers. Independent film and videomakers continued to support the cause, resulting in the *Miners' Campaign Tapes* (dir. various, 1984), a series of extraordinary films documenting the strike. This time, of course, the miners lost, crushed by a remorseless government hell-bent on dismantling an entire industry and its influential unions.

Independent filmmakers responded to these issues in diverse ways, informed to the activist and intellectual micropolitics of the times. While some filmmakers produced films that supported movements of protest or reform, others set out to change ideology through engaging with problems of representation. In *An Egg is Not a Chicken* (1975), the Newsreel Collective produced a campaign film in direct support of a Women's Liberation National Abortion Campaign. By contrast, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's counter-cinematic *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) explores issues of gender and patriarchy, drawing on feminist theorists from Hélène Cixous to Juliet Mitchell to re-think gender relations and cinematic language. Similar divergences can be seen in terms of politics of race and ethnicity. In the 1970s, following unrest

during the primarily Afro-Caribbean Notting Hill Carnival in London, David Koff, an American filmmaker with socialist convictions produced *Blacks Britannica* (1978), a forceful and polemical work informed by the revolutionary Marxist discourses of the Brixton-based *Race Today* magazine (1973–88). By contrast, in the 1980s, Black Audio Film Collective produced *Handsworth Songs* (1986) in response to media representations of unrest in Handsworth, Birmingham (in 1981 and 1985) and Tottenham, London (1985), producing a brooding, elegiac work that was influenced by emerging discourses on ethnicities in sociology and cultural studies among writers such as Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall.

In this thesis, I will argue that this discursive function in independent film and video was set to work to foster a new public, to create an oppositional counterpublic, and to change the mainstream realms of cinema and television into an open terrain for Left political viewpoints. In order to unpick this rhetorical world-making aspect of independent film and video, I will begin this chapter by examining the persuasive force of independent film, drawing from the analysis of rhetorics of persuasion developed in documentary studies since the 1990s. While recognising that independent film and video took many forms, including fiction, documentary, and hybrids of the two, this framework will help to clarify the force of independent film and video as a form and practice of persuasion, polemic and consciousness-raising. The first section of the chapter on ‘The Contention and Reinvention of Documentary’ looks at definitions around the term ‘documentary’ and how these were problematized, dismissed and partly recuperated during the 1970s and 1980s. The part of this chapter on ‘Rhetorics of Persuasion and Pedagogy’ explores independent film and video as a form of rhetorical form that sets out to convince audiences of sociopolitical concerns. This chapter also sets out to clarify the forms

of rhetoric that crystallised and sustained these discursive film and video counterpublics. The section of this chapter on 'Desire and Pleasure' argues that independent film and video articulate desires for a different world, one in which desire is rebuilt outside of patriarchy, racism, homophobia or capitalism. I use the term 'counterpublic' throughout this thesis, drawing on public sphere theories by authors including Jürgen Habermas, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, Miriam Hansen, Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner. The final section of this chapter on 'Experience and Counterpublics' explores and explains this theory in further depth, setting it up for further development throughout this thesis.

The conceptual framework used in this chapter is clearly quite different to the dominant currents of film theory developed during the 1970s in France and the UK. Many of the key film theory texts of the period drew on the writing of Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan, as well as the poststructuralism of Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida and others. As manifest in journals such as *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Screen*, this theory suggested that the solution to problems of ideology (such as the persistence of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, homophobia) could be tackled through the use of avant-garde forms that resisted conventions of realism in film. As D.N. Rodowick has argued, drawing from Sylvia Harvey, these discourses were underpinned by an aesthetics and ethics of 'political modernism', a radical conception of the social possibilities of film (Rodowick, 1994; Harvey, 1982). Political modernist discourse argued for film that foregrounded disruptive formal techniques: fragmentary narratives, rephotography (re-filming a screen to emphasise the materiality of celluloid or the television monitor), and intertextuality (the referencing or quoting of literary, cinematic or other sources). These strategies of aesthetic resistance are evident in a canon of independent films running from



*Nightcleaners* (1975, Berwick Street Film Collective) to *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen), *The Song of the Shirt* (1979, Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling) and *Handsworth Songs* (1986, Black Audio Film Collective). These works were championed as examples of ‘counter-cinema’ or ‘Brechtian cinema’ (Wollen, 1999; Heath, 1976; Johnston and Willemen, 1975; Mulvey, 1975).

While this discourse is extraordinarily rich, it has unfortunately frequently elided fellow travellers of the Left whose work eschews explicit formal innovation, such as the early work of Cinema Action, Newsreel Collective, Amber, Faction Films, and others. It also has the effect of excluding a whole raft of Left discourses such as anarchism, humanist socialism, libertarian Marxism, and more, that did not fit within Althusserian-Lacanian theoretical critiques of ideology and subject-formation, but which nevertheless had an important role to play within the film and video cultures of the time. Independent film and video was evidently part of a wide cultural field that included diverse political and aesthetic avant-gardes, from structural-materialist film to community video and collective film, as well as aspects of video art and video activism.<sup>1</sup> Rodowick’s insightful analysis of political modernism is a significant contribution to this research; however, in concentrating on the histories of film theory, Rodowick does not set out to explore the broader field of practice at this time. Also of importance to an account of independent film and video, as a field that includes the counter-cinema but is not reducible to it, are works that are less obviously indebted to theory, and which foregrounded ideals of solidarity and action, as is evident in *The Miners’ Film* (1975, Cinema Action), *An Egg is Not a Chicken* (1975, Newsreel Collective) and *Fakenham Occupation* (1972, London Women’s Film Group). Such films were primarily concerned with drawing attention to social and political issues, rather than with subverting conventions of realism and

narrative cohesion, and were subsequently dismissed in key texts of 1970s film theory as relying on retrograde aesthetic forms and therefore of being naively ideological (Comolli and Narboni, 1990; Wollen, 1999; Johnston and Willemen, 1975). The diversity of the field has been recognised and foregrounded within recent accounts of independent film and video (Kidner and Bauer, 2013; Knight and Thomas, 2011; Rowbotham and Beynon, 2000; Dickinson, 1999). However, as I have outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, these historical surveys and personal reminiscences tend to avoid accounting for this range of forms in terms of a deeper cultural or theoretical analysis.

My account here does not exclude or dismiss theories of 1970s film centred on ideology in order to recover less-theoretical activist work. My intention is instead to explore conflicting discourses and diverse practices as part of the same historical moment, and to construct an account of the interplay of these forces. While my work here is historical, this history includes theories, discourses and practices. My analysis here relates to Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as a set of ways of thinking and structuring knowledge, in which a wide set of theories and practices may be grouped together (Foucault, 1972). Such a focus on discourse has been central to a number of influential debates within film studies since the early 1990s, by writers including D. N. Rodowick, Bill Nichols and Michael Renov.<sup>2</sup> My thesis situates these debates within more diverse discourses that were related through journals and newsletters, interpersonal connections, patterns of distribution and exhibition, and political alliances. My research suggests that much of the film and video work of the 1970s and 1980s drew not just from Althusserian, Lacanian and semiotic models, but also from the complex, interpenetrating discourses of a fragmented Left (Rowbotham et al., 1979). Here, the rich theoretical influences of

semiotics and semiology, psychoanalysis and Marxist film theory rubbed shoulders with the activist politics of militant Trotskyism, anarchism, libertarian Marxism, socialist feminism, the Gay Left, analysis of race from within Marxism and cultural studies, and numerous other discourses. Independent film and video cultures were held together by this weak yet pervasive gravity, a set of complementary and sometimes antagonistic social, political and theoretical discourses that include, but also go beyond, those ideas of a modernism centred on problems of film form and ideology.

What these works had in common, then, was a commitment to drawing viewers into discourses on sociopolitical realities. The film form that may be most clearly concerned with what Bill Nichols calls the registration and address to 'this world', as opposed to the 'elsewhere' of narrative fiction, is that of documentary (Nichols, 1991). However, an analysis of independent film and video of the 1970s and 1980s in terms of documentary must confront a number of significant challenges. In the film discourses of the period, the idea of film's access to reality was both challenged and enriched in the pages of *Cahier du cinéma* and *Screen*. Discourses of political modernism effectively rendered a simple notion of indexical access to the real problematic, riven by ideology and processes of signification. Nevertheless, as I argue in the following section of this chapter, these arguments did not mean a shirking from sociopolitical realities. Instead, they reveal a deep commitment to the real as understood in terms of psychoanalytic conceptions of ideologies – 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (Althusser, 1971, p.162).

## The Contention and Reinvention of Documentary

In this section, I examine major theoretical film discourses of the 1970s in order to examine problems with the notion of the documentary form as it was perceived at the time. In his writing since the 1990s, Bill Nichols has argued convincingly that the preoccupation with semiotics and semiology, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism in 1970s film theory resulted in a hostility to documentary forms that were regarded as un-theoretical and complicit with dominant ideology. As Nichols argues, documentary's '[...] lack of a royal road to the unconscious and the secret underbelly of society relegated it to subordinate status in critical theory [...]' (Nichols, 1991, p.9). However, Nichols's points need to be qualified. As the discourses of political modernism emerged in the 1970s, they did not entirely dismiss documentary. Within the discourses of political modernism, a simple fiction/documentary split is often denied, with films of both types recast in categories in relation to their relation to ideology and realism. Furthermore, this same discourse also frequently sought alternative documentary forms within cinema history as models for radical practice, such as the debates in *Cahiers du cinéma* and then *Screen* in Soviet 'factography' (Brewster, 1971) and Brechtian aesthetics. I will now explore some of the discursive currents in relation to various notions of documentary practice in 1970s film discourse, placing them in relation to theoretical concerns with realism and critiques of idealist notions of empirical reality.

The criticisms of documentary film that emerged in film theory in the 1970s and 1980s must be understood in relation to the complex and often-inconsistent discourses of political modernism. One significant strand of Althusserian film criticism suggested that there should be no simple dichotomy between documentary and fiction, but that the distinction should rather be drawn between levels of

ideological complicity or resistance in various film forms. In their essay 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism', which had been published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1969 and was translated into English and published in *Screen* in 1971, Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni undertook an analysis of cinema that categorised films according to their relations to ideology, with the distinction between them being the degree of self-awareness, formal innovation and political commitment shown. The *cinéma direct* tradition and certain of the militant films of May 1968 are particularly cited as examples of a film type that holds an ideologically complicit understanding of the camera's access to the real. Documentary is not singled out as a special case of such a naivety, since their list also includes mainstream fiction films that do not evince any awareness of their own ideological function (Comolli and Narboni, 1990, p.63). Indeed, at the same time, film theory sought models to move at the level of both theory and practice beyond the impasse of ideological complicity. Between 1969 and 1971, *Cahier du cinéma* produced a series of translations into French of key Soviet texts by Vertov, Lenin, Eisenstein, Mayakovsky, Meyerhold and Kuleshov (Browne, 1990, p.3). *Screen* followed with articles on Mayakovsky, Kuleshov and *Nony Lef* in the winter 1971 edition.<sup>3</sup>

The groundwork for British independent film and video was partly located in the space opened up by this discourse, with paths revealed beyond dominant cinematic practice often rooted in experimental forms of documentary practice. These discourses pitted an avant-garde reflexivity against a hypostasised notion of key traditions of documentary film (*cinéma direct* and militant agit-prop), positing the latter as theoretically naïve and therefore irrelevant to any progressive struggle within cinema. The framework for this conception in Anglo-American discourse emerged through the importation of French semiological analysis via translations of

key texts published in *Screen* and *Afterimage*. Rodowick demonstrates that film theory's semiological inheritance had been imported via Derrida and *Tel Quel* and mixed with Althusserian critiques of ideology (Rodowick, 1994, p.22). The notion of *écriture* was given a political vitality in Jean-Louis Baudry's essay 'Writing/Fiction/Ideology', which was published in 1970 in *Cinéthique* and subsequently translated into English and published in *Afterimage* (Baudry, 1974b). In this essay, Baudry attacks representational 'readability' as logocentric idealism, the implications of this argument being (according to Rodowick) that 'if the world and the condition of its intelligibility becomes contingent on language or symbolic representation, then the world itself can only be considered as textual' (Rodowick, 1994, p.27). Thus the development of a semiotic position within film theory suggested that an empirical reality cannot be taken as given, and forms of filmmaking that do so may be considered a theoretical and politically emancipatory dead-end. Nichols argues that, following Christian Metz's use of Lacanian and Althusserian terminology, it became arguable that society's ideological battlegrounds were to be found most resolutely within the myths and conventions of fiction cinema. For example, in his 'Narrative Space' essay, Stephen Heath argues against Peter Gidal to conclude that it is only in forms of (counter)narrative representation that an oppositional cinema might be built (Heath, 1976). However, this does not mean that documentary traditions were excluded from the discourse as a whole; rather, models of oppositionality for independent practice came from fiction, European counter-cinema (Godard, Straub-Huillet) as much as from Soviet avant-garde documentary, as well as through the writing of Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin.

What was at stake within key aspects of independent film and video discourse was an analysis of the most productive forms for a political cinema. Vital to this were criticisms of terms including ‘realism’, ‘verisimilitude’ and ‘empiricism’ (Johnston, 1971; Garnham, 1972; Willemsen, 1972; MacCabe, 1974).<sup>4</sup> Criticisms of ‘empiricism’ drew in particular on the international Left’s dismantling of the ideological framework of bourgeois humanism, and the project of what Louis Althusser had termed the ‘theoretical practice’ of Marx. Althusser had distinguished the task of the intellectual as participating in an historical materialist analysis of ideology to produce knowledge (Althusser, 1990, pp.119–120). Key to this theoretical practice was his rejection of the ‘empiricist-idealist world outlook’: an attempt to extract empiricism from Marxist thought in order to rescue the latter as a science. Althusser particularly rejects the young Marx’s concern with the movements of ‘human essence’ within society; it was part of the Althusserian project to dismantle this intellectual heritage. Althusser would do so by contrasting the ‘scientific’ older Marx (post-1845 and the text ‘Thesis on Feuerbach’) from his younger Hegelian self:

By rejecting the essence of man [that is, after 1845] as his theoretical basis, Marx rejected the whole of this organic system of postulates. He drove the philosophical categories of the subject, of empiricism, of the ideal essence, etc., from all the domains in which they had been supreme. Not only from political economy (rejection of the myth of *homo economicus*, that is, of the individual with definite faculties and needs as the subject of the classical economy); not just from history (rejection of social atomism and ethico-political idealism); not just from ethics (rejection of the Kantian ethical idea); but also from philosophy itself: for Marx’s materialism excludes the empiricism of the subject (and its inverse: the transcendental subject) and the idealism of the concept (and its inverse: the empiricism of the concept). (Althusser, 1990, p.228)

The impact of Althusser on film discourse, and in particular on notions of films’ relation to reality, was vital. Following Althusser, for example, Comolli and Narboni do not deny material reality, but argue rather that the form of real that the cinema

captures is '[...] nothing but an expression of the prevailing ideology' (Comolli and Narboni [1969] in Browne, 1990, p.60). Comolli and Narboni retain an appeal to the real – things 'as they really are', and more importantly, the capacity of film to create new realities in the world. What they deny is that empirical forms of knowledge have access to such a reality. Instead, it is only a materialist critique of ideology that is seen as capable of producing knowledge of ideology.

In the British context, Ben Brewster, the editor of *Screen* from 1974–1977, had translated key texts by Althusser into English.<sup>5</sup> In his essay 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian theses', Colin MacCabe identified what he called the 'classic realist text' within fiction film, which may be 'defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth' (MacCabe, 1974, p.8), and which was structurally unable to understand the conflicting interests of the bourgeoisie and the working class (MacCabe, 1974, p.12). MacCabe's essay was part of a series of reflections in *Screen* and the Edinburgh Film Festival on Bertolt Brecht, and it was through these discourses that a new reading of realism and attitudes towards the real were developed. For Brecht, realism in theatre, literature and photography was a nineteenth-century bourgeois form of representation that failed to capture the realities of modern twentieth-century life, or offer ways in which an audience may set out to change society. Thus, Brecht's problem with photographic (or cinematic) representation is that it is incapable of capturing the complexities of social reality.<sup>6</sup> While indebted to Brecht, MacCabe's essay draws its deeper understanding of ideas of empiricism and ideology from Althusser. Indeed, echoing Althusser, MacCabe argues that any future developments in a Marxist film theory must start from the analysis that:



[...] the central and unvarying feature of ideology is that it represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. Ideology is always “imaginary” because these representations place the subject in position in his society (MacCabe, 1974, p.23).

Distinct readings of the real can thus be detected in 1970s film discourse. Firstly, there is a pragmatic concern with realities of social experience excluded from mainstream representation (the ‘real conditions of existence’); secondly, there is a commitment to new potential social realities (such as communism or socialism); thirdly, there are ideological relations that seems inaccessible to both non-fiction and fiction cinema; fourthly, there is a concern for a quasi-Platonic reality that is masked by the cinematic apparatus. This latter conception of a hidden, masked, screened or ‘deeper’ reality is vital for an understanding of the disagreement with realism as a surface style in the film discourse of political modernism. The fundamental ambivalence of such film theory should not be missed, since it staked a claim to a reality that it saw as fundamentally ‘foreclosed’ (Silverman, 1988, p.2) – at least in relation to a dominant cinema that is analysed. For Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, the cinematic encounter is a dream (Baudry) or a daydream (Metz) that shuts the viewer off from any sense of reality. Baudry, in particular, invokes an argument that suggests that the filmic viewer is akin to the shackled denizens of Plato’s cave: unable to access dimensions of reality (Baudry, 1974a). For Metz, the cinematic apparatus thus takes on the qualities of a mirror in the Lacanian sense: the scene of ego formation in which the child recognises itself within the mirror (Metz, 1982); one looks at the screen and encounters not a Bazinian trace, but one’s own ego-formation.

Claire Johnston and Paul Willeman echoed Comolli and Narboni, as well as MacCabe, when they criticised activist/political/militant films whose style indicated

a ‘dependence on *cinéma-vérité*, forms which purport to capture the world as it “really is”’ (Johnston and Willemen, 1975, p.103). Johnston and Willeman looked forward to a type of film that could provide a ‘basis for struggle’, and found it particularly in the Berwick Street Film Collective’s *Nightcleaners*. While Johnston and Willemen were highly critical of what they perceived to be more naïve forms of activist film, the types of film they dismissed – for example *A Chicken is Not an Egg* (1975) by Newsreel Collective, a film supporting the National Abortion Campaign, or the early films of Cinema Action made in support of unions and workers – were precisely those that most obviously correspond to documentary activist traditions and forms. What Johnston and Willemen demanded was a more self-reflexive form, a clearly defined conception of the function of film as a ‘struggle within ideology’ (*ibid*, p.103) – which is to say, a struggle at the textual level of film form. This discourse of rupture has affinities with militant calls for film to not just theorise conflict, but to actually provoke it – in the words of US Newsreel’s Robert Kramer, radical film should ‘explode like grenades in people’s faces or open up minds like a good can opener’ (Kramer in Renov, 2004, p.12). However, Johnston and Willemen’s argument was posited explicitly against such direct activist film in which forms of reportage were left intact. In her 1973 essay ‘Women’s Cinema as Counter Cinema’, Johnston had stated that rupture must be exercised at the level of the film text itself: ‘new meaning has to be manufactured within the text of the film’ (Johnston in Thornham, 1999, p.36). Johnston further argued that: ‘[...] the language of the cinema/the depiction of reality must also be interrogated, so that a break between ideology and text is effected’ (*ibid*, p.37). Drawing on Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s criticism (Enzensberger, 1970) of the New Left’s tendency to conceive of the media as a monolithic force consciously performing a repressive function in society, Johnston and Willemen argued that the mainstream media

enacted repression as an unconscious extension of patriarchal myth. In these arguments, a closer correspondence to the 'real conditions of existence' might be reached via a disruptive avant-garde textuality, or through mainstream cinema that reveals its own cracks or opens a critical space for the viewer (a similar argument is posited in Comolli and Narboni's article).

In order to further understand this hostility towards realism and empiricism as it took place in Britain, it is important to understand the intellectual climate in which these arguments were formulated. Here, it is useful to look beyond the texts of political modernist film discourse, to the wider currents of the British New Left. Margaret Dickinson has noted that critiques of English class culture developed in the 1960s in the *New Left Review* were particularly influential on radical-left British film in the 1970s (Dickinson, 1999, p.37). From the early 1960s *New Left Review* writers Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson had argued that hegemonic class interests were manifest in a 'blanketing English fog' of 'traditionalism' and 'empiricism' (Anderson, 1992, p.31), frequently drawing on Gramsci's theories of hegemony in order to critique establishment culture.<sup>7</sup> In his 1968 essay 'Components of the National Culture', Anderson gave a scathing criticism of the English intellectual elite, arguing that its abhorrence of broad socio-political theories were major blocks for attempts to revolutionise society.<sup>8</sup> For Anderson, the roots of the problem of culture in Britain was that it had 'never produced either a classical sociology or a national Marxism' (Anderson, 1992, p.89) – it was 'without a centre' in that its conceptual tools were averse to abstract, 'totalising', ideas capable of viewing society as a whole; indeed, the entire culture rested on 'the atomized empiricism of domestic British thought' (*ibid*, p.95) that was incapable of thinking through the notion of Marxist class contradiction (namely that between the producers and the

owners of the means of production) (*ibid*, p.54). Here, ‘empiricism’ is criticised not for its supposed idealist conception of the relation of vision to knowledge, of camera to profilmic reality, or of sign to referent; rather, it is criticised above all for a cultural failing to understand the materialist dialectic. The deep anxiety within Anderson’s essay centres on the limitations of English culture as a system of consensus through atomisation of thought, rather than the philosophical failings of empiricism as conceived in the Althusserian strains of film criticism expounded by Baudry and MacCabe.

In ‘Components of the National Culture’, Anderson argues for a form of Marxist criticism that dismantles an English class-based culture rooted in the bourgeois critic’s taste. This analysis of the dialectic would resurface via the movement of *New Left Review* contributors such as Brewster, MacCabe, Wollen and Sam Rohdie to *Screen* in the 1970s (Bolas, 2009, pp.205, 235). Echoing Anderson’s broadside, in 1971, Claire Johnston surveyed an array of British film magazines and journals since the 1950s (*Sight and Sound*, *Movie*, *Definition*, *Motion*, *Brighton Film Review*, *Cinema*, *Afterimage*), asserting that ‘British film criticism largely exists in the pre-Bazin stage’ and finding that there were ‘a number of factors contributing to this situation, not least the firmly-entrenched empiricist, anti-intellectual tradition [...]’, which she locates particularly in the tendency for critics to make judgments of taste based on little more than their own whims (Johnston, 1971, p.39). Criticisms of English cultural stasis and conformity were also directed at Britain’s cinematic heritage. In 1972, Nicholas Garnham wrote of ‘that tradition which saw “the documentary” as the art cinema of Britain’, and found that it was used ‘unchallenged to support the status quo’ (Garnham, 1972, p.110). Also in 1972, writing in the journal *Cinema Rising*, Jim Pines argued that

[...] militant-political-revolutionary cinema has to be aimed at provoking social contradictions, and to the extent of alienating sectors of the audience from one another. [...] the majority of political films shown in Britain have been essentially informational and far from political (Pines [1972] in Kidner and Bauer, 2013, p.84).

In 1974, Alan Lovell noted the ‘basic conservatism of the British Cinema’ which was due largely to the fact that (in his opinion), the ‘documentary movement [in the 1930s had] cut off the experimental direction of the British feature cinema’ (Lovell, 1975, pp.66–67). In 1974, MacCabe compared Lindsay Anderson’s *O Lucky Man!* (1972) with Godard’s *Vent d’est* (1970), finding the French film superior to the English in its capacity to expose social contradictions (MacCabe, 1974). For MacCabe English cultural criticism and the primary examples of British cinematic art were equally bogged down by ‘consensus’, a lack of understanding of the Marxist historical dialectic, and an atomisation of thought unable to think through contradiction.

Documentary was, in these texts, often presented as a particularly British genre that routinely participated in the mystifications and ideological project of the governing class, patriarchy and capitalism. Noël Burch summarises these concerns about the retrograde nature of English establishment-friendly culture in a 1978 *Screen* article:

[...] in a society where philosophical positivism continues to be not merely the dominant but indeed the hegemonic intellectual framework, where reformist and technocratic delusions, associated with a uniquely ‘gentlemanly’ set of ground-rules for the class struggle, provide the basis for an ideological and political consensus unrivalled in the capitalist world, it is easy enough to see the reasons for the exceptional prestige still surrounding today an idea of film whose very denomination embodies ‘objectivity’, ‘dispassionate observation’, and in short ‘the end of ideologies’. (Burch, 1978, p.122)

These caricatures of British documentary cinema would begin to slowly break apart in the late 1970s as film studies increasingly paid attention to historical film forms, from early cinema to the social documentary movements of the 1930s, and historical ways in which women audiences had related to cinema and television.<sup>9</sup> Reflecting on the film theory of the earlier 1970s, Annette Kuhn, writing in *Screen* in 1978 noted that:

Discussions of the space film occupies within ideological discourse tend to dismiss documentary as irredeemably implicated in an analogical mode of representation and an ideological regime from which it can take no distance. This has meant that documentary films have scarcely begun to be treated in terms other than those they set for themselves, that is in terms of the extent to which they reveal a/the truth about whatever they are addressing [...] There is a notable absence of writing on the subject of documentary which considers it as a specific body of films either in terms of the 'formal' characteristics of film texts or with regard to the modes of address and subject positions constructed by them. (Kuhn, 1978, pp.71–72).

While Kuhn lamented the underdevelopment of the field of documentary studies, her article was nevertheless a part of an attempt in the 1970s and early 1980s to find radical antecedents, models and theories for new forms of independent film and video. As has been noted, there had been significant attempts to locate radical precedents of politically committed film within the UK and abroad: in 1971 *Screen* published an edition devoted to the Soviet *Novy Lef* of the 1920s, with analysis of Soviet 'factography'; in 1972 it published an interview with Ivor Montagu, the radical documentary film-maker active in the 1930s; and Bert Hogenkamp published a number of studies of radical British documentary in the 1970s and 1980s (Hogenkamp, 1986). These publications were complemented by screening activities: Joris Ivens' radical documentaries were distributed by 'The Other Cinema' in London in the 1970s; and in 1975-1976 the London Filmmakers' Co-op put on a series on the 'History of the Avant-Garde' showing classical documentary works such as Robert

Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1948), Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* (*Tri pesni o Lenine*) (1934), and Jennings' *Fires Were Started* (1943); and British and Soviet documentaries were explored in the *Film as Film* exhibition at the Hayward in 1979.<sup>10</sup>

Some of this activity can be seen to function as attempts to create an 'origin myth' for a political modernist film practice, as Rodowick suggests in regards to Burch's interest in early cinema (Rodowick, 1994, p.122). More broadly, we can say that many studies of independent film history at this time were at least partly concerned with finding historical parallels and antecedents to contemporary oppositional practice. Kuhn had presented a paper on this subject in the 1977 Edinburgh Film Festival special event titled 'History/Production/Memory', and would subsequently contribute to the volume *British Cinema: Traditions of Independence* (Macpherson and Willemen, 1980). This publication set out to outline a genealogy for British oppositional practice and the work of the Independent Filmmakers' Association in the radical documentary work of the 1930s, bring together historical examples of documentary practice such as Ivor Montagu, Ralph Bond and Paul Rotha, the work of the Progressive Film Institute and Kino. Indeed, discussion of Kino had taken place too within the forum of the Independent Filmmakers' Association:

An understanding of this history should be seen as the basis for our struggle at the present time. Memory – a sense of one's own history – constitutes a vital dynamic for any struggle. The questions we face today relate in a very real way to our struggle for an independent cinema in the past, dating back to the 1930's [sic] when the development of 16mm distribution to avoid the censorship paved the way for the development of an alternative cinema with a politico-aesthetic purpose in the form of Kino and the Progressive Film Institute. ('Independent Film-making in the 70s', 1976, n.p.)

This interest in tracing British roots of radical culture can nevertheless be seen to shift the terms of the debate back to a nationalism that Perry Anderson was keen to

undercut. On the other hand, there was an awareness of the contemporary and recent work being produced in terms of activist or militant film on the international stage. The journal *Afterimage* devoted its first issue in 1970 to 'film and politics', drawing attention to international trends in militant cinema, notably the Newsreel group in the USA, and practices of *cinétracts* in France and *cinogiornale* in Italy. In its third issue, translations of key Third Cinema texts from the 1960s by Glauber Rocha, Julio García Espinosa and Fernando Solanas were published in English for the first time, drawing attention to innovative forms of committed documentary and non-European models of counter-cinema.<sup>11</sup> Evidently, the alternative film fora of the period were engaged with a wide-ranging search for the validation of oppositional experiences along axes both temporal (i.e. looking for antecedents) and spatial (searching for a broad internationalist network of socialist filmmaking). Nevertheless, a fundamental ambiguity about British culture remained – a desire to trace particular forms of British radicalism to challenge a conservative notion of British or English identity; and a resolute internationalism evidenced by the widespread importing and translation of French film theory, and the citation of Godard and Straub-Huillet as exemplars of political modernism. The peculiarity of these currents of anti-nationalist radicalism and radical nationalism, as well as broad internationalism, can be seen in Channel 4's Independent Film and Video Department, which launched its *Eleventh Hour* strand in 1982 with a backwards glance that suggested a striking continuity between the Documentary Movement of the 1930s and the independent film works of the 1970s, with *So That You Can Live* (1981, Cinema Action), *Launch* (1973, Amber), and *Last Shift* (1976, Amber) shown as part of a package that also included *Industrial Britain* (1933, directed by Robert Flaherty and produced by John Grierson) (Fountain, 1986, p.1). Critical reflections on Britishness, realism and documentary form continued into the 1980s, particularly



in relation to the widespread influence of nostalgic or nationalist trends in Left histories of British working class struggles, which would seem to exclude newer migrant groups (Gilroy, 1987) (see my discussion of this in relation to the notion of the ‘counterpastoral’ in chapter 2).

### **Rhetorics of Persuasion and Pedagogy**

To clarify the discursive and rhetorical relation to sociopolitical experience that I see as fundamental to independent film and video, this chapter draws from the analysis of rhetoric in documentary studies as it has been formulated since the early 1990s. What follows is therefore not an attempt to classify independent film and video as documentary, but rather to draw on aspects of film studies in order to look at ways in which rhetorics of persuasion and attitudes towards social experience can become manifest and comprehensible. My intention here is not to trace a taxonomy of forms, but rather to analyse an historical moment to locate broad commonalities and assumptions between diverse elements of intellectual and activist film and video culture. Indeed, while many independent films and videos of the 1970s and 1980s may now be considered as documentaries, it is also clear that independent films and videos are very often also concerned with fiction and the creation of new formal combinations that transcend these boundaries. By looking at the idea of rhetoric, I want here to look at ways in which diverse forms of independent film and video can be considered to be part of the same cultural milieu, sharing a desire to realise sociopolitical change with the use of film or video.

Another crucial influence on independent film and video practice is that of Bertolt Brecht, a figure who was particularly attuned to returning the viewer to contemporary sociopolitical realities. The influence of Brecht on film theory in Britain at this time is explicit, with two key issues of *Screen* (the Summer 1974 and Winter 1975 issues) and an edition of the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1975 devoted to the pedagogical work of the German playwright. This discourse produced an extensive speculation on how to apply his epic theatre and ‘learning plays’ (*Lehrstücke*) to contemporary film theories and aesthetics centred on Althusserian notions of ideology. The reading of Brecht put forward in *Screen* at this time is not, however, easy to apply to all forms of independent film and video. Activist work, such as that of Cinema Action’s early work, for example, lacked a Brechtian dynamic: it frequently did not seek distancing to emphasise the operations of ideology, but rather sought identification between audiences and the plights of those depicted on screen. In terms of an aesthetic strategy, much of the work of independent producers at this time was clearly not Brechtian in the sense that was extrapolated within 1970s film theory.

However, it is clearly the case that both activist work and the counter-cinema sought to speak of sociopolitical realities in order to change them. Here, we can turn to documentary studies for an insight: Bill Nichols has argued that a distinct aspect of the rhetorical property of documentary is that it returns the viewer to what he calls the ‘historical world’, that is ‘this’ world as opposed to other possible worlds of fiction (Nichols, 1991). Certain films, then, do not depend on style so much as their rhetorical abilities to return the viewer to a concern with the ‘historical world’. Carl Plantinga has similarly argued that non-fictional film must primarily be understood in relationship to the audience’s recognition of given modes of address

and contexts, with clues on screen, in advertising and marketing material, enabling viewers to understand the film as either fictional or non-fictional (Plantinga, 1997, pp.18–19). A film communicates itself as fiction or non-fiction not only at the level of the film text, but also through the context in which it is encountered. Plantinga argues that film forms only make sense within a ‘sociocultural milieu’ (Plantinga, 1997, pp.18–19), through shared understandings of these codes and contexts. This argument echoes Dai Vaughan’s assertion that ‘What makes a film “documentary” is the way we look at it’ (Vaughan, 1999, p.84). Similarly, the activism of independent film and video is located not merely in the differentiation between forms, but in the sense that these works were foregrounded as sites of struggle about sociopolitical realities.

I do not here wish to re-inscribe binaries between fiction and non-fiction or documentary, especially given the erasure of these boundaries in the discourse outlined in the previous section of this chapter. In the Brechtian cinema of the 1970s fiction is re-presented in all its artifice in order to convince the viewer of the social construction of reality, and thus of the possibilities of constructing new social forms. It is a presentational form of cinema, directly addressing viewers, as would a speech at a political rally. In independent film and video, dramatic sequences rarely function entirely as fictive worlds, but rather are rhetorical devices for reflecting on and producing discourse about this world. *Riddles of the Sphinx*, for example, is not so much an attempt to tell a story happening ‘elsewhere’ through the production of a diegetic space, but rather is a complex examination of the material, psychic, and symbolic relations of patriarchy producing the marginalisation of working mothers. *Riddles of the Sphinx* is, on the one level, a Derridean deconstruction of the language and conventions of melodrama, which is centred on a fractured narrative of a

woman struggling to balance work and motherhood; yet it also addresses wider social issues of childcare and women's roles at home and in the workplace, arguing that patriarchy permeates the crevices of history and contemporary existence.

This process of deploying fictional and avant-garde elements within a rhetorical framework of documentary persuasion can be seen in other independent film and videos. *Song of the Shirt* includes dramatised scenes that mix temporal registers drawing a parallel between discourses of women's labour in nineteenth-century sweatshops and under contemporary welfare systems; *At the Fountainhead (of German Strength)* (1980, Nick Burton and Anthea Kennedy) uses both dramatised sequences and intertitles to draw parallels between the authoritarian laws of Nazi Germany and contemporary West Germany; and *Thriller* (1980, Sally Potter) examines ways in which women have been represented in dramatic fiction from the nineteenth-century opera to contemporary cinema and television.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, some independently produced works did allegorise social realities through more traditional fictional narratives. For example, *Tunde's Film* (1973, directed by Maggie Pinhorn and Tunde Ikoli) was scripted by and made with a cast of young black men from London's East End, and centres around issues of unemployment, discrimination and police harassment. If the work is a fiction, however, the film's participatory mode of production and amateur acting nevertheless gives audiences 'clues' to read it as a commentary on actual, lived experience. Fiction and melodrama can and do routinely return the viewer to immediate sociopolitical realities, and as Plantinga says, form: '[...] a kind of allegory that presents some states of affairs as fictive, yet through that fictive presentation makes assertions [about social realities]' (Plantinga, 1997, p.22).

We may extend Vaughan's and Plantinga's insights and state that when a viewer engaged with independent film and video in the 1970s and 1980s, he or she would generally be made aware by the 'sociocultural milieu' that what they have encountered is designed to engender discourse and debate about the world. In *Representing Reality* (1991), Bill Nichols argues that documentary is related to what he calls 'the discourses of sobriety', including 'science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion and welfare' (Nichols, 1991, p.4). Nichols' conception here is useful in that it foregrounds the aspect of documentary that explicitly invokes discourses that have the potential to effect political or social change, often through a call for the reforming of social attitudes, laws, or systems of governance. Later in this chapter, I shall explore some of the limitations of this notion of rational or 'sober' discourse and legislative or state power, especially as it was worked through within independent film and video.<sup>13</sup> For now it is important to note that independent film and video can be usefully understood as a form of discourse that directly reference the sociopolitical world and invokes wider social currents that may help to rethink or change it, changing not only ideology, but influencing the 'sober' discourses of legislation and state power: the struggles of socialism, the Women's Liberation Movement and anti-racism were all struggles that sought to change laws and government policies.

Like documentary, independent film and video uses rhetorical forms that directly reference this world, rather than summon other imaginary worlds, in order to potential change sociopolitical realities. Plantinga argues that non-fiction film's rhetorical specificity is one of 'assertion' (Plantinga, 1997, pp.16–18).<sup>14</sup> One fundamental link between independent film and video and documentary can, I would argue, be located within the use of the rhetoric of assertion. Independent film

and video, like documentary, makes assertive statements about the world and its representations in order to change it. Independent film and video asserts that the world is full of problems: capitalism, patriarchy, homophobia and racism. The intention of the counter-cinema was to not only describe problems in the world, but also to produce makers and thinkers who could conceive of, and promote, new socialist formations.<sup>15</sup> The intensely polemic discourses of political modernism can then also be seen as a form of rhetorical positioning with similar aims to activist political documentary.

Indeed, the period can be said to have produced a veritable documentary renaissance with activists explicitly grounding their arguments about the world within films and videos that sets out to document, testify and witness. Many independent films and videos in Britain at this time took shape around what Thomas Waugh calls the 'committed documentary', which make 'a declaration of solidarity with the goal of radical socio-political transformation' (Waugh, 1985, p.27). Collectives such as Cinema Action, Newsreel, London Women's Film Group, Trade Films, and others, were action-oriented, operating as polemicists and consciousness-raisers on behalf of movements including workers, squatters, strikers, the Women's Movement, as well as black and gay liberation. Independent filmmakers were sometimes overtly inspired by the insurrectionary traditions of international militant cinema: by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas in Argentina (Solanas and Getino, 1997); and by the U.S. Newsreel group, the Italian Cinegiornale and the French collectives of the late 1960s such as Chris Marker's SLON and Jean-Luc Godard and Jean Pierre Gorin's Dziga Vertov Group (Hartog, 1970; Harvey, 1980; Aitken, 2013, p.269). These currents continued in the 1980s, as media activists increasingly made innovative videos that sought to give visibility to

issues including censorship, workers' strikes, police harassment and AIDS (Hallas, 2009). Such work was achieved with the support of a number of institutions, including the BFI Production Board, the Other Cinema, and Channel 4. During Barrie Gavin's time as Head of Production at the BFI (1975-1976), twelve of the thirty-two films produced were 'political documentaries' by groups including Berwick Street Film Collective, London Women's Film Group and Newsreel (Dupin, 2012, pp.197–218). In the 1970s, the Other Cinema distributed a wide array of independent documentaries, including classics of Third Cinema and works by Fred Wiseman (Other Cinema, 1975). During the first few weeks of Channel 4's broadcasting, from November to December 1982, the Independent Film and Video Department's *The Eleventh Hour* strand featured numerous documentaries by Cinema Action and Amber (Fountain, 1986). Activist documentary was, nevertheless, simply one aspect of the larger field of independent film and video, running alongside diverse oppositional practices.

There are also diverse forms of assertion of sociopolitical realities and solidarity within the canon of political modernist counter-cinema. In many key works from *Nightcleaners* to *Handsworth Songs*, documentary traditions such as *cinéma vérité* and the Griersonian poetic documentary are re-worked and re-deployed.<sup>16</sup> In these works, social critique can be seen to emerge partly by harnessing the existing rhetorical power of documentary persuasion, of direct testimony, witnessing and polemic. In *Nightcleaners*, the re-photographed image of the workers' faces are often isolated in a darkened space indicating the cinematic context, while other material interventions include the use of rephotography to zoom in, while at the same time the film is slowed down to something like a flicker. These material strategies were examined by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemsen in their key essay 'Brecht in Britain: The

Independent Political Film (on *The Nightcleaners*)', in which they argue that the Berwick Street Film Collective's editing strategies invoke self-reflexivity, critical distance and promote ideological rupture (Johnston and Willemen, 1975). On the other hand, Marc Karlin, one of the core members of the Berwick Street Film Collective alongside James Scott and Humphrey Trevelyan, later argued that the film's use of slow footage was an attempt to 'render back to that person a certain physicality, a certain presence, which is always absent from filming at 24 frames a second. That's what people call romantic or whatever' (Karlin et al., 1980, pp.23–24). For Karlin, this 'romantic' attachment to the human subject was a constant concern throughout his film practice (See my discussion of this in chapter 4 of this thesis on Karlin's *For Memory*). Here, the evident materiality of the film in *Nightcleaners* can be seen as a means of drawing attention to the deep-furrowed brows and sleep-deprived eyes of the worker, while their oral testimony gives evidence of exhaustion and marginalisation. Here, re-photography and slowed footage is deployed not for its critical distance, but for its intimacy, empathy and a solidarity founded on human suffering. This intimacy is also evident in *36-77* (1978), the follow-up to *Nightcleaners*, which takes the elegiac rephotography of the earlier work to an extreme, giving extraordinary, lengthy 'portrait' meditations on the face of Myrtle Wardally, one of the leaders of the Cleaners' Action Group Strike in 1972. While the reading of *Nightcleaners* offered by Johnston and Willemen is important within the discourses of political modernism, it is quite possible to interpret these images in terms of embodied affect, empathy and solidarity.<sup>17</sup>

The rhetorical and persuasive aspect of independent film and video can also be used to clarify that the counter-cinema's emphasis on dialogical and intertextual forms should not be taken as meaning an absolute freedom of interpretation. For example,



it is evident that *Nightcleaners*, *Riddles of the Sphinx* and *The Song of the Shirt* all use experimental and avant-garde techniques of filming, editing and narration to make arguments about the marginalisation of women in the workplace by managers and union leaders, and more widely in the persistence of patriarchy from ancient myth to the contemporary welfare state.<sup>18</sup> *Riddles of the Sphinx* specifically utilises an address of *écriture féminine*, a struggle to find a new language outside patriarchy. At key moments throughout the film, a female voice-over intones workaday routines as a camera circles around a child's bedroom, or links histories of myth and motherhood as a camera circles display cases in the British Museum.<sup>19</sup> How should such a film be understood? One answer is that the viewer should read the reinvention of textual form partly as a liberational ideal. As Colin MacCabe has argued, the production of 'open' texts such as these are intended to carry an allegorical political weight – 'in so far as the text remained open, so did the subject' (Colin MacCabe in Rodowick, 1994, p.29).<sup>20</sup> Such a claim rests on an assumption of a direct causal relation between text and viewer: an open text produces an active viewer, with the default condition of the viewer assumed to be that of passivity. This argument has been critiqued extensively, notably by Jacques Rancière, who has undertaken an extensive critique of the notion of the 'passive' spectator that first emerged in theories of the theatre audience from Dennis Diderot to Bertolt Brecht and Guy Debord (Rancière, 2011).<sup>21</sup> Following Rancière's insights, we can argue that the supposed openness of intertextuality in works such as *Riddles of the Sphinx* or *Song of the Shirt* has its limits. Clearly, the overall intention of these films is to communicate the persistence of patriarchy, and the possibilities of alternative organisational and communicative means for women against that historical oppression. The meaning of such works is evident, and not open to boundless interpretation.

The political-modernist counter-cinema communicates to its audience through a presentational style, a neo-Brechtian style, which is deliberately constructed in order to make the viewer aware of the textuality of the film or video and the materiality of the cinematic apparatus. Again, this does not mean that such works are completely 'open'. Indeed, such works seek an 'epistemological' activation of audiences through the evidencing of a film's own construction (Michelson, 1972). In Peter Wollen's 'Two Avant-Gardes' essay, the emphasis is on the need for films that interplay between signifiers and signified; but he refuses the possibility of an endless open text with its '[...] delirium of interpretation as though meaning could be read at will by the spectator' (Wollen, 1975, p.173). In his earlier text 'Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'Est*' (1972), Wollen argued that the explicit presentation of argument was essential: 'The constructive principle of the film is rhetorical [...] in the sense that it sets out the disposition of an argument, point by point' [...] (Wollen, 1999, p.419). Through the simultaneous acknowledgement of rhetorical reasoning ('point by point') and the foregrounding of cinematic language, the intention is, as Wollen says to 'change the spectator' (Wollen, 1999, p.424). While the specific tactics of Peter Gidal were very different, we can also note in his theoretical and film work an incessant drive to activate the viewer, to generate a screening situation centred on the 'reflexive attitude' of the avant-garde audience (Gidal, 1976). The difference in degree between the various practices of oppositional independent film and video are important – the emphasis on *écriture* in counter-cinema and in audience reflexivity in structural/materialist film – but these differences are tactical notions of how to activate the viewer; the unspoken commonality is the very need to activate viewers.

At the same time, any close historical reading of independent film and video in the 1970s and 1980s must understand other influences outside of political modernism: as pointed out in this chapter's introduction, all of the works here are part of a pervasive political environment within the fragmented discourses of the Left. The consciousness-raising activities of feminism, gay and black liberation movements and their corollaries on independent film and video activism were made in direct reaction to realities of patriarchy, homophobia, racism and nationalism, as experienced by large numbers of people. Moreover, a significant element of independent film and video was rooted in the 'social practice' of community action and local politics (Liberation Films, Amber, Leeds Animation Workshop), and sought to give voice to these excluded social sectors. Activist work by such filmmakers sought to raise consciousness, to activate viewers' sympathies, imagination, and participation at specific political junctures. Such works were very frequently directed at audiences who were already partly involved in social or political movements (workers at a union meeting, for example), or emerged through direct collaboration with local groups, who were already active within sociopolitical struggles. These audiences were clearly not considered passive by independent filmmakers. Rather, activist work of this kind was often intended to inform and motivate already committed oppositional audiences, as well as to find greater support and solidarity in likeminded communities (in the case of Cinema Action's *The Miners' Film*, urging other industrial workers to support striking miners).

The adoption of a framework of independent film and video as discourses of persuasion helps to capture some of these commonalities between the diverse elements of theory, politics and practice that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, whether they adhered to assumptions of audience passivity or not. The theorists of

the counter-cinema were describing a form of film that might persuade viewers who they perceived of as potentially passive to become active, while other activist filmmakers were involved in persuading already (politically) active viewers and groups to support or take part in specific struggles. My approach here sets out to encompass a diverse range of films and discourses that coexisted within the same time and geographical space, from the political modernism of the counter-cinema and debates in *Screen*, to the work of activist film collectives and the discourses of non-aligned Marxism, syndicalism, socialist-humanism and anarchism. What is clear, above all, is that the discourses of political modernism that emerged in the 1970s and were consolidated in the 1980s were extraordinary useful in consolidating these publics, even if in retrospect we may see limits to the assumption of a passive audience. In retrospect, it is evident that the polemical quality of these texts had an equally socially binding quality to those other activist-militant practices of independent film and video, helping to bring together and consolidate a multi-pronged oppositional counterpublic of independent film and video.

### **Desire and Pleasure**

Independent film and video was rooted in a desire to rethink and rebuild the sociopolitical world. This section argues that desire for social and political change helps to bring together communities of interest, solidarity and action. To speak of desire in an audience, in a cinema culture, and among groups of filmmakers, is to speak of an active striving for a goal. In documentary, the appeal to audiences is underpinned by a desire for knowledge that Nichols calls 'epistophilia'. The 'episte-' part of the word 'epistophilia' suggests a function of the intellectual film that recurs

through the discourses of political modernism. This is the form of reflexive knowledge that Annette Michelson had called the ‘epistemological inquiry’ of Dziga Vertov and other pioneers – a foregrounding of the knowledge of the socially grounded relations of the cinematic apparatus as a textual form within avant-garde film (Michelson, 1972). Independent film and video discourse was, as Rodowick has asserted, very often ‘epistemological’ in this sense; for writers such as Peter Wollen argued that the avant-garde film was capable of directing viewers’ consciousness to encounter the world through an informed understanding of processes of film language (Rodowick, 1994, p.44). The ‘-philia’ suffix, suggests something else: a desire for the forms of knowledge offered by documentary film.

While Nichols deploys the term ‘epistophilia’ to documentary in general, I find the term that Michael Renov outlines as a ‘documentary desire’ to be more germane (Renov, 1993, p.5). If Nichols’ account emphasises a cool rationality in the love of knowledge, Renov’s account emphasizes this desire in terms of the affirmation of personal or cultural identity as a rhetorical commitment with culturally binding implications. Renov notes that ‘[...] the promotional impulse—selling products or values, rallying support for social movements, or solidifying subcultural identities—is a crucial documentative instinct to which nonfiction film and video continue to respond’ (1993, pp.23–24). Moreover, film and video cultures can harness oppositional desires, opening sites for ‘shared cultural identity’ (Renov, 2004, p.15) as well as for ‘psychic identification and group solidarity’ (*ibid*, p.17). Independent films and videos in Britain at this time, whether part of avant-garde or militant trajectories, were ‘committed’ in the sense that Thomas Waugh outlines in his account of the ‘committed documentary’ (Waugh, 1985): works that are allied to

causes and that seek to change sociopolitical realities, rather than simply depict existing ones.

Renov's account is Foucaultian, in that pleasure is understood as working both through dominant and oppositional, discursive and embodied, forms of power (Renov, 1993, p.17). For Foucault, pleasure must be rooted in an understanding of what he terms 'power-knowledge' (Foucault, 1998, p.71–73; 98), a two-way concatenation of power and pleasure – 'Pleasure spread to the power that harried it; power anchored the pleasure it uncovered' (Foucault, 1998, p.45). Foucault writes of:

The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it (Foucault, 1998, p.45).

Pleasure, desire and fantasy were vital, yet contested, terms within the discourses of independent film and video of the 1970s and 1980s, and threads of thought concerning subversive pleasure significantly predate Foucault's famous analysis. Subversive pleasures had, indeed, been fundamental to libertarian intellectual discourses since the 1960s, from Wilhelm Reich, R.D. Laing and Herbert Marcuse to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.<sup>22</sup> For Roland Barthes, the secret anarchy of the text was its *jouissance*, its quasi-sexual joys – that which exceeds the semiological system and reveals the revolutionary potential of embodied, desiring language (Barthes, 1991, 1975). In Hélène Cixous's essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975, translated 1976), a liberational female desire is given form and flesh, the discovery that, 'I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of song' (Cixous, 1976, p.876). Questions of pleasure, of who it was that

was the recipient of pleasure, were also vital within feminist discourse influenced by the semiology of the late 1960s.<sup>23</sup> For Laura Mulvey in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', cinematic pleasure was problematic in mainstream narrative cinema as it had developed in a particular scopophilic and patriarchal form. Calling for the 'destruction of pleasure as a radical weapon' (Mulvey, 1975, p.7), she demands a new form of desire, one partly rooted in the smashing of oppressive patriarchal cinematic conventions. She writes of the '[...] the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire' (Mulvey, 1975, p.8). If there was scopophilic pleasure for the male viewer in watching conventional film, a feminist language of desire could break those bonds.

Whether modernist or more conventionally articulated, it is the desire to dispute, reveal and undermine the articulation of power that is at the core of the project of much independent film and video in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. As early as 1973 in her vital essay 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', Claire Johnston argues that collective oppositional desire must be incorporated within developing forms of counter-cinema. Johnston's understanding of the term 'counter-cinema', it should be noted, is rooted in an audience-oriented idea of film reception that differs from Wollen's conception, where it is part of a modernist semiotic discourse of painting and literature (Wollen, 1975, 1999) (Wollen's text was first published in the arts magazine *Studio International*, and was thus consciously situated in terms of fine art discourse). Johnston assigns a feminist counter-cinema the task of undermining sexist iconicity in mainstream cinema, and she concludes her essay by emphasising the collective importance of desire:

At this point in time, a strategy should be developed which embraces both the notion of films as a political tool and film as entertainment. For too long these have been regarded as two opposing poles with little common ground. In order to counter our objectification in the cinema, our collective fantasies must be released: women's cinema must embody the working through of desire: such an objective demands the use of the entertainment film. Ideas derived from the entertainment film, then, should inform the political film, and political ideas should inform the entertainment cinema: a two way process. (Johnston, 1973 in Thornham, 1999, pp.39–40)

Johnston here calls for pleasure that is allied to social change, a motif fundamental also to Brechtian epic theatre (Harvey, 1982, p.53; Mueller, 1989). While she calls for a use of the subversive cinematic pleasure found in the 'entertainment film', as I have argued, we may also find such subversive pleasures in documentary or other cinematic forms. A number of differing forms of pleasure can be detected here. In her 'Visual Pleasure' essay, Mulvey aligns cinematic pleasure with a male scopophilic look, with the problematic of masculine power. If Mulvey is primarily thinking here of narrative fiction, it may also be seen that documentary has problematic pleasures. As Elizabeth Cowie has argued, there is a 'disreputable' aspect of documentary rooted in spectacular forms of pleasure: '[...] a desire for the real not as knowledge but as image—as spectacle' (Cowie, 2011, p.2). If for Mulvey the pleasure of counter-cinema is to be found in its dismantling and disassembling of established norms or attitudes of a phallogentric cinema, for Johnston it could already be found in the pleasures audiences can 'read' in mainstream cinema. For Johnston, the notion of a 'progressive text' of Hollywood cinema as developed in auteur theory is a real possibility (she provocatively contrasts the work of Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino in 1930s Hollywood with what she sees as the 'reactionary' films of Agnès Varda and others within the tradition of the 'European art film'). Another powerful



form of pleasure that Johnston identifies is the collective experience and ‘fantasy’ of the cinema audience. Although Johnston is dismissive of the reduction of feminist filmmaking to collective practice in her ‘Counter-Cinema’ essay – she asserts that ‘[...] a repressive, moralistic assertion that women’s cinema is collective film-making is misleading and unnecessary’ (Johnston, 1999, p.40) – she would later write a paper for the Independent Filmmakers’ Association that called for independent film as ‘an oppositional social practice’. Against a purely text-centred model of counter-cinema, Johnston here argues that: ‘An oppositional cinema must see as its task the setting in motion of a pleasure/knowledge producing process which will make possible the restructuring of desire in the reader’ (Johnston, 1976, n/p). Indeed, forms of ‘collective fantasies’ that Johnston envisaged were realised at least partially at sites for the production, consumption and discussion of independent film and video: the Other Cinema’s theatre in Charlotte Street, London (which operated between October 1976 and December 1977); the London Filmmakers’ Co-op’s various bases and 2B Butler’s Wharf; Cinema Action’s screenings at factories and meeting rooms; and the exhibition of films by London Women’s Film Group and Newsreel Collective to supporters of the Women’s Liberation Movement. Here, it was the shared experience and alliance of filmmakers with audiences that generates oppositional political pleasure.

My observation of the pleasure of subversive documentary forms and practices has a particular relation to a re-reading of independent film and video discourses in relation to larger publics. For cinephiles such as Wollen, Mulvey and Stephen Heath (Heath, 1976), the counter-cinema was directed against the narrative fiction film, not in order to destroy it entirely, but to rebuild it outside of dominant ideologies. It is also evident that the pleasurable subversion of authority in independent film is

very often directed against conventions of documentary, reportage, news and public-service television, again, not to destroy it, but to rebuild it anew. For example, in Cinema Action and Berwick Street Film Collective's work, documentary forms were developed that are distinct from the voice-of-God narration that was common to both classic forms of cinema documentary and dominant models of television documentary and current affairs programming. In these independent works, interviews give voice to individuals and groups, allowing them to narrate their own lives and present their own arguments. These arguments are then reinforced, rather than contradicted, through the editing process, a process that makes it clear that the filmmakers are on the workers' side. In Cinema Action's *Miners' Film*, one elderly interviewee recalls the tactics of the Tories during the General Strike of 1926, comparing them with the Conservatives of the early 1970s; as this interviewee speaks, the film cuts from archive footage of plummy young middle-class men attempting to break the 1926 strike, to footage of troops in Northern Ireland during the 'Troubles' of the early 1970s, and clips of the then-prime minister Edward Heath giving a speech on incomes policy. The pleasure here is to be found in witnessing a form of cinema that is on the side of socialism, of the striking miners, and not against them – it offered a counter-pleasure to the frustrations of media bias documented in a number of pamphlets and reports at this time (Media Workers Group, 1973; Beharrell et al., 2009) (see my further discussion of these tensions in Chapter 3).<sup>24</sup>

Oppositional desires are, then, concerned with the imagined relations of a community (Anderson, 1991), its self-perception as oppositional. Part of the origin narrative of the Independent Filmmakers' Association, for example, is that Aubrey Singer, the Controller of BBC-2, announced that he would not have the kind of

work produced by the filmmakers of the IFA broadcast on ‘my channel’ (‘Independent Film-making in the 70s’, 1976). The centrality of this narrative, as it is reproduced in the organisation’s unofficial mission statement (‘Independent Film-making in the 70s’, 1976), reveals that acts of exclusion operate as a powerful means of bringing together oppositional practitioners against the form of normative power and conservatism represented by Singer. Independent film and video was unified in opposition to dominant forms of power and what Foucault calls ‘governmentality’ – the operations of power that produce subjects (individuals, classes, identities) at the service of the state (Foucault and Rabinow, 1984, p.338).

While discourses of political modernism contested the notion of ‘empirical truth’, this itself was not a dismissal of truth-claims in general. While later documentary and ethnographic filmmakers such as Trinh T Minh-ha invoked a postmodern dance of signifiers, this was generally not the case with independent filmmakers in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>25</sup> Instead, what was contested was certain definitions of truth (empiricism) that would mask or support dominant ideologies. Moreover, independent film and video evidently relies on recognition of the reality of social exclusion, marginalisation and oppression. The pleasures afforded by attacks on mainstream convention emerge from shared opposition to these representations. For example, in Stuart Marshall’s video and television work, the queering of history, the undermining of heteronormative accounts of the past, produces a pleasure by shifting power away from the prevailing narrative and towards an alternate account in which we see signs of the falsity of prevailing ideology. The pleasure of *Rapunzel Let Down Your Hair* (1978, London Women’s Film Group) is its undermining of the fairy-tale of Rapunzel, trapped in her castle by a witch and rescued by an amorous knight, by gradual shifting the agency within the story from the male to the female

figure, and thus to an assertion of the problems of patriarchy and women's agency. In *The Miner's Film*, the pleasure of the film emerges through its assertion of an alternate social reality to that evinced in television news, to a space where a socialist world is valued above a capitalist one, and to the sense that this political movement may have a wider success in bringing political change. All of these pleasures are in the identification with and assertion of groups (subcultures, counterpublics), and are coded through irony, humour and political discourses.

Such pleasures assert the reality of truths and experiences that are either not revealed in the mainstream, or that are misrepresented in it. They do not deny or infinitely defer meaning, but rather locate it within marginalised bodies, identities, and social forms. Independent film and video thus continuously seeks to persuade the viewer of the verity of the problems analysed (patriarchy *exists* and it *does* affect women's lives), or the existence of social resistance (miners *are* working together in solidarity). The rhetorical truth claim of independent film and video is oppositional because it is not aligned with figures of authority (makers of foreign policy, education, religion) and positivist or utilitarian philosophies (science, economics). Independent film/video and its audiences sought to explore, record and speak on behalf of precisely those embodied experiences and affective aspects of society excluded by the address of mainstream film and television discourses, to give voice to concerns of childcare and women's labour, unionisation, the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, issues of sexuality, gender and race. Such political issues cannot be spoken of outside of a conception of truth or reality, but neither can the expression of these ideas be understood outside of a recognition of the place of pleasure and fantasy in their conception.

## Experience and Counterpublics

I have argued that independent film put forward forms of rhetorical argument about the world in order to re-create it outside of dominant ideologies. Independent film and video was rooted in rhetorics of persuasion, and bonded into communities by oppositional desires. In this section, I argue that independent film and video aimed to speak to audiences whose life experiences were often overlooked or mischaracterised in the mainstream media, including the working classes, the Left and women (among others). Independent film and video usually appeals to specific worldviews and experiences, as may be expected from practices with roots and branches in social movements. But it was, I argue throughout this thesis, not only addressed to these specific subcultural or oppositional groups. Instead, these films and videos were also intended to speak of social conditions that were of interest to society much more broadly. These publics are potentially without limit, including the national ones that are constituted through television broadcasting, as well as transnational ones encountered in film festivals, art exhibitions, and screenings at academic and educational institutions. Independent works were associated with campaigns against class oppression, capitalism, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia and racism – issues deeply important to, but that also transcended, the specific audiences to which works were routinely shown. If specific works were not always understood as of relevance to all publics – Wollen spoke of a ‘cadre’ audience for *Penthesilea* (Mulvey et al., 1974) – then the socio-political effects that they sought could only be realisable on that broad social terrain.<sup>26</sup> Many independent films and videos ultimately demand a fundamental change within social conventions, economic relations, legislative or media structures. The destruction of patriarchy,

homophobia, and capitalism itself, is not achievable only within the confines of alternative screening scenarios. This potential for addressing larger audiences in the 1970s was most concretely realised in 1982, when Channel 4 was launched, and works by Cinema Action, Mulvey and Wollen and Amber Collective were shown on *The Eleventh Hour* strand operated by the channel's Independent Film and Video Department. In this way, over the two decades in question, independent film and video was addressed to both small and broad audiences. How can such a multifarious form of address be characterised?

It is within public sphere theory that we may find the most developed analysis of the ways in which forms of rhetorical address and persuasion can communicate and become meaningful to constituencies of various dimensions. Contemporary public sphere theory was first developed by Jürgen Habermas in the early 1960s, and has been expanded by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner. Public sphere theory has roots in eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse, particularly Emmanuel Kant's 1784 essay 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' (Kant, 1996), which argues that a liberal state must be built upon the free exchange of letters and news in print form. For Kant, the public discourse of eighteenth-century liberal print culture enabled 'mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity' (Kant, 1996, p.58), through the encouragement of an individual's use of his faculties of critical reason. This ideal centres on a distributive media, print culture, circulated freely between citizens – 'the entire public of the *reading world*' (Kant, 1996, p.60. Italics in the original). It was this idea that Jürgen Habermas turned to in his influential *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962) in order to explain the rise of liberal ideals of publicity and the collapse of this social formation under pressure

from the development of the culture industry at the end of the nineteenth century. For Habermas, borrowing from Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the culture industry (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002), the possibilities of a free and rational discourse in society had been fatally compromised by the growth of mass entertainment and media spectacle, and the encroachment of business and state propaganda into a terrain that had once allowed rational discourse to flourish. For Habermas, as well as for Richard Sennett in *The Fall of Public Man* (1977), the notion of a discursive public was an ideal that had, tragically, failed.<sup>27</sup>

In the wake of Habermas, however, others have explored flourishing areas of discursive publicity. Habermas's writing on the public sphere has had a delayed effect in Anglophone writing, with his *Structural Transformation* only being translated into English in 1989. In her 1990 essay 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', Nancy Fraser points out that both Kant and Habermas assume a male readership and a rational-critical form of address, leading to a dismissal of multiple publics such as women or working class publics (Fraser, 1993; Ryan, 1993).<sup>28</sup> By contrast, Fraser has argued that there have been numerous counterpublics, such as that of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s, whose political agency was partly realised through flourishing alternative presses, printed materials, journals and magazines. Like publics, counterpublic spheres are grounded in alternative networks of distributive media, including the pamphlets, posters, journals, novel, films and videos (Fraser, 2014; Warner, 2002; Fraser, 1993). The model is itself an elaboration of the Habermasian and Kantian account of a unitary bourgeois public sphere, but fractured through an understanding of the limits of rational discourse. Fraser notes that 'deliberation can serve as a mask for domination' (Fraser, 1993, p.119), and that rational discourse is a powerful means through which apparently open discourse is

circumscribed by existing power relations. Against this normativity, she usefully addresses the possibility of multiple ‘subaltern’ counterpublics that enable subordinated groups to discuss their own concerns, consolidate ‘social identities’, and enable members of a group to speak ‘in one’s own voice’ [125-126]. For Michael Warner, following Fraser, and developing it in light of queer theory, public speech is less a critical reflection on reality as an act of world-making: such speech does not merely reflect an existing public, but sets out to create or build one (Warner, 2002, p.422). Publics are, in this sense, the manifestations of the forms of rhetoric and persuasion, grounded in desire, which I have discussed as a central feature of both documentary and independent film and video during this period.

Another critical trajectory in the discussion of public sphere theory has emerged through German critical theory. Ten years after Habermas in 1972, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge put forward a complex notion of the ‘proletarian public sphere’ in their *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Negt and Kluge, 1993). Here, proletarian cultures were recognised as having their own publics. Negt and Kluge argued that this arena should be understood as rooted in physical and psychic pressures exerted by capitalism, with working peoples’ common concerns anchored in embodied and psychic experiences, such as toiling in factories or in the domestic care of the family. This is an explicit counter-model to the critical-rational one put forward by Kant and maintained as an ideal by Habermas. For Negt and Kluge, while workers’ experiences are not represented within the remnants of the bourgeois public sphere and what they call the ‘public sphere of production’ (as instantiated particularly by ‘public-service’ television), they nevertheless remain a potent social force. For Negt and Kluge, the proletarian public sphere cannot be found in a discrete group of texts (the bourgeoisie’s



newspapers, journals, books), but exists in the ‘fissures’ of history, in ‘crises, war, capitulation, revolution, counterrevolution’ (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p.xliii). Negt and Kluge write that:

What is striking about the prevailing interpretations of the concept of the public sphere is that they attempt to bring together a multitude of phenomena and yet exclude the two most important areas of life: the whole of the industrial apparatus and socialization in the family. According to these interpretations, the public sphere derives its substance from an intermediate realm that does not specifically express any particular life context [Lebenszusammenhang], even though this public sphere allegedly represents the totality of society. [...] The weakness characteristic of virtually all forms of the bourgeois public sphere derives from this contradiction: namely, that the bourgeois public sphere excludes substantial life interests and nevertheless claims to represent society as a whole. (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p.xlvi)

Moreover, given the decline of the bourgeois public sphere as theorized by Habermas, it was to Negt and Kluge clear that a new arena, the ‘public sphere of production’ had emerged. This sphere is made up of corporate, private interests, masquerading as public – television, newspapers, advertising, corporate publicity campaigns, and other new technologies of production.

[...]. It is essential that the proletarian counterpublic sphere confronts these public spheres, which are permeated by the interests of capital, and does not merely see itself as the antithesis of the classical public sphere. (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p.xlvi)

Miriam Hansen, a former student of Kluge’s, has argued that the appeal of cinema to those excluded from mainstream discourses is best understood in terms of this notion of oppositional counterpublics, a term she adopts from Nancy Fraser (Fraser, 1993). Hansen’s historiographical research has explored how audiences engage with cinema in order to construct communities of interest that reinforce social identities, and new pleasures, in particular with regards to women and immigrant audiences in early cinema and the era of silent film (Hansen, 2012, 2011,

1994; Kluge et al., 1981). Hansen summarises how Habermas's concept of a universalised public sphere excludes '[...] substantial social groups, such as workers, women, servants [and] the material conditions of production and reproduction [...]' (Hansen in Negt and Kluge, 1993, pp.xxvii–xxviii). By contrast, Hansen argues that Negt and Kluge's counterpublic suggests a terrain in which areas of experience left outside of Habermas's public sphere may be constituted. These areas include, according to Negt and Kluge, '[...] events of overwhelming public significance, such as childrearing, factory work, and watching television within one's own four walls', as well as spectacular events such as 'Federal elections, Olympic ceremonies, the actions of a commando unit, a theater premiere' that are routinely accepted as public (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p.xliii).

These excluded areas of experience have clear resonances with the subject and argument of independent films in Britain, from *Nightcleaners* (which looks at the marginalisation of women and migrants from the union movement), to *Riddles of the Sphinx* and *Song of the Shirt* (examining women's labour and childcare). Hansen argues that audiences engage in cinema in terms of their own life experiences. For Hansen, the term 'experience' (*Erfahrung*) as developed within German critical theory (particularly Adorno, Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer) does not exclude either conscious or unconscious fantasy. Here, experience is a social function 'which mediates individual perception with social meaning' (Hansen, 1994, p.13). Hansen insists that the German critical theory notion of 'experience' is not merely an empirical one; rather, it incorporates lived and imagined, real and desired relations. Hansen explains that 'experience' here is:

[...] that which mediates individual perception with social meaning, conscious with unconscious processes, loss of self with self-reflexivity; experience as the capacity

to see connections and relations (Zusammenhang); experience as the matrix of conflicting temporalities, of memory and hope, including the historical loss of these dimensions. (Hansen, 1994, pp.12–13)

Hansen is here following Kracauer and Benjamin in arguing that cinema, as a form of mass entertainment, is a powerful cultural force that enables viewers to cope with the shocks of modernity, an idea that she examines further in *Cinema and Experience* (Hansen, 2011). For Kluge, ‘experience’ is a term that includes unconscious fantasy as well as memory (Kluge et al., 1981, p.215), and that cinema is particularly suited to address these psychic conditions through its capacity to both document social events and to form images of alternative worlds. Such analysis suggests that the appeal of cinema to audiences is underpinned by its capacity to draw meaning from both material social existence and the audience’s own imaginative and psychic desires. For Kluge, the theorisation of the ‘proletarian public sphere’ as rooted in experience, fantasy and memory demands a hybrid film form that operates simultaneously on all of these levels. Kluge argues that it is only by mixing these faculties, in heterogeneous forms that cinema could produce a ‘radical changes in perspective’ (Kluge et al., 1981, p.215). Here, as Hansen points out, Kluge draws on a tradition of critical theory developed by, amongst others, Brecht and Benjamin whereby a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and montage had a potentially liberatory force. For Benjamin, for example, ‘The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again [...] It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger’ (Benjamin, 2007, p.255).

Hansen also suggests this possibility with an emphasis on conditions of reception. In *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Films* (Hansen, 1994), Hansen

argues that the cinema of the early twentieth century constitutes one site in which the disciplines of narrative have not harnessed the ‘mechanisms to create a spectator’ (Hansen, 1994, p.24), and in which the audience was able to boisterously interrupt the filmic spectacle.<sup>29</sup> Hansen argues in particular for the importance of ‘hybrid’ and ‘composite narratives’ (1994, p.47) in pre-classical cinema that mixed actuality footage and dramatised scenes. She cites Kluge:

By intersecting documentary and fictional modes the composite genre films advance a greater affinity between the cinema and the texture of experience, the kind of interaction between the film on the screen and the “film in the spectator’s head” that Kluge sees as the structural condition for the cinema’s functioning as a public sphere. The discourse of experience, he argues, does not obey the division of labor evolved by the Hollywood system of production, its hierarchy of narrative and non-narrative genres, but tends to mix news with memory and fantasy, factuality with desire, linear causality with associational leaps and gaps. (1994, p.48)

Hansen elsewhere notes that Kluge proposes ‘[...] a structural affinity of cinematic discourse with the stream of associations in the human mind [...] to which technical inventions like camera, projector and screen only responded on an industrial scale’ (Hansen, 2012, p.60). This conception of the cinematic mind has been deep roots in film theory, from Hugo Münsterberg to Gilles Deleuze.<sup>30</sup> For Hansen and Kluge, this hybridisation allowed for a connection to be made between material conditions of life, subjective experience and unconscious phantasy.<sup>31</sup> Kluge’s account is polemical, and offers a resolution of modernist rupture from tradition and resolution with experience in a stylistic hybrid, one that is instantiated within his own directorial practice. Hansen’s film-historical approach is more open to the nuances of a mainstream Hollywood cinema and diverse forms of reception, and she elsewhere insists that the public experience of mainstream film offers a multitude of moments of agency and affect.

As noted earlier in this chapter, a number of independent films and videos in Britain developed poststructuralist ideas of intertextuality to produce a hybridity of documentary, fiction and other experimental elements.<sup>32</sup> Thus, in *Song of the Shirt*, there are numerous dramatised sequences of actors in period costume walking through actual contemporary street markets. In *Riddles of the Sphinx*, a number of sequences seem to testify to real life places and situations, including a scene shot in a shopping mall with an extended sequence of women and children resting or waiting. Here, the films' fictional or historical narrative is disrupted by signs of real life captured within the spatialized public fora of the street and shopping mall. In *Nightcleaners* the use of sampled music of the nursery rhyme "Ten in the bed" accompanies footage of a female cleaner seen from the street outside, through the glass walls of the office building, and thus breaks away from the immediate qualities of the *cinéma vérité* footage. The soundtrack functions at a number of levels: it comments on the cleaner's lack of sleep (tossing and turning in bed), motherhood (the song is about children), and isolation (the sample ends with the phrase 'I'm lonesome'). This sequence also precedes footage of one of the office bosses commenting that he doesn't believe in the welfare state because 'people don't have to work hard because they're featherbedded'. This ironic use of disjunctive sounds and images is also a feature of *Song of the Shirt* (particularly in the dissonant soundtrack by Lindsay Cooper), and in the eerie electronics and *acousmètre* in *Riddles of the Sphinx* (provided here by Mike Ratledge). The deliberate disjunction between image-track and soundtrack adds a sense of artifice that plays a significant role in signalling an avant-garde reflexivity in these works.

These currents of political modernism are clearly influenced by the ideas of Brecht and Benjamin, notably through the use of motifs of estrangement or distanciation,

as well as the ideas of intertextuality and notions of excess or *jouissance* formulated by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes (Kristeva, 1986; Barthes, 1975). As such, they are works that fit within the idea of political modernism outlined by Harvey and Rodowick. These discourses also clearly drew from the example of filmmakers themselves, including the creators of neo-Brechtian cinema such as Godard, Straub-Huillet and Nagisa Oshima. The British discourses and practices of political modernism appear to have not drawn from Negt and Kluge's writing on the public sphere, or Kluge's writing on hybridity, although there was some distribution and exhibition of his films in the UK.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Negt and Kluge's writings were largely only translated into English since the 1990s, notably the 1993 translation of *Public Sphere and Experience*, and the even more recent translation of *History and Obstinacy* (1981, English translation published in 2014). Nevertheless Kluge's writing can be used to develop a sense of how films may articulate a relation to the sociopolitical conditions in Britain at this time. Kluge development of the critical category of 'experience' (*Erfahrung*) as a rich intersection of the physical living and working situation and its psychic dimensions (desire, fantasy) can usefully be applied to works such as those described above to begin to outline the complex arena of embodied and desiring counterpublic spheres.

As I have already argued, these works of political modernism are not the entire story of independent film and video in Britain. The range of films and videos produced in the broad field of independent film and video during this period points to the fact that counterpublic discourses were rooted in diverse intellectual, political and cultural currents, from those of political modernism to other diverse forms of persuasion, pleasure and public-making. The important notion to preserve from Negt and Kluge's argument, and Hansen's elaboration of it, is that an expanded

notion of embodied and psychical experience can have an important place within counterpublic discourse. In their 1972 text, Negt and Kluge note that workers' fantasy is a kernel of social experience that is not co-opted by capital:

In its unsublated [sic] form, as a mere libidinal counterweight to unbearable, alienated relations, fantasy is itself merely an expression of this alienation [produced by capitalism]. Its contents are therefore inverted consciousness. Yet by virtue of its mode of production, fantasy constitutes an unconscious practical critique of alienation [...]

Without a doubt these workings of fantasy, which are supposedly useless within the framework of valorization, have until now been suppressed on a vast scale; human beings are expected to be realistic. [...] The subliminal activity of consciousness has been neglected until now by bourgeois interests and by the bourgeois public sphere, and thus represents a partly autonomous, proletarian mode of experience. The existence of this subliminal activity is presently in danger because it is precisely the workings of fantasy that constitute the raw material and the medium for the expansion of the consciousness industry. (Negt and Kluge, 1993, pp.33–34)

Cautiously anticipating the possible co-option of these territories of liberatory fantasy by the public sphere of production, Kluge and Negt emphasise that a range of experiences, desires and imaginative possibilities might be the basis for an oppositional public sphere.<sup>34</sup> This helps to dispel the notion that the appeal of publics is primarily in their offering of a space for rational-critical debate (as assumed by Kant, Habermas, and Nichols). Rather, what is appealed to in independent film and video is an array of experiences that were often excluded from the mainstream then (and often still today). These include women's experiences of patriarchy (*Riddles of the Sphinx*, *Song of the Shirt*), gay men's experiences of coming out as well as police harassment and entrapment (*Bright Eyes*), and experiences of police persecution and racist scapegoating by politicians (*Blacks Britannica*, 1978, directed by David Koff; and *Handsworth Songs*). All of these works offer powerful

forms of affective and embodied identification, empathy and solidarity for specific groups (women, gay and lesbian and black audiences) as well as those sympathetic with these causes.<sup>35</sup> By revealing suppressed social narratives, such films enable oppositional viewers to engage with their own desires and see them worked through on screen. The utopian demand of Kluge and Negt's account is that unconscious drives can become liberational at the point that they are harnessed by oppositional publics. Film can operate on all of these levels: it can present rational arguments and critical debate, but it can also release desire and fantasy. By recognising the complex dynamics of argument, persuasion, desire and fantasy, it is possible to begin to understand how social formations of resistance have come together, gained momentum and consolidated themselves as counterpublics.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that independent film and video in the 1970s and 1980s had deep commitments to marginalised social realities, experiences and desires, coupled with an uneven opposition to certain forms of documentary and a championing of others. Althusserian, Lacanian and semiotic theory cannot be said to have spoken for all forms of independent documentary, which varied hugely in form, from the agit-prop activism of early works by Newsreel and Cinema Action to the highly reflexive intertextual films of Mulvey and Wollen. However, all can be said to have shared a desire to speak of social realities that were routinely excluded or bracketed out from mainstream discourse in film and television. If independent film and video cannot be summarised as a style, or even a coherent body of thought, it can be seen as a discursive network committed to effecting or promoting



social change. The discourses of independent film and video developed in the 1970s and 1980s can be said to have had a powerful world-making capacity, summoning multitudinous counterpublic spheres that tried to fill in voids in the representation of marginalised or excluded social experience. Independent film and video cultures opened sites for 'shared cultural identity' (Renov, 2004, p.15), for 'psychic identification and group solidarity' (*ibid*, p.17). By the late 1970s, film- and video-makers had assembled a toolkit of heterogeneous forms of moving image practice that sought to engage and communicate diverse social experiences, which they continued to use to trace the contours of excluded experiences, memories and desires in the 1980s. These trajectories suggest that independent film and video is intimately linked with the ambition to realise an alternative sphere of discourse. The following chapter argues that commitments to social realities and ideologies were also developed in independent films and videos that tapped into wider oppositional discourses: namely the socialist and feminist examinations of history that were widely circulated in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the programme included works by diverse filmmakers and groups including expanded cinema and structural materialist artists (Peter Gidal, Malcolm Le Grice, Lis Rhodes, Annabel Nicholson), activist collectives (Cinema Action, Berwick Street Film Collective, Liberation films), and individual filmmakers of a more visionary or poetic persuasion (Margaret Tait and Jeff Keen).

<sup>2</sup> Bill Nichols' writing on documentary theory draws heavily on discourse theory. See in particular: Nichols, B. (1991) *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. See also: Renov, M. (1993) *Theorizing Documentary*. London: Routledge. D.N. Rodowick's *Crisis of Political Modernism* sets out to locate the similarities within a wide-range of debates within the Anglo-America film theory of the 1970s. See: Rodowick, D. N. (1994) *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Criticism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>3</sup> Subsequently in *Artforum* and drawing on the avant-garde documentary example of Vertov, Michelson advocated for an 'epistemological' film that was self-reflexive, and which aimed to draw the viewer's attention to the work's own construction (Michelson, 1972, p.111).

<sup>4</sup> 'Documentary' was often avoided as a term by independent filmmakers. For example, the Other Cinema's 1975 catalogue generally eschewed the term 'documentary', preferring instead to classify its films by subject – from 'Anthropology' to 'Womens' Studies' (sic) and 'Workers' Struggles' (Other Cinema, 1975, p.iii). Campaigning politically left documentary was, meanwhile, often referred to as militant or 'Newsreel' (Hartog, 1970)

<sup>5</sup> Brewster had translated several of Althusser's books into English, and had also been a contributor to *New Left Review* including *For Marx* (translated 1969); *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (translated 1972); *Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx: Politics and History* (translated 1978). For *Screen* the importation of an Althusserian analysis and 'theoretical practice', however, led to a rupture in the editorial board in 1976, with Edward Buscombe, Christine Gledhill, Alan Lovell and Christopher Williams submitting a coruscating denouncement of the Althusserian turn of the journal, arguing that its texts were increasingly esoteric and difficult for students to engage with (Buscombe et al., 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Brecht's famous lines about a photograph of the Krupps factory failing to capture the reality of capitalist production is but one striking example of this refusal of surface representation as opposed to a deeper argument about social conditions. See 'The *Threepenny Lawsuit*' in Brecht, B. (2015) *Brecht On Film & Radio*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Nairn, who had studied in Italy, was responsible for introducing critical accounts of hegemony from Gramsci into Anglophone New Left discourse.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson's criticism focussed on a number of individuals across the academy, including the literary critic F.R Leavis. The text was first published in *New Left Review*. See: Anderson, P. (1968) Components of the National Culture. *New Left Review*. (50), 3–57.

<sup>9</sup> For example, in 1978 The Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film (FIAF, the International Federation of Film Archives) held its annual conference in Brighton, helping to launch a new engagement with early cinema in Anglophone film studies. (Bordwell and Thompson, 2009, p.32). In 1978, the conference 'Women and Film: A Discussion of Feminist Aesthetics' was convened in Chicago, responding to the concern that feminist film theory had too often excluded the actual experience of the female audiences (Citron et al., 1999). From the mid-1980s writers including Annette Kuhn, Christine Gledhill, Valerie Walkerdine and Jackie Stacey drew on sources including British Cultural Studies in order to examine the manner in which audiences are able to negotiate the material that they watch. See: Thornham, S. (1999) *Feminist film theory: a reader*. New York: New York University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Ivens' *Seventeenth Parallel* (1968) was distributed by the Other Cinema (Other Cinema, 1975, p.iv); Ivens' and Marceline Loidan's *How Yukon Moved Mountains* (1976) was also shown by The Other Cinema (Rosenbaum, 1977). According to Paul Marris, the screening of the latter was 'very successful' (Harvey, 1985, p.55). Also relevant to this discussion of

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independent film and video, Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen mention Montagu, the Progressive Film Institute and the alternative 16mm distribution network Kino in their essay 'Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film (on *The Nightcleaners*)' (Johnston and Willemen, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Other journals including *Framework* and the Canadian *Cinétracts* also included discussions and interviews with Third Cinema pioneers.

<sup>12</sup> This meta-commentary on German politics is also a feature of Yvonne Rainer's *Journey's From Berlin/ 1971* (1980), a film that was partly made in the UK with a British crew.

<sup>13</sup> Nichol's discourse framework in *Representing Reality* is unhelpful if it is understood to suggest that documentaries are aligned with figures of authority (makers of foreign policy, education, religion) and positivist or utilitarian philosophies (science, economics). For documentary might clearly address other concerns: for example, widely felt relations of sexual politics or cultural marginalisation.

<sup>14</sup> The distinction between fiction and non-fiction is complex: a nonfiction film may include fantasy or fictional elements and a fictional film may reference real sociopolitical meanings and contexts. Plantinga notes that: 'the distinction between fiction and nonfiction will sometimes be fuzzy at best. [...] A distinction with fuzzy boundaries is no less a distinction' (Plantinga, 1997, p.24).

<sup>15</sup> This also links to earlier vanguard practice such as that of Bertolt Brecht, whose epic theatre and *Lehrstück* intended to educate and create citizens for a socialist state. A useful discussion of this aspect of Brecht's work can be found in: Mueller, R. (1989) *Bertolt Brecht and the Theory of Media*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

<sup>16</sup> The official description for *Handsworth Songs* asserts that: "The 'Songs' of the title do not reference musicality but instead invokes the idea of documentary as a poetic montage of associations familiar from the British documentary cinema of John Grierson and Humphrey Jennings." See: <http://www.smokingdogsfilm.com/bafc/handsworthsongs01.html>.

Accessed 9 November 2015. Also see: Eshun, K. & Sagar, A. (2007) *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective, 1982-1998*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

<sup>17</sup> It is possible to read *Nightcleaners* in terms of the 'skin of film', as Laura U. Marks describes it. See: Marks, L. U. (2000) *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Classical mythology is referenced throughout *Riddles of the Sphinx*; one of the subjects of *Song of the Shirt* is the contemporary welfare state.

<sup>19</sup> 'Polyvocal' and 'dialogical' are terms used by Mikhail Bakhtin; Julia Kristeva developed the term 'intertextual'. Mulvey has stated in her notes for the *Riddles of the Sphinx* DVD produced by the BFI in 2013 that Kristeva as well as Lucy Irigaray were important in formulating her and Wollen's films (Mulvey, 2013). 'L'écriture féminine' is a term used by Hélène Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976); Rodowick notes a connection between *écriture féminine* and *Riddles of the Sphinx* (Rodowick, 1994, pp.224, 246). For an illuminating analysis of this film, see: Silverman, K. (1988) *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp.101-140.

<sup>20</sup> This discourse of the 'open' work is influenced by Barthes and the *Tel Quel* group. Umberto Eco's theorization of the open work in his 1962 text *Opera aperta* does not appear to have had a direct impact; it was only translated in 1989. See: Eco, U. (1989) *The Open Work*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>21</sup> Other critiques of this notion of passivity can be found in the writing of Noël Carroll and David Bordwell. See: Bordwell, D. & Carroll, N. (1996) *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.; Carroll, N. (1988) *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory*. 1st edition. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

<sup>22</sup> See: Reich, W. (1997) *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. New edition. London: Souvenir Press Ltd.; Marcuse, H. (2015) *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. New edition. Boston: Beacon Press.; Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1983) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Reprint edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

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- <sup>23</sup> In particular, see Juliet Mitchell's 1974 turn to Freud and Lacan. See: Mitchell, J. (1974) *Psychoanalysis And Feminism A Radical Reassessment Of Freudian Psychoanalysis*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- <sup>24</sup> A note of caution does need to be struck here, for there is no simple binary between the community involvement of oppositional documentary cinema and mainstream television. For example, Liberation Films, who specialised in film- and video-making giving local communities the ability to document and narrative their own lives, had their work *Starting to Happen* (1974) screened on television as part of the *Open Door* strand of the BBC's Community Programme Unit. Ed Webb-Ingall's PhD thesis research in this area is important. See: <http://lux.org.uk/blog/community-video-3-community-tv>. (Accessed 3 December 2015)
- <sup>25</sup> See: Minh-Ha, T. T. (1990) Documentary Is/Not a Name. *October*. [Online] 5276.
- <sup>26</sup> The notion of the 'cadre' is important in Marxist-Leninist revolutionary thought. See in particular: Lenin, V. I. (1961) 'What is to be Done?', in *Lenin's Collected Works*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House. pp. 347–530. [online]. Available from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/> (Accessed 29 July 2015).
- <sup>27</sup> Similarly, Richard Sennett argued in his 1977 *Fall of Public Man* (Sennett, 1977) that the old sense of public address had been fatally compromised under conditions of late modernity. See: Sennett, R. (1977) *Fall of Public Man*. First edition. New York, NY: Knopf.
- <sup>28</sup> While Ryan and Fraser are critical of Habermas's exclusion of multiple publics, these writers nevertheless build on his insights into the communicative role of public discourse. Habermas would also modify his position on the multiplicity of publics in light of others' research. See: Habermas, J. (1993) 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. pp. 421–462.
- <sup>29</sup> Hansen's valediction of the early cinema space as freer than classical cinema has been criticized by Julian Hanich. See Hanich, J. (2014) Watching a film with others: towards a theory of collective spectatorship. *Screen*. [Online] 55 (3), 338–359.
- <sup>30</sup> Rodowick makes this observation in *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*. See: Rodowick, D. (1997) *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. p.18.
- <sup>31</sup> Kluge's argument misses the important ways in which forms of realism capture aspects of lived existence and communicate this with audiences. See the excellent analysis in Margulies, I. (2003) *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- <sup>32</sup> In British independent film and video these moments of drama-documentary are not as systematic realised as in Kluge's own films, for example as in *In Danger and Dire Distress the Middle of the Road Leads to Death* (1974, co-directed with Edgar Reitz), where fictional narratives are entwined with footage of the brutal demolition of a squatted building by authorities in Frankfurt am Main.
- <sup>33</sup> Alexander Kluge's *Ferdinand the Radical* (1976) was screened at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1976. Kluge's *The Patriot* (1979) was distributed by The Other Cinema, and Channel 4 broadcast the film in 1984.
- <sup>34</sup> This has come to fruition within what has become known as 'the experience economy' in the business models proposed by Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore. Pine II, J. & Gilmore, J. H. (2011) *The Experience Economy*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- <sup>35</sup> In film studies, the key writings on affective and embodied experience are by Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks. See: Sobchack, V. (1991) *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.; Sobchack, V. (1999) 'Towards a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience', in *Collecting Visible Evidence*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. pp. 241–254.; Marks, L. U. (2000) *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.





Top: Still from *Song of the Shirt* (1979, Susan Clayton and Jonathan Curling). Courtesy Susan Clayton.  
Bottom: Still from *So That You Can Live (For Shirley)* (1982, Cinema Action). Courtesy Platform Films. Both films show an interest in labour histories in Britain, archives, and counterpublic historical debates.

## Chapter 2. Counter-history in British independent film and video

Independent film- and video-makers of the 1970s and 1980s often examined the past as a site and source for ideological struggle in the present, looking backwards for examples of revolutionary potential, or for analyses that might explain contemporary social experiences and concerns. Their films and videos excavated subterranean traditions, from revolutionary and utopian thinking since the seventeenth century, to working class activism since the nineteenth century, and early twentieth-century struggles in women's liberation. Such counter-histories are evident in a wide range of British independent films and videos, including *Winstanley* (1975, Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo), *In the Forest* (1977, Phil Mulloy), *Song of the Shirt* (1979, Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling), *Amy!* (1980, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen), *The Year of the Bodyguard* (1981, Noël Burch), *Bright Eyes* (1984, Stuart Marshall), *Red Skirts at Clydeside* (1984, Sheffield Film Co-op), *For Memory* (1986, Marc Karlin), *Handsworth Songs* (1986, Black Audio Film Collective) and the television series *People's Flag* (1986-1988, Chris Reeves). These works explore marginalised histories and memories centred on issues of patriarchy, sexuality, race, capitalism and empire, often drawing from narratives that had been explored by radical historians of the New Left such as E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill, Sheila Rowbotham, and other cultural thinkers such as Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. Independent film- and video-makers were influenced by diverse, and often contradictory, historical approaches – from oral and 'people's history' projects, to feminist interests in history and myth, to the historiographical debates explored within the pages of *Screen* that drew directly from the work of Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser.

This chapter examines these complex interactions, arguing for the importance of New Left and other historical discourses and practices in the formation of independent film and video counterpublics. I argue here that independent film and video in Britain was part of a wider cultural and political struggle in the 1970s and 1980s to remember, memorise, and inscribe counter-traditions of insurrectionary pasts that speak of social change and socialist potentials in the present. These histories also examine the past for the persistence of various forms of oppression and marginalisation in the present, including sexism, racism and homophobia. The notion of a ‘counter-history’ or ‘counter-memory’ referenced in this chapter is drawn partly from Foucault’s analysis of genealogies of ideas, institutions and social relations.<sup>1</sup> For Foucault, counter-history is used to trace histories in formations that may be thought to not have histories, such as the genealogies of the formation of subjects and identities, such as those of criminality, madness or sexuality. My use of the notion of counter-history also references the operation of counterpublic discourse as that which binds oppositional groups and seeks to drive social change. Socialist and feminist histories can be considered as paradigmatic models for counterpublic discourse of this kind. In her essay ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere’ Nancy Fraser proposes that alternative sociocultural groups have long played a significant part in the transformation of social life, state legislation and national institutions, largely through the development of new distributive literary cultures. As an exemplary instance of this oppositional literature, Fraser cites the publishing activities of the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1970s, as well as the development of ‘recent revisionist historiography’ (Fraser, 1993, p.113) tracing the emergence of literary cultures within women’s groups in the nineteenth century (Ryan, 1993). Fraser argues that close historical research can help demonstrate that



there have always been a plurality of publics, rather than the single normative 'bourgeois public' assumed by Habermas.<sup>2</sup> This historiographical project is vital to the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which produced extensive analyses of the historical roots of oppression, with examinations of the earlier Suffragette movement and of noteworthy but overlooked female figures of the past who were 'hidden from history' (Rowbotham, 1992).

This project of recovery was also played out in feminist film discourse in the 1970s, notably in the foregrounding of women directors in the 1972 Edinburgh Film Festival Women's Event programmed by Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston, and in the latter's re-appraisal of the work of Hollywood directors Ida Lupino and Dorothy Arzner (Johnston, 1975). Interpersonal connections between historians and independent filmmakers are also important: for example, feminist historians such as Sheila Rowbotham and Sally Alexander supporting the night cleaners campaign and appear in the eponymous film by the Berwick Street Film Collective; while Alexander and Mulvey were both involved in the History Group, a reading group focussed on the sources of women's oppression that encompassed both historical and Lacanian research (Kelly, 2015); the historian Barbara Taylor was an important advisor on *Song of the Shirt* (see later in this chapter for a discussion of this film); Rowbotham, Alexander, and Taylor had all been involved in the 'history workshops' at the Ruskin College in Oxford and *The History Workshop Journal*, and were key figures in the organisation of the Women's Liberation Conference in Oxford in 1970. Such interpersonal connections reveal that historical activism ran deep and wide within the counterpublic discourses that fed into and surrounded the activities of independent film- and video-making.

Beyond these interpersonal connections, a deeper reflection on the open nature of public discourse can also help account for the interpenetration of diverse interest in social histories in the 1970s and 1980s. Independent films and video culture engaged with historical interests and narratives in order to coalesce consciousness, bringing groups of people together, and generating and sustaining oppositional voices and identities. Independent film and video culture was not simply oppositional in the sense of being outside of or alternative to the mainstream; rather, it also sought to engage with and disrupt wider normative public historical discourses (these include not only nationalist histories, but also other genealogies of patriarchal institutions, myths and biomedical discourse). Michael Warner has argued that publics, including counterpublics, are cultural forms that are inherently open: they seek to simultaneously communicate with both a specific special-interest group (such as feminists, historians, or radical activists), and wider audiences who may chance upon a television programme, attend the cinema or read a text out of mere curiosity (Warner, 2002, 2005). Public communication can potentially be read or watched by anyone, since the reader or viewer cannot be known in advance, and anyone might potentially engage with a work that is published, or speech that is made publicly (this is in contrast to a private conversation between individuals, or gossip, which is 'never a relation among strangers' (Warner, 2002, p.59)). Warner further argues that no single text or speech act can form a counterpublic; instead, the key importance is the production of a set of texts that are iterated and 'circulated' through time (Warner, 2002, p.62). While there are certain important limits to this notion of accessibility (different languages and language styles such as those of academia, or limits of distribution and censorship) the 'open' aspect of counterpublic literature and speech nevertheless helps to clarify how radical counter-histories can gain social meaning beyond specific countercultural groups.

It is vital, then, to trace how such historical work was produced, received and circulated at this time. In 1981 Raphael Samuel observed a widespread popular interest in the writing of socialist historians such as Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thomson and Sheila Rowbotham (Samuel, 1981, p.xi). Samuel observed that other cultural producers outside of the professional sphere of trained historians expanded and popularised historical research from a political-activist perspective:

One of the striking features of this work is how much of it is being nurtured outside the universities and polytechnics, or on their extra-mural fringes: in WEA [Worker's Education Association] groups, such as the 'People's autobiography of Hackney' [...], in community arts projects, in women's studies groups, and in the work of independent worker historians [...] In another sphere one could point to the importance of history in socialist work in the arts: plays such as Red Ladder's *Taking Our Time*; films such as Kevin Brownlow's *Winstanley*, and television productions such as Garnett and Loach's *Days of Hope* have probably done as much to popularise a socialist interrogation of history as all the work undertaken in more traditional historical modes [...] (Samuel, 1981, p.xi)

If, according to Samuel, historical discourse was widespread, it nevertheless frequently coalesced around key figures – that of the 'public intellectual'.<sup>3</sup> In an early Anglophone reflection on the writing of Habermas, Terry Eagleton asserted that Raymond Williams' popularity was partly due to his position as a figure whose work contributed to an interdisciplinary discursive public sphere (King, 1983, p.30; Eagleton, 1984), while Perry Anderson similarly argued that Williams was a key figure in the 'radical public sphere' of the 1970s and 1980s in Britain (quoted in Collini, 2006, p.189). Williams was an author whose work crossed and overlapped different discourses and media, with his texts taking the form of cultural-historical analysis in academic essays for *Screen*, book-length works of fiction, and television

appearances. Notably, his book *The Country and the City* was re-worked into a 1979 BBC documentary directed by Mike Dibb in which Williams appears as a narrator.

The same book was also used as an important reference point in Cinema Action's *So That You Can Live* (1982), a film that I discuss later in this chapter. E.P.

Thompson was also a significant public figure of the New Left, who straddled numerous discursive areas as an educator working with the WEA, as a popular historian, and as a prominent supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Rowbotham is also a good example of this kind of this dissenting public intellectual – an activist involved in numerous social campaigns whose work has helped carve a space for feminist discourse in publications ranging from *Black Dwarf*, *Red Rag* and *Spare Rib*, as well as *History Workshop Journal*, and her own numerous popular histories of women's resistance throughout history. This role of the public intellectual as a mediator between specialist research and wider counterpublic discourse was significantly evident with the Women's Liberation Movement, coalescing around socialist historians such as Rowbotham and Alexander at the Ruskin College, Oxford, who spoke and wrote eloquently to open the terms of historical discussion to a wider demographic.

If the public intellectual historian was a key figure during this period, it is also significant that a major current in the broadening of the base for those writing and recording the past came from oral history work. Samuel argued that oral history had set out to '[democratise] the act of historical production, enlarging the constituency of historical writers, and bringing the experience of the present to bear upon the interpretation of the past' (Samuel, 1981, p.xv). In the first issue of *History Workshop Journal* in 1976, he argued for the case of oral histories based on its discursive potential for feedback:

Oral evidence makes it possible to escape from some of the deficiencies of the documentary record, at least so far as recent times are concerned (i.e. those which fall within living memory) [...]. There are matters of fact which are recorded in the memories of older people and nowhere else, events of the past which they alone can elucidate for us, vanished sights which they alone can recall. Documents can't answer back, nor, beyond a point, can they be asked to explain in greater detail what they mean, to give more examples, to account for negative instances, or to explain apparent discrepancies in the record which survives. Oral evidence, on the other hand, is open ended, and limited only by the number of survivors, and by the ingenuity of the historian's questions, and by his or her patience and tact. (Samuel, 1976, p.199)

Many independent film and video practitioners also favoured this use of oral history to produce a democratic feedback between maker and subject, notably community film and video groups such as Liberation Films during the 1970s, in some works by Amber (*Byker*, 1983), and then in the 1980s Albany Video, West London Media Workshop, Steel Bank Film Co-op, and others. These currents also influenced television, with the BBC's Community Programme Unit (1972–2004) and series including *Open Door* and *Open Space* enabling diverse social histories to access the broadcasting platform. This trajectory was also evident in the *People to People* strand of Channel 4, broadcast from September 1983, which had:

[...] the intention of showing programmes which had resulted from the unique collaboration between groups within geographical communities or 'communities of interest' and programme producers committed to this form of television (Caroline Spry in Fountain, 1982, n/p)

A political use of oral histories can be seen in Cinema Action's interest in the marginal voices of industrial labour established in *The Miners' Film* (1975), a film on the 1972-74 miners' strikes in which a group of women pensioners recall the vital financial support given to strikers during the 1926 General Strike by the trade unions. This is an examination of the situation of women in organised labour that is

also evident in the London Women's Film Group's *Women of the Rhondda* (1973), while Sheffield Film Co-op's *Red Skirts on Clydeside* (1984) traces the interconnected histories of a rent strike in Glasgow in 1915 and the women's movement through a series of interviews with women whose parents had been involved in the strikers. *Red Skirts* reflects on processes of historical recording, noting how women's involvement in the socialist struggle has been left out of many written records. In a review published in *Spare Rib*, Amanda Lipman asserted that 'oral tradition, at least, cannot be censored' (Lipman, 1984). Similarly, *Song of the Shirt* was the outcome of a series of workshops examining the relationship between welfare provision and patriarchy (Clayton et al., 1980); and the 'social practice' of cinema, in which screenings were accompanied by extensive discussion sessions. The historical work of public intellectual historians and oral histories was not, however, absorbed unproblematically into the political modernist discourses of independent film and video, a subject that I shall explore in the next section of this chapter.

### **Counter-history and Political Modernist Historiography**

Counter-histories from the New Left and the popular history movement were, however, absorbed into and carried out within independent film and video practice in multiple ways and at various levels, one of which was a critical reflection on historiographical practices filtered through the discourses of political modernism. As D.N. Rodowick observes, for the discourses of political modernity, '*the possibility of a radical, political text is conditioned by the necessity of an avant-garde representational strategy*' (Rodowick, 1994, p.12, italics in original) – and this project was carried through in examinations of the function of historical narrative in relation to ideology. A radical

examination of historiographical method drew in particular from the writing of Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin. In Benjamin's 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History' (1940) an argument is put forward that historical accounts should not rest on a simple narrative presentation of teleological 'historicism', but rather harness the past's fragments as a sort of montage 'as it flashes up at a moment of danger' in order to imagine a new future (Benjamin, 2007, p.255; Brecht and Willett, 1964, p.140). Benjamin and Brecht's historiographical arguments were revitalised and altered from an Althusserian perspective in the 1970s in discussions that took place in the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Screen*, notably at the Edinburgh Film Festival's Brecht event in 1975, and the EFF's 'History/Production/Memory' event in 1977 (Johnston, 1977). The magazine produced for this event included texts on subjects ranging from film history as a specialist academic and popular subject, to the narration of the past in the historical film. The authors of the EFF magazine do not provide a united theory, but rather a set of discourses that dovetail with the political modernist programme of attacking bourgeois ideology. In her introduction to the magazine, Claire Johnston notes that previous EFF discourses had reflected on ideology and moved away from a 'naive teleological narratives masquerading as film history' (*ibid*, p.5), and she calls for a 'non-empiricist Marxist theory of history' (*ibid*, p.6) that would be best drawn from Althusser and Balibar's *Reading Capital* (Althusser and Balibar, 1970). MacCabe's text in the same publication argues that politically left historical films and TV series, such as Tony Garnett and Ken Loach's realist account of the 1926 General Strike in the series *Days of Hope* (1975, BBC 1), failed to tackle the issue of the ideological complicity of historicism (MacCabe, 1977). MacCabe quotes Benjamin's anti-historicist argument from 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', and then argues that in the Loach-Garnett series, 'The past is not submitted to re-articulation in terms of the present [...] but it is the constancy

of the past that guarantees identity in the present' (*ibid*, p.15). Here, MacCabe brings a Lacanian/Althusserian critique of the subject into Benjamin's argument, suggesting that the past is too often used as a false guarantor of a subject's unity. Class unity, in this analysis, is an idealisation of a group subject into a static and unchanging whole, an idealisation that freezes history.

Explicitly, MacCabe attacks a notion of popular history in which such a subject position may be delivered as a teleological end-point: the working class as the end of history. The 1977 EFF magazine also cautiously reflects on earlier discussions published in *Cahier du cinéma* on 'popular memory' developed by Michel Foucault. In his text in the magazine, Stephen Heath follows Jacques Rancière's critiques of Foucault's arguments for the necessity of 'people's memory', arguing that it constituted a form of 'intellectual nostalgia'. Drawing on Marx, Freud, Lacan, and Foucault's own work on archives, Heath argues:

History is not an immanence but a production of discourse, the guarantee of which for the historical film is present, political, in the present political relations of the spectator to history and to his or her history in this film [sic]. Better that the discussion of popular memory, the work for popular memory, be situated there than outside film, pushed back on the past. But then it is the very category of the 'historical film' which must be challenged, displaced, broken up in favour of new ways of thinking the historical involvement of film. (Heath, 1977, p.42)

This critical discourse, this desire to think of a new form of historical film in which a viewer is actively aware of his or her place within the historical discourse, was indeed reflected in the films of the era. Notably, a Brechtian anti-historicist influence is evident in a number of major films by Godard and Straub-Huillet (Walsh, 1981). Indeed, the latter's *Fortini/Cani* (1976) was screened at the 1977 Festival (but not part of the History/Production/Memory event), with its script



published in 1978 in *Screen* (Straub and Huillet, 1978). Moreover, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, a wide range of British independent films would engage in these discourses, from the extensive quotations of the Brecht-Hindemith *Lehrstück* (learning play) in *Because I am King* (1980, Stewart Mackinnon/Trade Films), to the ‘Brechtian’ motifs in *Song of the Shirt*, *At the Fountainhead* (1980, Anthea Kennedy and Nick Burton) and *Bright Eyes*, among others. Such films can be considered answers to Heath’s call for the ‘historical film’ to reflexively acknowledge the fact that every film is also itself an historical document of contemporary ideology.

A tension would continue to be felt between these discourses of political modernism and the project of British cultural historians. In ‘History and the Production of Memories’, published in *Screen* in 1977 in the wake of the EFF ‘History/Production/Memory’ event, Keith Tribe mentions the widespread production of a ‘new kind of history’, which can be split into two interrelated strands of ‘labour history’ and ‘women’s history’, by writers such as Thompson, Rowbotham and Angus Calder (Tribe, 1977). Tribe concedes that feminist historical work is ‘very important in building an articulate and militant progressive womens [sic] movement’ (p.10). However, he goes on to argue that these historians are largely ignorant of processes of representation, and that a critically self-reflexive historiographical film form should emerge from traditions of anti-historicism rooted in Althusserian critique.<sup>4</sup> What Tribe opposes here is the widespread influence of radical and socialist historians who followed a ‘culturalist’ New Left tradition (Johnson et al., 2007) centred on a humanist perspective in which the past was viewed through individuals’ and groups’ narratives rather than through broader Marxist historical-materialist analyses, or Althusserian-Lacanian notions of ideological subject formation. If these historians’ books and articles were widely

read, Tribe is keenly aware that their radicalism is not part of a project of the critique of history that he draws from Althusser. This would develop into a spat between Althusserian theorists and E.P. Thompson, with the latter responded vehemently to Althusser's criticisms of historical methods in his book *The Poverty of Theory* (Thompson, 1978).

While political modernist theory as it emerged in *Screen* was centred on theory, New Left cultural historical work tended to eschew such critical reflections, for a more direct style: Rowbotham's prose is personable and quizzical; Thompson's is passionate and detailed; Hill's is witty and polemical; Jeffrey Weeks often writes from a clearly positioned stance as a gay man. While these writers are not necessarily untheoretical, these cultural historians nevertheless sought a simple, direct style that was the antithesis of the notion of textuality valued by numerous *Screen* writers. Here, we may recall that Rodowick asserts that a significant impetus in the political modernist project was *Tel Quel*, and Roland Barthes argument for the production of the difficult texts over easily consumed ones. For Barthes, 'writerly' texts carried a greater ethical value than 'readerly' one, since they forced the reader into an active struggle and intellectual process of negotiating meaning (Barthes, 1991). Moreover, cultural historians relied on historical data, on written or recorded speech, on archives, and on extensive case studies. Such an analysis was quite contrary to the dismissal of 'empiricism' within Althusserian critique, as well as the notion that a past could be found and reported on that was somehow outside of the text, that was neutral (non-ideological), that was 'imminent' rather than the 'product of discourse' (as Heath argued).

Despite such disputes, there were nevertheless commonalities between cultural historians and the discourses of political modernity. If the historians tended to examine subjects and eras that emphasise historical change outside of the terms outlined within the *Screen* and EFF debates of 1977, they nevertheless shared a utopian ideal of releasing the past's potential in the present. Social and socialist historians examined the past as a field in which continual social change, revolution and resistance is the rule; in which empires fade and in which the oppressed rise up; and in which the past unfolds into the present, and points towards alternative futures. Thus, for example, Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (1961) is a sweepingly Marxist overview of the 'twin revolutions' (the French Revolution and English Industrial one), an era of socioeconomic upheaval that might explain the emergence of communist ideas in Europe in the 1960s (Hobsbawm, 1996, p.4). E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1962) pays close attention to forms of agency revealed in workers' letters, pamphlets and diaries, tracing the subterranean strains of insurrectionary ideas in England between the 1780s and 1830s, those early discursive antecedents to the counterpublic fields of the New Left. For Thompson, these 'dormant seeds of political Radicalism' are important because, he argues, in 'some of the lost causes of the people of the Industrial Revolution we may discover insights into social evils which we have yet to cure' (Thompson, 1980, p.10). Similarly, Christopher Hill tapped into swirling currents of contemporary anti-authoritarianism, anti-psychiatry and anarchism in his 1972 publication *The World Turned Upside Down*, an account of the English Revolution told from the perspective of heretical Levellers, Diggers and Ranters. Hill argued that:

History has to be rewritten in every generation, because although the past does not change the present does; each generation asks new questions of the past, and finds new areas of sympathy as it re-lives different aspects of the experiences of its

predecessors. The Levellers were better understood as political democracy established itself in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England; the Diggers have something to say to twentieth-century socialists. [...] Each generation, to put it another way, rescues a new area from what its predecessors arrogantly and snobbishly dismissed as ‘the lunatic fringe’. (Hill, 1991, pp.15–16)

Here, Hill stresses the discursive, polemical and contingent aspect of historical narration, as well as the importance of perspective – of taking the view of commoners rather than king or clergy. Similarly, in her introduction to her 1972 *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, an account of women’s resistance and struggles for independence from the seventeenth century to the early 1970s, Rowbotham argued that ‘[this will] be a useful book only if it is repeatedly dismantled and reconstructed as part of a continuing effort to connect feminism to socialist revolution’ (Rowbotham, 2014, p.7). Such comments do not suggest a closed, teleological view of history as critiqued by Benjamin in his ‘Thesis’, but rather an awareness of the openness and mutability of the past. The difference, then, between New Left historical work and the notion of history explored in *Screen* and at the 1977 Edinburgh Film Festival was rooted, instead, in differing understandings of the function of public speech and textuality in relationship to ideology, with the historians generally opting for a populist public intellectual use of clear, polemical writing; and the political modernists invested in the complexities of the Barthesian ‘writerly’ text.

### **Diggers and Levellers from the New Left to Bertolt Brecht**

Beyond a common concern with historical mutability, what is shared between independent film and video-makers and other socialist engagements with history is an interest in specific subjects: in historical moments, events, or topics represented

on screen, on the page or in the theatre. These include such topics as the Suffragettes, union militancy in the 1920s and 1930s, and the anarcho-communism of the Diggers, Ranters and Levellers of seventeenth-century England. There is detectable here a circulation of reference points, an echoing of influences, and a repetition of historical examples between historians, filmmakers, theatre directors, journalists and novelists, amongst others. Often these ideas first emerged within the work of social historians, before appearing within literature, film, theatre or television. For example, an examination of seventeenth-century Diggers and Ranters appear in Hill's writing long before they appear in *Winstanley* and *In the Forest*; a reflection on the historical role of the welfare state and the oppression of women was a question within feminist historiographical research that was picked up and developed in *Song of the Shirt* (McIntosh, 2006; Wilson, 1990); an analysis of global-historical forms of capitalist trade appeared in Eric Hobsbawm's writing (not to mention Karl Marx's) long before these ideas were explored in *Commodities* (1983-1986, dirs. Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling). My analysis below suggests that the relevance of history within an overview of independent film within a wider oppositional cultural and intellectual context is the foregrounding of 'forgotten' and overlooked narratives of struggle by oppositional groups. In independent film there also is a fusion of these traditions of social history with motifs drawn from the abovementioned debates on Brecht, Benjamin and Foucault. These 'Brechtian aspects of radical cinema' (Walsh, 1981) are marked by anachronistic combinations of costume and setting, lengthy quotations of texts and direct address to camera, the use of stilted or non-professional acting, and cinematic techniques including the long take, reframing and rephotography; yet enframed within these techniques are narratives that owe their genesis to wider, oppositional historical discourses.

One social historian whose influence permeated some of these wider counterpublics was Christopher Hill, who had written a number of influential accounts of the seventeenth-century English Revolution (a term he used instead of ‘English Civil War’ to emphasise its parallels with later class struggles), starting with *The English Revolution, 1640* (1940), and culminating in *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972). The latter offered a ‘worm’s eye view’ (Hill, 1991, p.13), a perspective that emphasised the experience of common people rather than kings or the gentry, examining the emergence of forms of proto-anarcho-communism amongst Diggers, Baptists, Quakers, Seekers, Ranters, Familists, and Millenarians such as Gerard Winstanley and Abiezer Coppe. For Hill, it was a time in which all authorities, from king to Pope, and even God, could be challenged, ‘a period of glorious flux and intellectual excitement, when, as Gerrard Winstanley put it, “the old world ... is running up like parchment in the fire”’ (Hill, 1991, p.14, ellipsis in original). In the 1960s, Hill’s potent accounts of the Diggers had been further popularised in the novel *Comrade Jacob* (1961) by David Caute, himself a student of Hill’s, and in a theatre production of the same name by socialist playwright John McGrath (1969).<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the best-known historical treatment of the Diggers in the 1970s, however, is Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo’s *Winstanley*, which is based on Caute’s novel. *Winstanley* is a meticulously detailed film, which incorporates some Brechtian motifs, but is also stylistically akin to silent cinema with black-and-white cinematography recalling Eisenstein and Dreyer (Glaessner and Brownlow, 1976). *Winstanley*’s contemporary relevance is highlighted by the fact that the among the mostly non-professional cast of actors was Sid Rawle, a well-known leader of squatter group called the Hyde Park Diggers who had been dubbed ‘the King of the Hippies’ by the national press (Engelen and Winkel, 2007, p.121). While Brownlow was ambivalent about his film’s political import (Glaessner and Brownlow, 1976), the

film does reveal that the seventeenth-century Digger's struggle was one between the lower classes and sovereign power. In the film, Winstanley's dialogue is almost entirely composed from lengthy quotations from his own published writings, lending the film a stilted and literary quality, which may be understood in terms of the use of quotations of Brecht in Straub-Huillet's *History Lessons*, or in *Because I am King*.<sup>6</sup> *Winstanley* invokes an alternative tradition to the image of the British as docile subjects, the placid and happy country-folk of rural middle-England. For Hill, this pastoral ideal of the British landscape was nothing less than an unhistoric lie:

Beneath the surface stability of rural England, then, the vast placid open fields which catch the eye, was the seething mobility of forest squatters, itinerant craftsmen and building labourers, unemployed men and women seeking work, strolling players, minstrels and jugglers, pedlars and quack doctors, gipsies, vagabonds, tramps (Hill, 1991, pp.48–49)

This critical social history of the British nation and its subjects was a rich subject for independent film and video. For example, Phil Mulloy's *In the Forest*, made with support from the BFI Production Board, is a sweeping account of the oppression of outcasts and marginal peoples from the early medieval period to the nineteenth century, a history filled with 'rogues, vagabonds and beggars, roaming the countryside' (Hill, 1991, p.40). *In the Forest* traces a hidden social history of the British landscape. It opens with a figure dressed in period costume delivering a monologue on the riches of the nobility: 'Who do you think was the sources of these riches? This wealth, my friends, came from below'. In a scene set in the early middle ages, three figures, two men and a woman of the lowest social stratum, stumble across a barren landscape, into a woods, where they find a wounded knight lying in a glade. A voiceover asks:

What does it mean to see a man in a medieval costume? Who is he? A knight dying in a forest. Can we represent a moment of history, the complexity of a moment.

Absurd. What does it mean to you? The spectacle, the fantasy. [...] There is a story told of how five faithful peasants found a wounded knight, home from the war [...] The king granted them their liberty. (Mulloy, 1978)

With this last sentence, an etching appears on screen, a romanticised nineteenth-century depiction of a dying knight, lying in his bedchamber and surrounded by reverential and mournful women and servants. Given the previous events in the film, the image is nothing if not ironic. The film cuts back to a scene in which the peasants confront the knight and instead of helping him they strip him of his armour and fool around with it with childish glee. The merry band continues through the forest, and – in a cinematic temporal slip – years and centuries slide by. Now we see the group at the time of the Black Death (1348-49), listening to Lollard preacher who declaims, ‘My friends the state of England cannot be right until everything is held communally, and until there is no institution between nobleman and serf, and we are all as one’.<sup>7</sup> As the figure continue on their path through the forest, eras unfold: the birth of the bourgeoisie, the appearance of Cromwell’s Roundheads, the enclosures of the eighteenth century, and the formation of unions in the nineteenth century. The film concludes by informing us that ‘the rabble had transformed itself into a disciplined class’, thus arriving in a utopian moment with the promise for the future in which social agency is now in the hands of ‘the people’. It is an ending whose hopefulness seems oddly anachronistic, relying on an image of class-consciousness that had, by the time of the production of *In The Forest* in 1978, become increasingly fraught. Clearly, there were numerous uses of history that were aligned to diverse political and philosophical positions within the Left, from the critique of class subjects in *Screen* to more traditional Marxist notions of the working class and the agents of historical progress.



References and tropes to English popular insurrection also appear in *Because I am King* (1980, Stewart Mackinnon/Trade Films), a neo-Brechtian film in which actors deliver monologues to-camera from a range of sources, including the seventeenth-century Ranter Abiezer Coppe's tract 'A Fiery Flying Roll' (1649), a visionary text soaked with prophecies of the coming of the 'Leveller' and the end of days, while the camera pans across a landscape of housing and industry bordered by rolling hills.<sup>8</sup> Later in the film, an actor dressed in Second World War military uniform walks through a woodland singing *Jerusalem*, with the blistering words of William Blake railing against the 'dark satanic mills' of the industrial revolution and capitalism. The film also includes footage from an unnamed film made in Tyneside in 1943 capturing its industrial past, which it contrasts with the footage of the present (i.e. late 1970s) depressed, post-industrial conditions in the North East of England. These combinations of words and images set up a contrapuntal relation between past and present, nature and industry, with the countryside established not as a realm for pastoral escapism but rather as the terrain of nationalism, war, capitalism and industry. Earlier in the film, an actor reads from Brecht's 'Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties':

In our times anyone who says population in place of people or race, and privately owned land in place of soil, is by that simple act withdrawing his support from a great many lies. He is taking away from these words their rotten, mystical implications. The word people (Volk) implies a certain unity and certain common interests; it should therefore be used only when we are speaking of a number of peoples, for then alone is anything like community of interest conceivable. The population of a given territory may have a good many different and even opposed interests—and this is a truth that is being suppressed. In like manner, whoever speaks of soil and describes vividly the effect of plowed fields upon nose and eyes, stressing the smell and the color of earth, is supporting the rulers' lies. (Brecht, 1948; *Because I am King*, 1980)

If the first half of *Because I am King* centres on these notions of landscape and labour, the second half consists of a lengthy depiction of a performance of the Brecht–Hindemith *Lehrstück* of 1929, in a new performance by the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra of Tyneside staged in a hangar-like former industrial building. While literally depicting the performance of the *Lehrstück*, this section of the film is nevertheless at odds with Brecht’s conception of the learning plays, which were intended for the self-education of performers rather than for an audience. If the *Lehrstück* offers a radical form of active participation in learning, the cinematic context of the screening of *Because I am King* might suggest a more passive spectator (see chapter 1 for a discussion of the notion of passivity in political modernism). However, in an article on the film published in *Screen*, John Caughie argued that this second part of the film is a deliberate articulation of the cinema’s apparent inability to respond to and modify itself in relation to the live screening situation (Caughie, 1980). This critique is drawn partly from Ben Brewster’s observation in an article published in *Ciné-Tracts* that Brecht had offered a ‘fundamental reproach’ to the cinema’s failure to set up a ‘conversation’ with the audience (Brewster, 1977) (in the epic theatre and *Lehrstück*, the performance can be modified according to recent events or audience feedback).

In response to this reproach, Brewster notes two possible avenues of audience agency, first at the level of the political modernist film text, and secondly at the level of what came to be called the ‘social practice’ of cinema. A key development within independent film in the 1970s, the social practice of cinema involved the use of the screening as a prompt for wider debate and discussions. The form of presentation was championed by a number of contributors to *Screen* (Brewster, Claire Johnston), and was advocated in particular by the Independent Filmmakers’ Association, the

Other Cinema, and (briefly) by the BFI (Johnston, 1976). MacKinnon has stated that the film was designed to be split into two, with the first half screened alongside pedagogical, partisan and political films including: *Peace and Plenty* (1939, Ivor Montagu and B. Megarry), *Culloden* (1964, Peter Watkins), *British Sounds* (1969, Jean-Luc Godard), *Paisan* (1946, Roberto Rossellini), *The Age of Cosimo de Medici* (1973, Roberto Rossellini), *Far From Vietnam* (1967, Marker, Godard, Ivens) and *The Battle of the Ten Million* (1970, Chris Marker). The film was thus a nexus for discourse related to film form (such as the costume drama, history film or militant cinema). Here, the screening was the locus for a spatialized debate, one reliant on speech taking place within the agora-like room of the re-conceived cinema space. It was also, however, the platform for the production and distribution of printed texts: a pamphlet with a text by Paul Marris was produced for those attending the screenings, while *Screen* profiled the work in depth (Caughie, 1980).<sup>9</sup>

Films such as *Because I am King*, *In the Forest* and *Winstanley* can also be said to reflect on issues of class, privilege and capitalism in relation to what Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* called the 'counter-pastoral' (Williams, 1975). In Williams' analyses, the poetic forms of the pastoral have evolved, from Virgil onwards to the seventeenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries to mask, obscure or allegorise the material conditions of labour and exploitation in the rural economy of an idealised 'Old England':

[...] this economy, even at peace, was an order of exploitation of a most thoroughgoing kind: a property in men as well as in land; a reduction of most men to working animals, tied by forced tribute, forced labour, or 'bought and sold like beasts'; 'protected' by law and custom only as animals and streams are protected, to yield more labour, more food, more blood; an economy directed, in all its working

relations, to a physical and economic domination of a significantly total kind.  
(Williams, 1975, pp.37–38)

In Williams' analysis of classical and Romantic pastoral poetry and prose, there are also counter-pastoral literary traditions in which these socioeconomic conditions are recognised and foregrounded.<sup>10</sup> Independent films such as *Because I am King*, *In the Forest* and *Winstanley* all emphasise the material conditions of exploitation and power in the countryside, and can therefore be considered extensions of this critical impulse developed within cultural history and literary-historical criticism. Notably, critiques of the social ideology of landscapes in art history had emerged in British art historical studies, including in John Berger's 1972 television series *Ways of Seeing*, which examined Thomas Gainsborough's painting *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (1750), as well as in the writing of Marxist art historian John Barrell.<sup>11</sup>

Another independent film that explores ideas of pastoral idylls and the counter-pastoral is Cinema Action's *So That You Can Live*. The first film screened on Channel 4's independent film and video strand in 1982, *So That You Can Live* was a work that straddled the smaller counter-publics of independent film and activism, and the larger publics of television, newspapers and magazines. The film was not only reviewed and discussed in specialist journals including *Framework*, *Screen* and *Undercut*, but also in more popular (but still alternative) magazines such as *City Limits* and *Spare Rib* (Chanan, 1999; Clarke, 1982; Aspinall and Merck, 1982; Clayton, 1982; Harvey, 1982b). Shot over five years in South Wales and recording the lives of Shirley and Roy Butts and their children Diane and Royston, the film documents the family's experience within the labour market and their lives outside of it: Shirley's involvement with a strike and her fight as part of a union for equal pay with men; her long unemployment; the family's move to the countryside on a hill

high above the town, and their attempt to sell goose eggs to supplement their meagre income. There are motifs of landscape, the passing of an industrial era, the threat of unemployment, and the struggle to earn a living – as Shirley says, ‘so that you can live’. Old industrial valleys once bursting with industry have greened over, but what is left is not an Eden, but rather a life of social fragmentation and diminished opportunities: Diane misses spending time with her grandmother in town, and eventually she moves to London to seek work. Throughout the film, we hear Diane reading out sections of texts from Williams’s writing, including *The Country and the City*, *The Fight for Manod* (1979) and *Politics and Letters* (1979); indeed, Williams had been involved in aspects of the film’s production, even writing texts for the beginning and end of the film (Aspinall, 1982).<sup>12</sup>

If the film has a reflexive textual quality, it is also influenced by practices of oral and popular history, and by the fractured politics of identity. In her review of the film, Sue Clayton notes that the filmmakers give Diane the texts to read, ‘to see if it makes more sense to her than her absurdly Anglophile school history course’ (Clayton, 1982). The film dwells on a frequent motif in popular histories and of Williams’s writing, that of worker’s literacy and historical self-knowledge. This is foregrounded through sequences that reflect on the growth and demise of the Miners’ Institute libraries, with the camera panning across old, dusty volumes. Sentiment seeps through this footage. Michael Chanan asserts that the film’s slow pace ‘becomes a passionate plea for the voice of conscience to be heard again in the labour movement’ (Chanan, 1999, p.173). The music adds to this pathos – haunting sounds by Robert Wyatt, Lindsay Cooper and Scritti Politti, among others (Cooper’s significant presence in independent film is addressed later in this chapter). Shots of windswept landscapes and drab urban streets emphasise the socioeconomic realities

of the landscape of the valleys. Writing in *Screen*, Jane Clark notes that the film inscribes and memorialises a difficult sense of the decline of working-class culture in the West:

The film-makers develop a sense of what it is to live in South Wales in the 1980s. What emerges is a many-faceted portrayal of one specific site of a worldwide crisis in capitalism. As the profitability of the mines and steelworks decline, facilities are withdrawn and it becomes more and more difficult to move around Wales, easier to move out of Wales. [...] The great value of *So that you can live* [sic] is its grasp and representation of a complex historical moment, and Cinema Action's achievement should not be overlooked because they dare to offer us a difficult and painful vision (Clarke, 1982, p.156).

Writing in the same issue of *Screen*, however, Mandy Merck and Sue Aspinall found that while the film offered a refreshing movement beyond the working class militancy of Cinema Action's earlier films, it could be seen as problematic in its focus on a moment of loss and its lack of any sense of a way forward for socialist struggle. While it quotes Raymond Williams' analysis, 'the effect of these remarks [within the film] about complexity and capitalism is often a sense of awe at mysterious forces at work, rather than a sharpening of understanding' (Aspinall and Merck, 1982, p.158). Indeed, the film suffers from a loss of the sense of contradiction between country and city found in Williams' writing, instead 'creating an elegaic [sic] mood reminiscent of the Augustan idealisation of the obscure countryman dwelling in rural simplicity' (Aspinall and Merck, 1982, p.159), harking back to a lost unity of class struggle and militancy. This analysis of *So That You Can Live* by Aspinall and Merck echoes with *Screen's* critique of the notion of a unity of the singular or collective subject within the 1977 debates around the EFF 'History/Production/Memory' event. It reveals the ongoing tensions into the 1980s between different approaches of engaging with and writing history, between practices rooted in oral testimony and documentary activism: on the one hand, the

activist filmmakers' work with localised groups of people; on the other hand, the theorisation of a largely passive audience that needs to be activated through textual complexity and critical reflection.

### **Counterdiscourses and Socialist-Feminism**

It is also important to understand the diversity of counter-histories at this time, which were rooted in various forms of political commitment, from Marxist ideas of class to intersections with issues of gender and sexuality. In their engagements with the past, independent filmmakers reflected on, and contributed towards feminist critiques from within socialism, in order to reform and rebuild the movement outside of patriarchy. Independent films and videos of the 1970s and 1980s were influenced by, and contributed towards, this broader critical reflection on socialist pasts developed from within the Women's Liberation Movement and practices of social history. For example, a number of independent films undertook oral interviews in order to rediscover the voices 'hidden from history' within accounts of the industrial past. Such films include: *Women Of The Rhondda* (Mary Capps, Mary Kelly, Margaret Dickinson, Esther Ronay, Brigid Segrave, Humphry Trevelyan), *The Miner's Film* (1975, Cinema Action) and *Red Skirts on Clydeside* (1984, Sheffield Film Co-op). Such films suggested a redress of the balance of socialist history, away from its previous emphasis on brotherhood, to one in which women held a central role in the maintenance and continuation of socialist ideals.

Independent film and video also engaged in other parallel feminist discourses that necessitated a rethinking of the family, of welfare, of gender relations, and of the

very foundations of Western society. Within socialist feminism, subjectivity would be set within a social understanding of the historical changeability of gender roles and norms, one that drew from materialist histories and an awareness of radical pasts. Numerous writers, including Juliet Mitchell, asserted that biology is not destiny for women (Mitchell, 1966). In independent films such as *Rapunzel Let Down Your Hair* (1978, London Women's Film Group), *Penthesilea* (1974, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen) and *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen), culturally encoded myths are revealed to be similarly malleable, since they can be the sources of psychic oppression and of liberation. Kaja Silverman has argued convincingly that *Riddles of the Sphinx* emphasises historical change and contingency rather than the 'anatomical destiny to which classic cinema holds its female characters', that is to be sex objects or maternal figures (Silverman, 1988, p.130). Silverman notes that the film invokes a meeting of 'politics and subjectivity, economics and the family, personal history and a collective future' (*ibid*, p.132). In a visit to the Egyptian rooms in the British museum the narrator in *Riddles* intimates a memory of 'a forgotten history and the power of a different language'. The film, which is directly informed by the writing of Hélène Cixous, calls for a past that is re-written, an *écriture féminine* of the text of history: 'Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement' (Cixous, 1976, p.875). Here, historical thought encounters that trajectory of French feminist poststructuralist thought in which new forms of subjectivity may be formed against phallogocentric 'unifying, regulating history' (Cixous, 1976, p.882). A number of films suggested a feminist rethinking of history, myth and consciousness. In *Rapunzel*, the fairy tale in which a young girl is trapped in a tower by an evil witch and is liberated by a gallant knight is retold from various perspectives: the witch transforms from a figure of magic and evil, to a caring but controlling mother figure, then a lesbian



dominatrix; the knight transforms from a gallant hero, to a stalker, a pervert, and a bully; Rapunzel progresses from a dutiful child, to a wilful teenager and then to a punk-rock-playing feminist activist.<sup>13</sup>

A feminist consciousness thus demanded not merely the insertion of women's narratives into socialist history, but of a fundamental reconceptualization of time itself. For Julia Kristeva, 'women's time' could be thought of as global, as either cyclical (repetition, gestation, biology) or monumental (eternity, myth, the maternal), as opposed to the linear, teleological 'historical time' of nations (Kristeva, 1981). These conception, while specific and complexly entwined in poststructuralist feminist discourse, also resonate with Benjamin's desire for a time that is fragmented, fractured and 'messianic' in his "Thesis on the Philosophy of History" (Benjamin, 2007, p.263). Mulvey and Wollen's *Penthesilea* traces myths of an Amazonian leader from antiquity to a play by Heinrich von Kleist, in contemporary feminist comics, and in media portrayals of the militant Suffragettes in the early twentieth century. In a spoken monologue at the start of the film that is suggestive of a preface, Peter Wollen stating that *Penthesilea* takes as its subject 'a story that has never been told and a history that has never been made' (*Penthesilea*). Anticipating a later sequence in the film on the Suffragettes, Wollen states that this part of the film is where:

[...] the reality of their struggle brings myth into contact with history. The image of the Amazon is still projected onto the woman militant, both by men and by women themselves, from within or outside the Movement. But it is invested now with a new, political meaning. (*Penthesilea*, 1974)

Thus, if *Penthesilea* focuses on issues of representation in myth, and of the uses of 'a *new insurgent writing*' (Cixous, 1976, p.880, italics in original), it also reveals how

myths have erupted into activist politics. *Penthesilea* is also a film concerned with the entwinement and conflicts between feminism and socialism, and between first- and second-generation feminisms. The film's penultimate section includes footage of an actress reading, directly to-camera, a series of letters by Jessie Ashley (a wealthy heiress, socialist and Suffragette), who aligns the women's movement with the cause of the working class, arguing that, 'suffrage is only a part, though an important one, of the world-wide movement for a real democracy' (*Penthesilea*). Socialism and feminist concerns also dovetail over women's employment, childcare and welfare. While *Riddles of the Sphinx* is (as the title suggests) open to a wide array of interpretations, one reviewer of the film writing in *Spare Rib* noted that the film revealed how:

[the] world of unions, work, campaigning for a nursery, do not always seem in touch with her central problems. The former have their place in the patriarchal world, whereas the silent mysteries of a woman's life at home, in the house, close with her child are unvoiced both in the 'real' world and to herself: only, it seems, in a women's collective identity is the silence beginning to break. (Vine, 1977, p.43)

These contexts of reception are important to bear in mind, bringing us back from the rethinking of time by Cixous, to the specific social contexts of the Women's Liberation Movement and other socialist campaigns in the 1970s. Indeed, printed next to this review in *Spare Rib* is another reporting on the Newsreel Collective's *The EGA Stays OK* (1977), a documentary on a workers' occupation of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson hospital, a women's hospital in the Bloomsbury district of London. Readers of this issue of *Spare Rib* would have thus made sense of *Riddles of the Sphinx* as part of a wider counterpublic discourse knitting socialist and feminist concerns in the context of very real financial, juridical, biomedical, social and ideological pressures of patriarchy.

Diverse conceptions of women's histories and time not only critiqued capitalism patriarchy, and 'phallogentric' thought, but also stressed the need for a close-grained re-examination of the labour movement in order to include the voices and experiences of women. The main oppositional Marxist groups, including the International Socialists (later the Socialist Workers' Party), were very often hostile to issues that distracted from the main analysis of class and capitalism. In some of these discourses, Rowbotham has asserted, it was not uncommon to suggest that women's oppression was to be blamed entirely on capitalism (Rowbotham et al., 1979); Lucy Robinson has similarly noted that Marxist political groups often argued that homosexuality could be regarded as a symptom of capitalist decadence (Robinson, 2011). Such thought suggested that socialism itself was unburdened by sexism (and in the case of homosexuality, that being gay would disappear with the end of capitalism). Against the machismo and normativity of the Left with its exclusory terminology of 'fraternity' and 'brotherhood', feminist historians sought to foreground women's voices and experiences.

One critique of socialist tradition was the exclusion of women's contributions to society and the vital importance of their labour, both within and outside the home. In the first issue of *History Workshop Journal* in 1976, Sally Alexander and Anna Davin noted that socialists had too often separated 'work' into the realm of male factory operations, and associated woman with the apparently private world of the home:

[These are] features of capitalism which are invisible and unquestioned within labour history. The working class has generally meant working men; women are the wives, mothers and daughters of working men. Domestic life is treated as a static unchanging backcloth to the world of real historical activity; unpaid domestic labour is absent and women's waged work is confined to a paragraph or two under

‘unskilled labour’ or factory work and the industrial revolution. (Alexander and Davin, 1976, p.4)

A lack of material evidence from the point of view of women of earlier generations made the task of redressing these occlusions difficult. It was through transversal readings, locating gaps in official histories and re-reading archives, and undertaking oral histories, that feminist historians could trace pasts that resonate with contemporary counterpublic discourse. Thus, for example, in the pages of *History Workshop Journal*, a history of abortion could be written, in which examples of the struggles of women in the nineteenth century to control their own bodies would resonate with contemporary concerns manifest in the National Abortion Campaign of 1975.<sup>14</sup> This archival work resonated in independent film centred on historical and contemporary representations of women, workers and marginalised groups, suggesting that the reflexive, intertextual qualities of independent film and video should be considered within the context of contemporary historical discourse.

A significant example of the influence of socialist feminist critiques of historical representations of women is evident in *Song of The Shirt* (1979, Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling). Drawing together currents including political modernist discourse, feminist historical and archival research, and oral histories, *Song of the Shirt* is a complex political modernist film that operates simultaneously on multiple levels. Firstly, the film offers an account of the various competing social reform campaigns of the 1830s and 1840s that set out to improve the welfare of impoverished female needle-workers whose sweated labour provided shirts to various strata of nineteenth-century British society. Secondly, the film also has one foot in contemporary oral history practices, and includes a number of interviews with contemporary women reflecting on their working lives. Thirdly, it is a work of

political modernism, utilizing a startling array of Brechtian alienation-effects (*Verfremdungseffekt*): temporalities and modes are interwoven (costume drama and oral history interviews); while actors speak in lengthy quotes taken directly from historical sources, break out of dialogue to reflect on the script, and anachronistically appear in period costume walking down contemporary streets. These Brechtian motifs are also echoed at the level of the film text, with footage re-played within television screens, and rephotography from video sources used extensively.

I have noted elsewhere that mid-1970s film theory used Brecht most clearly in relation to these alienation-effects within the text, but that this influence shifted increasingly towards the end of that decade with the turn from text-based to discourse-based theory (Perry, 2017). *Song of the Shirt* is an example of this shift, being attentive to not only the formal dissonance of the text, but also engaging deeply with wider discourses and social practices. One means used within *Song of the Shirt* of engaging with both textual reflexivity and socialist-feminist historical research is a turn towards the archive. The film draws from a vast array of nineteenth-century sources, including newspaper reports, letters and speeches, with quotes from Henry Mayhew, the free-trade liberal Richard Cobden, the reformer parliamentarian Lord Ashley, and the right-wing journalist and satirist Thomas Carlyle. These are deployed in a dissonant montage that offsets authoritative narrative unity through an overabundance of perspectives, avoiding a ‘voice of God’ narration. On the image track, archival material is evident in the use of imagery from the satirical magazine *Punch* (in one etching, a demonic factory owner cranks the handle of a giant mincer that chews up the exhausted seamstresses). This archival research is also evident in the avant-garde jazz soundtrack, composed by

Lindsay Cooper, which Michael Chanan argues, makes it a ‘film to be listened to’ (Stoneman and Thompson, 1981, p.115). Indeed, Cooper is a vital figure in independent film, contributing soundtracks to films by Mulvey and Wollen, Melanie Chait, and Sally Potter, among others.<sup>15</sup> Cooper’s soundtrack for *Song of The Shirt* was the result of extensive research, and she draws in a number of influences including historical ‘broadsheet’ ballads (songs printed and distributed on a single sheet of paper), such as ‘Stitch Goes the Needle’; and Thomas Hood’s poem ‘The Song of the Shirt’ (1843), which gives the film its name (Merck, 1984).

*Song of the Shirt* is a counter-history to narratives of social betterment and cohesion espoused by nineteenth-century reformers of various political colours, from Owenites to Chartists. Much of the film’s dialogue is composed of speeches garnered from original nineteenth-century texts, and it is these that reveal a patriarchal desire to protect women from the arduous work of stitching, not in order to emancipate them, but rather to restore them to a ‘natural’ position in the home and family and away from the labour market. The film draws these concerns partly from research developed by historian Barbara Taylor, an advisor on the film and a specialist in nineteenth-century social reform;<sup>16</sup> although critiques of the welfare state had also been central to feminism in Britain since at least 1974, when the national Women’s Liberation Conference debated the issue (McIntosh, 2006; Wilson, 1990). *Song of the Shirt* thus echoes contemporary feminist discourses over welfare, medicine, reproduction, family and labour. Importantly, the film was itself developed out of a set of discussions that Clayton and Curling had encountered in a women’s group in 1976, and a video project that looked at ‘the present-day positioning of women with regard to the Welfare State’ (Stoneman and Thompson, 1981, p.102).<sup>17</sup> The starting point for the film was the need to trace historical

reasons for the social role ascribed to women by the welfare state within the constricted sphere of the family:

[One of the reasons that] we started to look at the 1840's was that in school and in history classes it's always taught as a period of philanthropy. You're always told that there was an industrial revolution which created a lot of hardship, and that the philanthropists realised how unfair everything was. We'd already seen that certain aspects of Welfare State legislation must have begun at that time. The amount of legislation that was passed in the 1840's was absolutely colossal, and it was mainly in relation to state control of different aspects of people's social lives. (Clayton et al., 1980, p.14)

*Song of the Shirt* is thus partially focuses on the juridical and biopolitical nature of oppression, the laws and customs that enable the state to regulate the body of the individual. As Clayton and Curling make clear, women were not liberated by the introduction of new legislation (such as the Poor Law of 1834), but were instead further brought under state controls that would limit their social roles to the family and home. This history is given immediate contemporary relevance in the film, through the use of oral testimonies, and sequences shot in areas of East London where the rag trade first boomed in the nineteenth century, and where clothes shops still traded in the 1970s. The film opens with a scene in a café, in which a television monitor, incongruously placed on a dining table, replays a video of a woman giving testimony of her experience of the law and workplace. She states:

In law, all women are dependents. So even though my husband didn't work very much, he is just one of those people that couldn't hold a job down, I didn't hold it against him, I didn't mind working. Well, at the time I left him, I was working as a waitress, getting home at 5 in the morning 'cos it was one of those sorts of joints [...] I just had had enough. The money I was getting was less than the money he would have got for us all on social security. (*Song of the Shirt*, 1979)

*Song of the Shirt* goes on to trace issues of representation in patriarchal welfare reform campaigns. Nineteenth-century campaigners (usually men) argued that women who worked and earned independently were forced into ‘the moral danger of the market place’ (Blackburn, 2013, p.23); while policy makers and commentators often argued against the regulation of work at home as it would threaten the functioning of the patriarchal family (*ibid*, p.23). For example, in Mayhew’s sensational journalistic reports of the ‘slop’ trade, seamstresses were portrayed as fallen figures reduced to prostitution to supplement their meagre income, often physically worn-down to an early grave by their endless labour. The quoted texts in the film are largely from men opining about women of a different class: ‘Her person, as it was waged, starved and sexually active, disturbed the womanly ideal, the passive domestic consumer, that accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie’ (Beale, 1980). As presented in *Song of the Shirt*, patriarchal exploitation is as much class-based as gender-centred: middle-class men patronised women, but middle-class women’s taste for finery was largely the cause of poor women’s exploitation, a fact noticed by Frederick Engels in *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (Engels, 1943, p.170).

The film is thus also quite deliberately part of an ongoing socialist-feminist discourse, drawing from a public debate on the nature of work, the function of the press, the relations among women of different classes, and the role of the state as a legislative force. This discursive self-consciousness is built into the structure of the film, which is divided into three parts, plus a postscript, allowing it potentially to be screened in segments to classrooms over a number of lessons. If the work emerged through oral history work, its destination was to likewise be part of a discussion group, this time centred on the screening event. Like *Because I am King*, *Song of the*



*Shirt* is segmented to allow it to be used within the ‘social practice’ of cinema, especially within a pedagogic setting at a university or arts centre. *Song of the Shirt* was screened to university students studying Sociology, History, on a Women’s Studies course, at a Workers Education Authority course on socialist feminist, as well as in arts centres as part of the South West Film Tour of 1979/1980.<sup>18</sup> The film also spilled out into publications: accounts of these screenings were published in the catalogue of BFI film productions from 1979/1980, while the film was reported on in specialist film and arts publications including *Camera Obscura*, *Ciné-Tracts*, *Screen*, *Undercut*, *Wide Angle* (Harvey, 1982a; Clayton and Curling, 1981; Johnston, 1980; Beale, 1980), and in social history publications such as *Labor History* and *History Workshop Journal* (Farr, 1984; Ashplant, 1980). *Song of the Shirt* thus operated on multiple levels of discursive counter-publicity, utilizing both distributive texts and media, and the spatialized discourse of the collective debate, workshop, and screening event.

### **National Pasts, Heritage, Ethnicities and Television**

While the previous section focussed on socialist feminist historiographies, this section examines the discursive relations between counterpublics and widespread conceptions of nationalism, class and race, with a particular emphasis on television (I analyse media representations of sexuality further in the final chapter, on Stuart Marshall’s *Bright Eyes*). These identities and experiences were frequently excluded from the ideals of a homogenous ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991), which were often constructed within and through television and the mainstream newsprint media (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012). Mainstream media and political narratives

often invoked an ideal of national consensus (Hood, 1972), which was frequently at odds with the specific historical experiences of women, the working classes, Black groups (including Afro-Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, and others), and gay men and lesbians. During the 1970s, these various group identities were frequently cast as points of psychological anxiety for an assumed homogenous (white, heterosexual) audience, particularly in the news and in sitcoms (Malik, 2002).<sup>19</sup> This failure of television to cater for diverse audiences would itself become a central political issue in the 1970s, with a governmental committee (the Annan Committee) charged with investigating the possibilities of a fourth Channel, which was finally realised in 1982 (see the following chapter for more on this subject). Television was thus both the site of the construction of reactionary notions of national belonging, but also increasingly in the 1980s, a field in which counter-discourses could be seen and heard.

The clearest task for an oppositional independent film culture engaged with issues of nationalism in the mainstream media was as a foil to more overtly right-wing histories that idealised social conformism and class rule.<sup>20</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s, the BBC continued to construct an idealised vision of the nation united in deference to the ruling classes, reporting dutifully on the royal family as it had done since its earliest days of Lord Reith, with the ‘presentation of state pageants as national, family events, in which everyone could take part’ (Cannadine, 2012). At the same time, costume dramas offered a steady stream of ‘depictions of a quieter, happier age’ (Sandbrook, 2011, p.150), often centred on specific periods such as the English Renaissance, the late Victorian era and the two World Wars.<sup>21</sup> In the 1980s, the British film industry experienced its own ‘renaissance’, with films by Merchant-Ivory and others obsessively idealising historical images of the English upper classes

for both a domestic and export market.<sup>22</sup> Such films, Andrew Higson has argued, turn ‘their backs on the industrialised, chaotic present’ and ‘nostalgically re-construct an imperialist and upper-class Britain’ (Higson, 2006, p.93). Benjamin’s critique of ‘historicism’ that promoted empathy with the ruling class (Benjamin, 2007, p.256) is pertinent in this context: for such films, historical class relations and the empire were valorised at the very moment that Thatcher was urging the nation to return to ‘Victorian values’ of family life and private entrepreneurship.<sup>23</sup>

There were, however, also differences within the Left that must be taken into account in a consideration of the uses of history, nation and class on television. Indeed, essentialist ideas of national or class unity were sometimes explicitly utilised within examples of Left-political work on television. One series of programmes that was discussed extensively within political modernist discourse was Ken Loach’s *Days of Hope* (1975), which (as I have outlined earlier in this chapter) was critiqued by writers including MacCabe, Heath and Johnston. Other examples might include *Penda’s Fen* (1974, David Rudkin and Alan Clarke) and *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black Black Oil* (1974, John McGrath), which were both broadcast in 1974 on the BBC’s *Play for Today* series (1970-1984). The former is a visionary account of sexual awakening set in the English countryside, evoking ancient pre-Christian spirits in a muted form of social rebellion. The latter is an historical account of the exploitation of the land and natural resources in Scotland, mixing dramatic reconstructions of the late-eighteenth-century Highland Clearances with documentary interviews with workers involved in the contemporaneous drilling for oil in the North Sea. *The Cheviot* would fit within the earlier discussion of Williams’ ‘counter-pastoral’, and has striking resemblances to the Brechtian address of other independent films. However, its anti-British message is also rooted in oppositional nationalism, at a

time in which the 'Break-up of Britain' was being theorised by Tom Nairn (Nairn, 2015).

Notwithstanding critiques of 'immanent' identity by *Screen*, it is evident that radical ideals rooted in the historical national past and its mythologies remained a powerful resource for independent filmmakers concerned with resisting and rethinking the nation in the 1970s and 1980s. A wide range of filmmakers, including among others, Ken Loach, Peter Watkins, Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman, explored imagined national pasts as sites of cultural resistance. Jim Ellis argues that Jarman 'seized on canonical texts from what is perhaps the key site of British national glory, the English Renaissance, and used them to tell different stories about the nation' (Ellis, 2009, p.viii) – narratives in which an essence of Englishness could be located in mysticism and sexuality. Jarman's 'patriot' desire to re-position a history of England against Thatcherism (Ellis, 2009, p.viii) was thus part of a wider contestation of the past against the hijacking of national identity by the New Right, by Thatcher and the increasing commercial success of the heritage film.

These tensions between the historical concerns of the New Right and the counterdiscourses of independent film were also played out on Channel 4 when it was launched in 1982. Alan Fountain and Rod Stoneman, the new heads of Channel 4's Independent Film and Video department and both members of the Independent Filmmakers' Association, set out to schedule a number of series of programmes that would rethink the past in the context of the Thatcherite onslaught. This was a time in which the Falklands War dominated the news, with the British Government and the media stirring up nationalist triumphalism and xenophobia directed at the 'Argies' (Gilroy, 1987, p.51). Against these currents, Channel 4's *The Eleventh Hour*

slot opened with a series of programmes that in this ‘exceptionally jingoistic era’ constituted ‘an attempt at presenting Britain and British history in a more diverse and engaging way’ (Fountain, 1982, p.5). In challenging Thatcher’s call for a return to ‘Victorian values’ and her government’s bellicose actions, independent film vehemently countered conformist ideals of the militaristic nation-state.

*The Eleventh Hour* set out to package and present independent work in response to right-wing historical narratives, elisions and omissions. In its first weeks of broadcast, the Eleventh Hour presented a number of films that explored the historical representation of women in struggle – films that, a booklet produced for Channel 4 proclaimed, ‘generally take unexplored areas of Britain and question the representations that are employed in conventional cinema and television in order to present us with images of archetypal Britishness’ (Fountain, 1982, p.5). Films shown included: *So That You Can Live*; *Song of the Shirt*; Noël Burch’s *The Year of the Bodyguard*, a dramatised history of the Suffragette’s use of martial arts; Mulvey and Wollen’s *Amy!*, a film on the self image and media portrayal of the female aviator Amy Johnson; and *Epic Poem* (1982, dir. Lezli-Ann Barrett), a film examining male conceptions of love through art and poetry. These films can be said to explore the representation of women in the context of patriarchy; but in the programming of *The Eleventh Hour*, they were re-positioned in light of a rethinking of the national past. Packaged alongside these feminist-influenced independent films were earlier works such as *Industrial Britain* (1931, dir. Robert Flaherty), a film that lyrically romanticises Britain’s industrial workers as craftsmen; and *Miss Grant Goes to The Door* (1940, dir. Brian Desmond Hurst), a wartime propaganda film in which two English women capture a German spy. These latter were presented as examples of

‘state funded cinema’ (Fountain, 1982, p.5), and thus as eminent precursor to the contemporary independent film practice.

Channel 4 also undertook this dispute with Thatcherite ‘authoritarian populism’ (Hall, 1979, p.15) in relation to anti-colonialist and national-revolutionary struggles. Part of the original outline for *The Eleventh Hour* series ‘Ireland: the Silent Voices’ included films on Britain’s neo-colonial presence in Ireland. Again, the series was an active intervention into the media prejudices of television in Britain at the time, a refutation of the ‘terminology adopted by the mainstream media’ (Fountain, 1982, p.7). This series was broadcast in 1983, and included Bob Quinn’s *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire/Lament for Art O’Leary* (1974), a neo-Brechtian response to the eighteenth-century English colonisation (‘plantation’) of Ireland as well as a defence of Irish republicanism and anti-imperialist Irish nationalism.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the channel’s *People to People* strand also programmed ‘people’s history’ films centred on diverse ‘communities of interest’ (Caroline Spry in Fountain, 1986, n.p.), focussing on the experiences of women, Irish, Asians and Afro-Caribbeans.<sup>25</sup> Channel 4 also broadcast Third Cinema films on struggles against neo-colonial power, including Guzman’s *the Battle of Chile* (1974/79, dir. Patricio Guzman), *Hanoi Tuesday* (1967, dir. Santiago Alvarez), *Xala* (1974, dir. Ousmane Sembene), *Mozambique Treatment for Traitors* (1984, Twisk Film), and Marc Karlin’s powerful series of films on Nicaragua (1985–1991). As Benedict Anderson has pointed out, most socialist struggles have taken place with a complex relationship to nationalism, often harnessing it for revolutionary purposes (Anderson, 1991, pp.2–3), and it is evident from Channel 4’s scheduling that a counter-discourse against Thatcher’s jingoism had taken just such a form.

Channel 4 would continue to challenge the New Right's historical horizons in the 'The Lie of the Land' series in 1987 (the pun in the series' title suggests that the nationalist ideal is a lie). The series consisted of nine independent films or videos, and can be considered as a critical, counter-pastoral discourse in televisual form. The passage of time and the decline of the North of England are the focus of *The End of the Pier* (1986, dir. David Eadington; prod. Amber), a portrait of a faded Victorian town (Saltburn-by-the-Sea); and *North* (1986, dir. Maxim Ford; prod. Trade Films), a wordless, visual portrait of industrial and postindustrial labour, with contrasting images of remaining steelworks and clothes factories in the north and the new sight of frantic trading in London's stock exchanges.<sup>26</sup> The essayistic *Thames Film* (1986, dir. William Raban) depicts the historical, layered, and changing face of London's post-industrial shoreline since the eighteenth century. Richard Philpott's video *Spirit of Albion* (1987) mixes documentary footage and audio samples, depicting contemporary New Age Travellers on their way to Stonehenge, artist Bruce Lacey performing a ritualistic ceremony at a music festival, readings of seventeenth-century Millenarian revolutionary texts, gatherings at Stonehenge, and a pounding industrial synth-soundtrack by groups including the 'Red Wedge' band Test Department. The film makes visible a counterpublic that has itself coalesced around notions of freedom rooted in pagan-mystic traditions, going back to an imagined past before systems of private property and capitalism corrupted 'Albion'. Here, it is abundantly clear that the Left also has its imagined communities that are rooted in conceptions of a history that 'loom out of an immemorial past' (Anderson, 1991, p.11).

Other films shown as part of the 'The Lie of the Land' series focussed on transnational issues of racism and neocolonialism in Britain and elsewhere: *Bringing*

*it all Back Home* (1987, dir. Chrissie Stansfield) is a film about the exploitation of women workers in the third world and the globalisation of trade; *An Environment of Dignity* (1987, dir. Mahmood Jamal) is an account of issues of race and housing in Britain; and *Sanctuary Challenge* (1986, dir. John Akomfrah) is an account of refugees struggling to escape deportation in Britain. Also shown as part of the series was Black Audio Film Collective's *Handsworth Songs*, a film on the 'riots' in the Handsworth area of Birmingham and the Broadwater Farm Estate in Tottenham, London, in 1985, and in Brixton, London, in 1981. *Handsworth Songs* has been extensively discussed within film and cinema studies, often in terms of transcultural or embodied memory, archives, remediation and the essay film, and as both a key work in independent film and in the new Black British cinema.<sup>27</sup> The film can also be seen as a specific intervention against Left histories that invoked 'immanent' oppositional identities centred on land, class or race. In a text produced for the 'Black Film/British Cinema' conference at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, in 1988, Kobena Mercer argues that the film sets out to '[...] reclaim and excavate a creole counter-memory of black struggle in Britain, itself always repressed, erased and made invisible in the "popular memory" of dominant film and media discourse' (Mercer, 1994, p.61). Mercer's critique is thus of a notion of class and memory that excludes both women and black people.

The film is thus very much understandable within a trajectory of political modernist historiographical critique by Heath, MacCabe and Johnston.<sup>28</sup> Reflecting on the context in which *Handsworth Songs* was made, Hall has argued that: 'There can [...] be no simple 'return' or 'recovery' of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present' (Hall in Chen and Morley, 1996, p.449). Paul Gilroy has also usefully pointed out that the deep entwining of nationalism and



racism poses fundamental challenges to the Left as well as to the Right (Gilroy, 1987, p.20). Gilroy shows how even champions of the New Left such as Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm deploy a radical Englishness (or Britishness) at the expense of cultural difference (Gilroy, 1987, p.50); a conception that Gilroy calls 'ethnic absolutism' (*ibid*, p.59). At the same time, *Handsworth's* protean montage of images, sounds and identities also inveighs against the rhetoric of black cultural nationalisms that assumes that identity is formed on the basis of a racialised essence (Gilroy, 1987, p.39; Fusco, 1988, p.42). Coco Fusco has argued the post-war and post-industrial era is a time in which 'Britain, specifically, and Western Europe in general, is involved in a larger postcolonial crisis that has forced them to rethink national and cultural identity' (Fusco, 1988, p.20). For Homi Bhabha, this crisis results not simply in the exclusion of large demographic groups from a defensive image of 'British character', but rather invokes a sense of 'double-time' in which the nation is strained between two poles of stable tradition and globalised modernity (Bhabha, 2004). *Handsworth* thus stresses the possibilities of the emergence of new 'intercultural' subjectivities (Marks, 2000), emerging from 'routes' rather than 'roots' (Gilroy, 1993, p.19).

If *Handsworth Songs* has been discussed at length in film and cultural studies, far less attention has been given to its specific broadcasting context on Channel 4. The film is clearly made within and in reaction to a great deal of news reporting and current affairs debate on the civil unrest in London and Birmingham between 1981 and 1985.<sup>29</sup> It includes guerrilla-style footage of television and news reporters in Birmingham and elsewhere, revealing how news reporters faithfully relay the comments of Douglas Hurd, the Conservative MP, as he patronisingly declaims the violence. *Handsworth Songs* also includes footage recorded just prior to a televised

debate on the 'riots' for an edition of the current-affairs programme *TV Eye* (1985, Thames Television), in which the producer and floor manager discuss the running order of the film and problems of light balance for recording the predominantly Black audience. The film is thus an intervention into the ideological complicity of television news in policing and the state in which community meetings are stage-managed as spectacle and where white television producers struggle to reconcile their aesthetic preference for white audiences.<sup>30</sup>

Using archival footage, *Handsworth Songs* builds a damning image of racism in the media and in Britain's party political system. The film includes infamous footage recorded by Granada TV's *World in Action* in 1978, in which Thatcher talks to-camera about the country being 'swamped' by immigrants. The soon-to-be Prime Minister asserts that it is only natural that the 'British character' might be hostile to the arrival of large numbers of immigrants since this is 'a British country with British characteristics'. Paul Gilroy argues that such language '[...] vividly convey the manner in which this nation is represented in terms which are simultaneously biological and cultural' (Gilroy, 1987, p.45).<sup>31</sup> *Handsworth Songs* deploys further archival footage referencing this sense of marginalisation from the nationalist narrative. The film's most famous quote that 'there are no stories in the riots, only the ghost of other stories' is swiftly made concrete with a specific historic example of injustice and struggle: 'Enoch Powell telling us in 1969 that we don't belong [...] Malcolm X visiting us in 1965'.<sup>32</sup> The film includes further archival footage of the Civil Rights leader in Smethwick, a town on the edges of Birmingham where many African and Asian migrants settled in the post-war era and where the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley had cut his teeth as an MP in the 1920s. In one sequence, an Afro-Caribbean man walks along a street in Smethwick, with an old newsreel voice-

over announcing that there are ‘nearly a million more like him in Britain today, and the white natives are distinctly unhappy about it’ (the cheery voice-over utterly fails to condemn this ‘native’ position).

To re-situate *Handsworth Songs* within the broadcasting context, it is important to note that the film was also part of a renewed context of television that was itself increasingly recognising the diversity of audiences in Britain at a structural level. By the early 1980s, Channel 4 was running a number of magazine programmes for Black audiences, including *Black on Black* (1982–85), *Eastern Eye* (1982–85) and *Bandung File* (1985–89), under Farrukh Dhondy, the channel’s Commissioning Editor for Multicultural Programming (from 1984 to 1997) and a founding member of the Marxist-inspired group Race Today.<sup>33</sup> It was precisely within this context that *Handsworth* ran into conflict with other discourses that demanded ‘positive images’ of Black people, with Salman Rushdie and Darcus Howe (the latter also from Race Today), arguing that the film’s representational strategies simply re-cast Black subjects as criminal and victim, and Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer arguing that the film’s developed new languages for emergent subjectivities (Mercer, 1994).<sup>34</sup> For all the heat of these debates, it is also clear that *Handsworth Songs* was considered less controversial by television regulators than other works that debated race at this time. Notably, the Black film collective Ceddo’s *The People’s Account* (1986, dir. Milton Bryan) was commissioned by Channel 4, but never broadcast due to significant editing cuts demanded by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (the regulator of Channel 4).<sup>35</sup> My research suggests that *Handsworth Songs* shared much with other programmes in the *Lie of the Land* series that tapped into a tradition of documentary-as-art: an updated Griersonian ‘poetic’ documentary mode is also evident in *Spirit of Albion*, *End of the Pier* and *North*. *Handsworth Songs* also cites

sources of oppositional culture, including William Blake's 'Jerusalem' (an extraordinary 1982 dub version by Mark Stewart and the Mafia), which is also quoted in *Spirit of Albion* and other independent films.<sup>36</sup> *Handsworth Songs* may be a radical film that develops significant new configurations of intercultural affect, but it also draws its cultural capital from existing oppositional developments within both television and independent film. It is, then, not only a film of rich relevance today, but also a film of its time.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued throughout this chapter that counterpublic discourses are organised through reflections not only on mainstream discourses, but also through dissensus with other Left trajectories. To conclude the chapter, I would like to briefly turn to a series of programmes made for Channel 4 that performed a critical counterpublic reflection on the collusions and compromises of the Labour Party and some trade unions since the early twentieth century, providing a Marxist account of nation and class that is neither essentialist, nor rooted in the discourses of political modernity. *The People's Flag* was a five-part series broadcast on Channel 4 in 1987, directed by Chris Reeves of Platform Films and written by Stuart Hood, a radical figure who had been a Controller at the BBC in the early 1960s, wrote extensively on bias in the media, and taught at the Royal College of Art in the 1970s where he influenced a number of independent filmmakers.<sup>37</sup> The team involved in the production of the series was also involved in *The Miner's Campaign Tapes*, a remarkable co-ordination between different independent film groups (Platform Films, Trade Films and Amber), and unions and workers in support of the striking mine workers in 1984.<sup>38</sup>

I cite *The People's Flag* here to mark out the variety that television in the late 1980s could accommodate, and to point towards the variety of voices and politics contained within the notion of independent film and video at this time. *The People's Flag* was a major endeavour, drawing on a vast archive of film material recording socialist histories and struggles (Dickinson, 1999, p.223), and 'people's history' interviews with older Communist activists recalling World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the General Strike, to offer a coruscating indictment of English party political history. The first episode details the emergence of the British labour movement at the very moment of the British Empire's zenith. Opening with a sequence showing the bellicose return of soldiers from Falklands to British docks in 1982, the episode goes on to show how in the early twentieth century many British workers were in solidarity with international workers and pacifism (supporting Indian independence and opposing World War I), supported international workers struggles (the Russian Revolution and later the Spanish Civil War), or opposed racism (the Battle of Cable Street). Nevertheless, the programme asserts, the Labour Party and union leaders subsequently undermined many of these early ideals. Towards the start of the programme, a voice-over asserts: 'The British labour movement was founded on the ideals of comradeship and international solidarity. Yet it has been unable to free itself from jingoism'. Thus, for example, the Labour Party is shown in Episode Three to have been involved in colonial warfare in Vietnam and Malaya, and its secret support of the development of an arsenal of nuclear weapons.

The series reveals, in damning historical detail, how the forces of the Right penetrated the Left, how the latter bowed to capitalism, and perpetuated the neo-colonial and racist impulses of the ruling classes. These programmes offer viewers a

perspective vertiginously different to dominant media narratives, offering detailed rebuttals to views of the nation and empire shared by many on both the New Right and the liberal Left. Few independent programmes offered such a sweeping conception of global history, with the possible exception of *Commodities* (1986, Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling) a six-part series on the past and present of international capitalism and trade, mixing elements of neo-Brechtian costume drama, actuality footage and interviews. *The People's Flag* can certainly be criticised: it is part of the fragmentary and often-bitter politics of the Trotskyite groups at the time. It also clearly draws its critical energies from traditions that retained a faith in the power of 'the people' and 'workers' to oppose oppressive forces of the state, capital and empire – notions that had been elsewhere critiqued as 'immanent' or racist. As with those traditions, the series can be seen to have failed to address newer forms of identity as outlined by Hall and Gilroy and given film form in *Handsworth Songs*. It is also extraordinarily didactic: an unsparing female voice-over makes concrete assertions in absolute terms that would become increasingly problematized by films such as *Handsworth Songs*, with its interwoven voices, its haunted and haunting archival images, and its decentring of identity and temporality.

Nevertheless, seen from the perspective of counterpublic discourses, *The People's Flag* is a significant pole within the divergent political and historical debate that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. By the mid-1980s, British television was broadcasting divergent narratives of history and nation. Independent film and video reflected numerous positions, from the New Left's eulogising of English or British radical dissent (*Spirit of Albion*), to notions of historiographical practice drawn from political modernism (*Handsworth Songs*), as well as the strident accounts of betrayal

invoked by the Trotskyist Left (*The People's Flag*). Through the interrelation of these discourses independent film and video can be seen to have constituted a discursive counterpublic that was polyvocal and spoke of the past, myth and memory in order to challenge and argue with mainstream accounts of gender, nation, race and representation. The vital force of independent film and video at this time can thus be seen to provide a platform for diverse positions whose ideals and politics may not be reconcilable with one another, but which together form a powerful argument for the uses of history in the rethinking of the present.

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<sup>1</sup> Theories of counter-memory propose that historical narratives should excavate oppositional narratives, such as those of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. For a classic account of this, see: Foucault, M. (1980) 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.) *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Fraser argues that this does not mean, however, that normative publics can be ignored. Fraser argues that a proper understanding of pluralistic publics must also allow for the existence of an area such as a sovereign parliament, which might translate campaigns into legally binding institutions. For Michael Warner, counterpublics always recognise their outer-limits in negotiations with the state and sovereign power. Counterpublics address themselves to power, notably to sovereign power, in order to ensure that their political claims are made concrete.

<sup>3</sup> The term can be related to Antonio Gramsci's conception of the 'organic intellectual' who is politically committed, as opposed to the traditional intellectual who asserts a distanced, rational judgement. For an account of the role of the New Left public intellectual in Britain, see: Collini, S. (2006) *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*. Oxford: OUP.

<sup>4</sup> Tribe's criticism is derived from an Althusser's criticism in *Reading Marx* of historians' claims to access reality. Paul Hirst and Barry Hindess also make this argument in their highly theoretical treatise *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (1975). In turn, social historians tended to side-line these theoretical exegeses in favour of the pressing work of connecting social movements with historical precedents.

<sup>5</sup> McGrath is another figure fascinated by the seventeenth century, this time looking at sources of oppression: his play *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black Black Oil*, looking at the Highland Clearances, was recorded for the BBC Play for Today in 1974. McGrath was influenced by Brecht's theatre, via the work of Joan Littlewood.

<sup>6</sup> This use of texts can also be seen in the 'theory film'. Theory films tended to use extensive quotations: for example, the passages of Freud in *Sigmund Freud's Dora*, or the more comedic quotations of Althusser by a sexually repressed man in Stuart Marshall's *Distinct*, (1979). *Sigmund Freud's Dora* was made by Anthony McCall, Claire Pajaczkowska, Andrew Tyndall, Jane Weinstock and Ivan Ward.

<sup>7</sup> The speech is a quote from John Ball, the leader of the 1381 Peasant Revolt.

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<sup>8</sup> Coppe is profiled in-depth in Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down*

<sup>9</sup> I have examined the different conceptions of history and audience activation in 1970s independent cinema, in a chapter for a forthcoming book edited by Laura Mulvey and Sue Clayton (Perry, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> He cites George Crabbe's *The Village*, 1783.

<sup>11</sup> See Berger's TV series, episode three. See also: Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. London; New York: Penguin.; Barrell, J. (1983) *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>12</sup> The film's subjective account of memory may be contrasted with Mike Dibb's more straightforward documentary film of *The Country and the City* for the BBC in 1979.

<sup>13</sup> Feminist criticism of fairytales and the witch figure developed in feminist discourse in the 1970s, in the idea of 'herstory' and 'gynocide' (the murder of women). See: Dworkin, A. (1974) *Woman Hating*. New York: Plume.; Carter, A. (1979) *The Bloody Chamber, and Other Stories*. New York; London: Penguin.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Patricia Knight's history of abortion since the nineteenth century, published in *History Workshop Journal* in 1977, had to contend with the fact that most accounts of the era were written by men who brought their own prejudices to the table. For Henry Mayhew, the Victorian liberal reformist and author of *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851), abortion was a practice largely adopted by prostitutes and the working classes and framed as a larger urban 'flight from maternity' (Knight, 1977, p.57). Against Mayhew, Knight argues that an historical survey could provide evidence that abortion was widespread, and that '[...] most women who attempted it [were] married women who already had two or more children' (Knight, 1977, p.59). Abortion was a concern within the Women's Liberation Movement, notably within the National Abortion Campaign and its rallies in 1975, which were recorded by the Newsreel Collective in *An Egg is Not a Chicken*, 1975, an agit-prop documentary of the NAC protests (for more on Newsreel, see the following chapter).

<sup>15</sup> Cooper's aural stamp is significant in independent film: she also produced whole soundtracks for other independent British films including *Amy!* (1980, Mulvey and Wollen), *Give Us a Smile* (1983, Leeds Animation Group), *The Gold Diggers* (1983, Sally Potter), as well as smaller pieces for numerous other independent films broadcast on Channel 4 in the 1980s. Cooper also contributed songs and sounds to films including: *So that You Can Live* (1982, Cinema Action), *Veronica 4 Rose* (1983, Melanie Chait) and *Green Flutes* (1984, Nancy Scheisari), *Domestic Bliss* (1985, Joy Chamberlain) as well as tracks made for a series of short films by Lis Rhodes and Jo Davis for Channel 4 in 1983. Sally Potter, a co-member of the Feminist Improvising Group, sings the ballads on *Song of the Shirt*.

<sup>16</sup> She would later collate her ideas about the place of women in radical social reform in the nineteenth-century in *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (Taylor, 1983)

<sup>17</sup> While the film is directed by Clayton and Curling, it emerged as part of The Film and History Project, and involved up to a hundred participants including historical research undertaken with the help of Barbara Taylor.

<sup>18</sup> Screenings were at Thames Polytechnic, Portsmouth Polytechnic, Lancaster University, Workers' Education Association group meetings and Warwick University. As part of the South West Film Tour 1979/1980, it was screened at Exeter Public Library, Falmouth College of Art, Plymouth Arts Centre, and at a hall in Barnstaple. (Stoneman and Thompson, 1981, pp.124–126).

<sup>19</sup> These stereotypes were particularly evident in sitcoms such as *Love Thy Neighbour* (ITV, 1972-76) and *Rising Damp* (ITV, 1974-78).

<sup>20</sup> See the following chapter for further analysis of the role of news reporting and bias on television

<sup>21</sup> In 1973, the BBC broadcast a live transmission of the marriage of Princess Anne and Captain Mark Phillips (Sandbrook, 2011, p.2), while in 1977, television's respectful coverage of the Silver Jubilee contrasted starkly with a mood of anti-nationalism in punk, with the Sex Pistol's counter-anthem *God Save The Queen* banned from the airwaves. Television's depictions of earlier ages were often invested in the 'invention of tradition' and included,



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for example, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (1970), the wartime patriotism invoked by *Colditz* (1974), and *Churchill's People* (1974-75), an adaptation of Winston Churchill's jingoistic four volume *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* (1956-58). Meanwhile, Alexander Korda's historical costume dramas of kings, queens and chivalry were replayed frequently throughout both the 1970s and the 1980s as a schedule-filler on the BBC. A series of Korda's films was shown on BBC-2 in 1986, for example.

<sup>22</sup> The subjects of 'heritage' films and television series such as *Brideshead Revisited* (1981, Granada TV, dir. Julian Jarrold), *Chariots of Fire* (1981, dir. Hugh Hudson), *A Passage to India* (1984, dir. David Lean), *A Room with a View* (1986, dir. James Ivory) and *Maurice* (1987, dir. James Ivory), were the rarefied world of the upper classes and their mansions, swathed in a sepia-toned nostalgia for empire and glory.

<sup>23</sup> Thatcher announced this turn in an interview for London Weekend Television on 16 January 1983. Raphael Samuel has critiqued her use of the term in depth. See: Samuel, R. & Smout, T. C. (1992) Mrs. Thatcher's Return to Victorian Values. *Proceedings of the British Academy: Victorian Values*. 789–29.

<sup>24</sup> Information on Quinn's film can be found on his website:

<http://conamara.org/index.php?page=essay-on-bob-quinn> (Accessed 15 August 2015).

Other films in the 1983 Channel 4 Ireland series included: *Ireland: The Silent Voices* (1983, dir. Rod Stoneman), a documentary on British media-bias about Ireland; the drama *Maev* (1981, dirs. Mat Murphy and John Davies); and the community drama project *The Writing on the Wall* (1981, dir. Armand Gatti). Also transmitted in 1983 was *The Cause of Ireland* (1983, Chris Reeves/Platform Films).

<sup>25</sup> For example, Television History Workshop's *Who Needs Women Drivers* (1986), which '... looks in detail at the working lives of ten of London Transport's past and present female employees. Through their words and experiences, the programme charts the changes in attitudes towards women at work'. (Fountain, 1986, p.13)

<sup>26</sup> *The End of The Pier* is available online: <http://player.bfi.org.uk/film/watch-end-of-the-pier-1986/>.

*The North* is available online here: <https://vimeo.com/41559273> (Accessed 14 August 2015)

<sup>27</sup> There are many in-depth examinations of *Handsworth Songs* as a reflection on migration, memory, the archive and the essay film. See: Brunow, D. (2015) *Remediating Transcultural Memory: Documentary Filmmaking as Archival Intervention*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG; Fisher, M. (2012) What Is Hauntology? *Film Quarterly*. 66 (1), 16–24; Eshun, K. (2009) 'The Disenchantments of Reflexivity in Handsworth Songs', in Sven Kramer & Thomas Tode (eds.) *Der Essayfilm: Ästhetik und Aktualität*. Konstanz: UVK. pp. 241–256; Bhabha, H. K. (2004) *The Location of Culture*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge. pp. 139–170; Marks, L. U. (2000) *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham: Duke University Press; Corner, J. (1996) *The Art of Record: a Critical Introduction to Documentary*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp. 171–180; Fusco, C. (1988) *Young British and Black*. Buffalo, NY: Hallwalls / Contemporary Arts Center. Mercer, K. (ed.) (1988) *Black Film, British Cinema*. ICA Documents 7. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts.

<sup>28</sup> Reflecting on an earlier work, the slide-and-audio piece *Expeditions*, John Akomfrah notes that:

... we wanted to problematize that very obvious splitting of memory into past and present. It seemed that the only way we could do that was to pay less attention to what historiographers and political commentators said about past and present, and look at what the iconography of those moments signified now. (Fusco, 1988, pp.45–47)

<sup>29</sup> Other programmes on the riots include: *Bombin'* (Central Television, 1988), *Viewpoint 86: After the Riots* (Central Television, 1986), *Central Weekend* (Central Independent Television, September 1986), *Opinions: Misrule Britannia – The Future of Our Inner Cities* (Panoptic Productions/Channel 4, 1986), *TV Eye: The Birmingham Riots* (Thames Television, 1985) and *Weekend World: After the Riots* (London Weekend Television, 1985).

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<sup>30</sup> This sequence has been analysed by Richard Dyer in terms of the concept of ‘whiteness’. See: Dyer, R. (2013) *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. New edition. London: Routledge. pp18-92

<sup>31</sup> The term ‘island race’ is Churchill’s. Thatcher used the term to describe the Falklanders. Margaret Thatcher (3 April 1982). HC S: [Falkland Islands].

<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104910>. (Accessed 18 August 2015).

<sup>32</sup> The British fascist leader Oswald Mosley was the MP for Smethwick between 1926 and 1931. The U.S. civil rights leader Malcolm X visited Smethwick on a trip to the UK shortly before he was assassinated in 1965.

<sup>33</sup> The BBC’s strand for Black audiences, *Ebony*, reported on the events on Friday, 15 Nov 1985

<sup>34</sup> For Judith Williamson, this crossing between avant-garde and the politics of race and colonialism resulted in a ‘doubly Other cinema’ (Williamson, 1988, p.106), in which both the avant-garde form of the work and its focus on blackness are posited as oppositional – a position that she critiques for its binary thinking and exclusion of the pleasures of mainstream film.

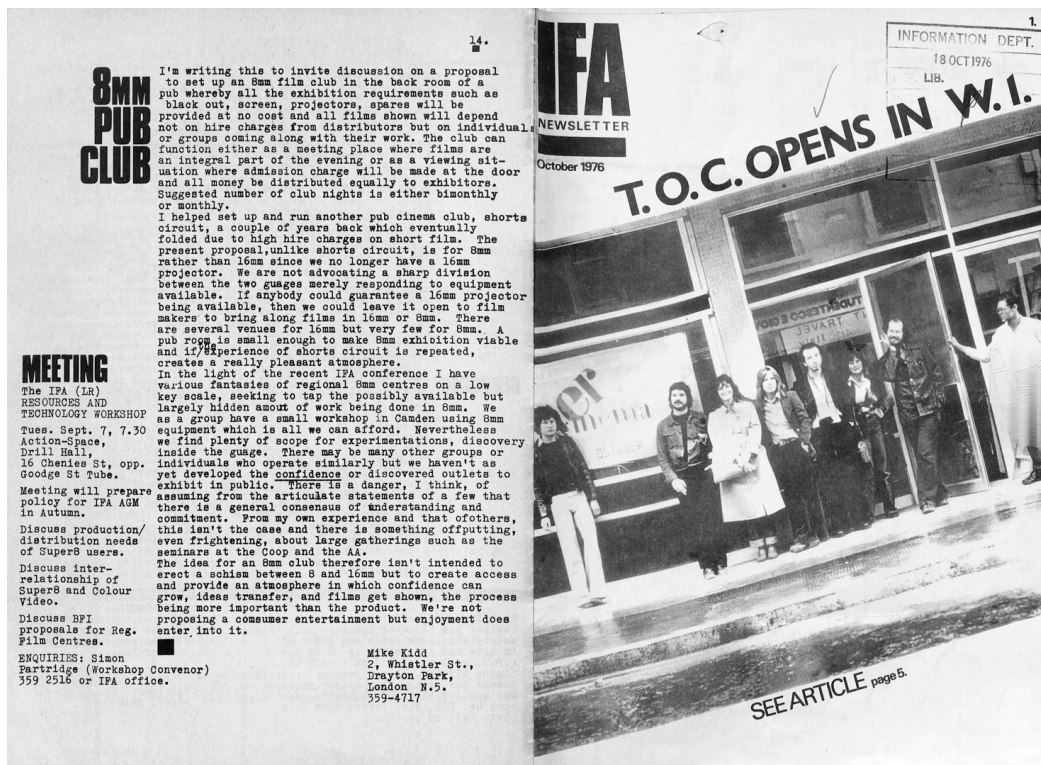
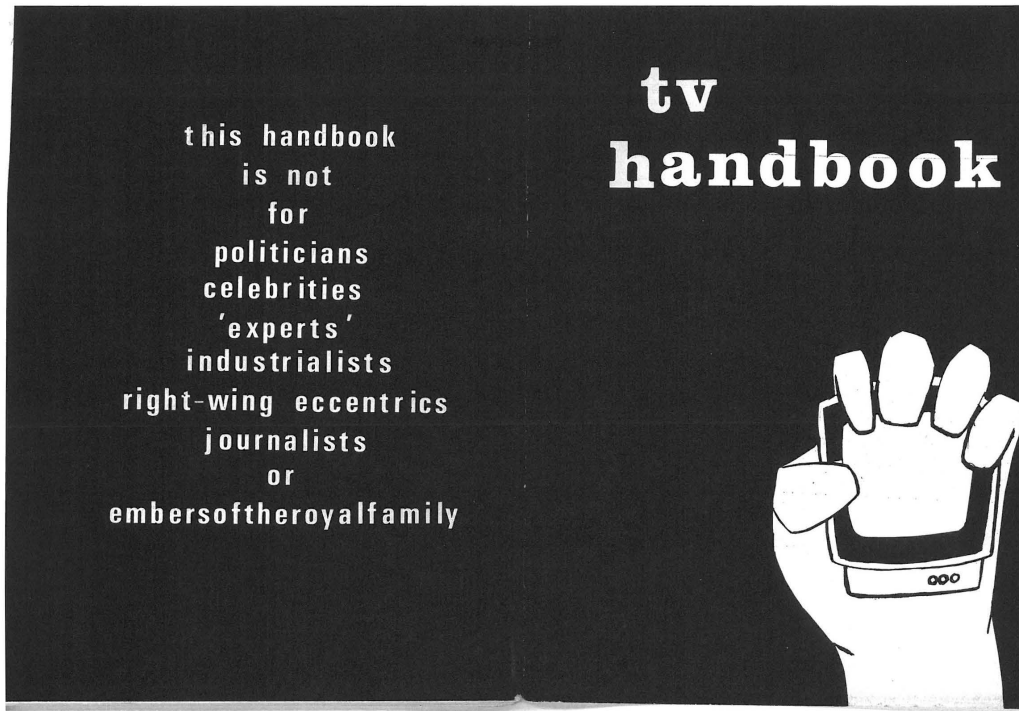
<sup>35</sup> *Handsworth Songs* was also significantly less controversial than an earlier film, *Blacks Britannica* (1978, dir. David Koff), a film made for the Boston television channel WGBH on race relations in Britain, and which was banned for a number of years.

<sup>36</sup> Oppositional uses of ‘Jerusalem’ can also be found in *Because I am King*, in Tony Richardson’s *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) and Lindsay Anderson’s *If* (1968) ‘Jerusalem’ is also deployed for more jingoistic purposes, being used on the soundtrack of *Chariots of Fire* (1981, Hugh Hudson), at the Last Night of the Proms, and in the wartime propaganda film *Listen to Britain* (1942, Humphrey Jennings). In the 1980s, post-punk and dub versions included Mark Stewart and the Mafia’s ‘Jerusalem’ (1982), and The Fall’s ‘Dog is Life/Jerusalem’ (1988).

<sup>37</sup> For a fuller account of the influence of Stuart Hood on British independent film, see the next chapter of this thesis. Chris Reeves was a student of Hood at the Royal College of Art.

<sup>38</sup> *The Miners’ Campaign Tapes* were made in support of striking coal miners, and as counter-information to the anti-union rhetoric of Thatcher, newspapers and many TV reporters. For more on the Miners’ Campaign Tapes, see: James, D. E. (1996) ‘For a Working-Class Television: The Miner’s Campaign Tape Project’, in *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. pp. 193–216.; and: Chapman, J. (2015) *A New History of British Documentary*. Palgrave Macmillan, p.245.





Top: Media Workers Group (1973) *TV Handbook*. Courtesy of James Swinson.  
 Bottom: Independent Filmmakers' Association (1976) *IFA Newsletter*. Courtesy of the British Film Institute, London. Both publications have an informal quality, with the ironic humour of the *TV Handbook's* reference to the 'embers of the royal family', and the *IFA Newsletter's* front and back covers devoted to diverse groups (the Other Cinema and an 8mm film club).

### **Chapter 3. Counterpublics in Britain, 1974-1990: The Independent Filmmakers' Association**

When a group of around fifty radical and avant-garde filmmakers met at a daylong conference held in the screening room of the Royal College of Art in London on 9 November 1974, the occasion marked a significant advance in the development of independent film and video in the UK. The meeting reflected a broad shift towards co-operation between diverse filmmakers intent on developing new publics and new approaches to the state, television and film funding. In this chapter, I argue that the significance of the organisation that emerged from this meeting, the Independent Film-makers' Association (IFA), lies in its self-organisation as a counterpublic that was intent on intervening in, and changing, Britain's public-service television and national film ecologies. The IFA was made up of a number of Left filmmakers, from activist documentary collectives (Gustav 'Schlacke' Lamche from Cinema Action and Marc Karlin, Humphrey Trevelyan and James Scott from Berwick Street Film Collective), to the London Film-makers' Co-op (Peter Gidal, Simon Hartog, Malcolm Le Grice), and other figures perhaps best-known for their activities in the heady counterculture of the late 1960s (Maurice Hatton, Peter Whitehead).<sup>1</sup> Finding common ground in their oppositional stance towards mainstream film and television the IFA remained a formidable force as the group developed in the 1970s, accommodating video makers and photographers in the 1980s and its acronym changing to the IFVA and then the IFVPA (for clarity and to avoid the multiplication of acronyms, I use 'IFA' throughout this thesis).

In this chapter I will argue that the Association's ambitions were fundamentally public in nature, and that it acted as a bridge between oppositional film and video

groups – Underground and avant-garde artists, activist documentarians, and the counter-cinema – and the mainstream of television and cinema. Margaret Dickinson has stated that the IFA never quite crystallised into a single movement with clear policies and objectives (Dickinson, 1999, p.55). This may be the case, but my chapter looks not to the explicitly stated aims of the group, but to the complex positions that appear to underpin many of its claims, and which can be found in the archival correspondence, letters, conference papers, newsletters and policy documents produced by the organisation between 1974 and 1990. The IFA was made up of individuals and collectives rooted in the diverse Left politics of the period, which offered grassroots and anti-authoritarian alternatives to traditional Leninist organisations (the Communist Party, Trotskyist groups). These politics were themselves fractured, non-aligned and fragmented and evolving throughout the existence of the organisation. My research here draws from original archival documents including the IFA archives, secondary literature, histories of public-service broadcasting, and public-theory discourse in order to trace the reformulation of oppositional film and video cultures in the 1970s and 1980s, and the ambivalent role of the organisation in its confrontation with other, wider publics. The chapter also argues for a rethinking of some of the assumptions of public sphere theory, arguing that while modern publics are essentially discursive, relying on published books, journals and newsletters, the communal gathering together of people has also been foundational for the formation of many counterpublics. These gatherings were vital, for example, to the Women’s Liberation Movement, Gay Liberation and the Gay Left, and anti-racism movements, where collective practices and consciousness-raising groups offered a different model to the traditional hierarchies of Leninist parties; and where a focus on empowering representations in the media

was contrasted with the Communist Party's emphasis on the economy and the unity of the party.

In its first meeting, the group was concerned with practical questions of organisation, strategy and policy – asking who radical filmmakers and artists could appeal to in order to find adequate funding for the production and distribution of their works. Could the IFA persuade the BBC to broadcast complete and uncut films by its makers? Would the BFI change its funding policies so that it might provide ongoing support to filmmaking groups including film collectives?<sup>2</sup> Clearly, then, access to television was a key concern of the organisation from its very inception. At the top of the agenda in this meeting was a plan mooted by BBC-2 to broadcast a series of British independent films on the channel (Dwoskin et al., 1999). It was agreed that 'the television question should be the association's immediate concern', and two committees were assembled to pursue the matter ('Minutes of the First General Meeting', 1974, p.1).<sup>3</sup> One of these committees was convened to communicate with the BBC about screening independent works on television. In January 1975, an IFA delegation met with Aubrey Singer, the Controller of BBC-2, to discuss such opportunities. According to comments published by the IFA on the occasion of its first Annual General Conference in 1976 that have subsequently come to be a foundational story for the organisation, Singer responded to their petition for more independent work to be shown on the channel with the words, 'I'm not having that kind of film on *my* television'. The IFA delegation reported back to its members: 'Needless to say we did not respond by saying that the BBC is a *public* corporation' ('Independent Film-making in the 70s', 1976, my italics). Here, the IFA authors point out the obvious contradiction between Singer's first-person singular and possessive tense ('my'), and the BBC's

putative role at the service of the national ‘public’. This confrontation points to the reasons for the deep suspicion that independent filmmakers felt towards television in the 1970s: it was an exclusive, class-ridden enclave. At the same time, independent makers understood that public television offered the promise of a wider access, a means of communicating and developing larger audiences.

### **Whose Public? The IFA and the Annan Committee**

It was precisely the tensions inherent in the meaning of the term ‘public’ that would be key to the IFA’s campaigns to influence and change British broadcasting and film funding policies. So what did the term ‘public’ mean at this time in the context of broadcasting? These questions can be addressed by looking at the second committee established during that first IFA meeting, which was charged with drafting a submission to the Annan Committee.<sup>4</sup> Headed by Noel Annan, the Committee was a body convened by the government earlier in 1974 to examine the long-term future of broadcasting in Britain, whose final report in 1977 outlined many of the structures of a new television channel to complement the three existing ones (BBC-1, BBC-2, ITV); a version of its proposal would come to fruition with the establishment of Channel 4 following the 1980 Broadcasting Act.<sup>5</sup> The Annan Committee was not only established to set out the structure of a fourth channel; it also set out to think through some of the complex ideas that had coalesced around the notion of public broadcasting since the inception of the BBC in the 1920s, and to rethink these ideals in light of new socio-political changes and challenges that had emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s – including the ongoing call for a national



Welsh-language channel for Wales, as well as programmes that catered for the burgeoning youth cultures that had developed throughout the 1960s.

Television in Britain had always had a potentially democratic possibility, since it was conceived from the beginning as a public service provision. Since the days of Lord John Reith, the director-general of the BBC from 1927 to 1938, public service broadcasting in Britain had centred on the concept radio and television as a national ‘utility’, owned and managed at arms-length by the state (Scannell, 1990). This conception of an organisation owned by the state, but independent of the government, was complemented by a paternalistic duty to ‘inform, educate, and entertain’ (Reith, 1924). Public-service television thus actively sought to shape viewers into a morally responsible citizenry, a model that had applied to both the BBC since the 1930s and the ITV network since the 1950s (Crisell, 2002, pp.28, 90). Reith’s notion of culture drew from Matthew Arnold, for whom high culture was both a social bond and a bulwark against anarchism (Collins, 2004, p.38) – it must provide the ‘best’ of culture to its viewers to encourage the best from them. Reith himself summed up this mission of top-down social betterment when he asserted: ‘It is occasionally indicated to us that we are apparently setting out to give the public what we think they need – and not what they want [...] but few know what they want, and very few what they need’ (Reith, 1924, p.34). For Reith, the public was thus a social body to be moulded and reformed. If British society was then (as now) striated along class lines, Reith’s vision of broadcasting sought to bind its listeners and viewers into a patriotic national public, using cultural forms such as coronations and military parades ‘as a kind of social cement binding people together in the shared idioms of a public, corporate, national life’, with ultimate aim of fostering a ‘informed and enlightened democracy’ (Scannell, 1990, p.14).

This model of a top-down normative national public sphere had been significantly challenged by an apparent increase in social diversity in the UK, particularly with the arrival of new migrants from the former colonies, the establishment of strong regional and nationalist interests in Scotland and Wales, as well as with the growth of diverse oppositional countercultures in place of the traditional Left political parties.<sup>6</sup> The Annan Committee was, indeed, established in response to a sense that the broadcasting ‘duopoly’ of the BBC and ITV was unrepresentative of the diversity of British public opinion: that contemporary culture ‘is now multi-racial and pluralist’ (Annan, 1977, p.30), and that television should reflect this new social complexity. This official recognition of plurality had crystallised at the start of the decade, with Anthony Smith’s call for a new television channel designed to cater to the greatest possible variety of tastes and viewpoints (Darlow, 2004, p.115).<sup>7</sup> In his 1972 conception of a ‘National Television Foundation’, Smith outlined how this channel might achieve such diversity: namely by operating as a ‘publisher’, commissioning and buying programmes from independent producers (this would become the model for Channel 4 in the 1980s). For Smith, such a broadcasting structure would be ‘a system of controlling television so that it will respond to the frustrations currently being expressed by the public’ (Smith in Darlow, 2004, p.139) (issues of interest to the youth, and Welsh-language television, for example). The model was explicitly positioned as an alternative to the commercial ITV moguls such as Lew Grade and Rupert Murdoch, who were arguing that a fourth channel should be handed over to them (Darlow, 2004, p.115). In his 1977 report, Lord Annan recommended that the BBC should ensure that ‘many different voices are heard’ (Annan Committee in Darlow, 2004, p.168), stating in a House of Lords

debate that ‘if one let the companies schedule ITV 2, then one says goodbye to diversity in broadcasting’ (Annan, 1977).

For independent filmmakers, one means around the clearly problematic but still-dominant ideal of the Reithian public sphere was to establish networks and groups that were outside of the structures of the state, and that utilised smaller or looser networks to produce and distribute films than those offered by television. Groups such as the London Women’s Film Group, Newsreel and Cinema Action promoted forms of collectivity with skill- and equipment-sharing, and networks of production and distribution (‘integrated practice’), as a counter-model to the professionalism of the broadcast and film industry. They were built from grassroots communities, with ideas spread through street actions, the radical press and film screenings, and often put the emphasis not on seizing governmental or state power, but rather on consciousness-raising and local activism (Rowbotham et al., 1979, pp.2, 160). Lynne Segal has argued that the late 1960s and early 1970s was a period in which the term ‘autonomy’ was used as a means of escaping the strictures of Left parties: ‘As we saw it, we were the people, up against the repressive force of the state [...]’ (Segal in Rowbotham et al., 1979, p.162). As outlined in the Chapter 2 of this thesis, writers including Claire Johnston, Colin MacCabe and Stuart Hall critiqued these notions of collective identity as either ‘immanent’ or implicitly exclusionary of other ethnicities.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, independent filmmakers did engage in campaigns and struggles of national and transnational importance, from the involvement of Liberation Films in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign group (from 1967 to 1968), to the involvement of Newsreel Collective and the London Women’s Film Group in the Women’s Liberation Movement (Dickinson, 1999, pp.224, 231; Cochrane,

2010), and Cinema Action's support of strikers, dockers, and unionists in numerous campaigning films.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than circumventing broadcasting entirely, other groups sought to change the television industry from within. Founded in the summer of 1968 the Free Communications Group (FCG) was composed of broadly Left-aligned media workers, and quickly developed into a significant pressure group that published its own newsletter called *Open Secret*, held a number of well-publicised meetings and had its ideas discussed in the House of Lords.<sup>10</sup> Inspired by the events of May that year in France, when journalists and others at ORTF had gone on strike, the FCG advocated a quasi-syndicalist model of workers' control over editorial content (Darlow, 2004, p.18). Tony Benn's statement in support of the FCG that 'Broadcasting is really too important to be left to the broadcasters' became an oft-quoted refrain, with widespread demands for change in broadcasting in mainstream newspapers.<sup>11</sup> Discussions also took place within the ACTT (The Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians), the main union for the ITV workers, who put forward a motion in 1971 calling for workers' control of the industry without compensation to owners (Freedman, 2003, pp.77–78), and produced a report in 1973 for the nationalisation of the film industry in Britain (ACTT, 1999), which was subsequently supported by the IFA (IFA, 1978b). At the centre of these campaigns was a demand to upend the power relations within the film and broadcasting systems:

Workers' control of the film industry is not a pretty frill but an essential part of our demand. Without it an unresponsive, inaccessible managerial oligarchy is inevitable. Without it neither the worker's relation to his [sic] life nor the industry's relation to community can change [...] the experience of Trade Union democracy provides

the workers with the knowledge and experience to control their own industry.  
(ACTT, 1999, p.114)

By the early 1970s, there was therefore already a battle underway for the future of broadcasting in Britain. A number of independent filmmakers with experience working within the film and television industries also set out to intervene in and critique broadcasting. In 1973, a group who would later establish the Newsreel Collective (1974–1978) formed the Media Workers Group, producing a number of pamphlets designed to counter bias in the media.<sup>12</sup> The 80-page *TV Handbook* (1973) was a guide for activists and television workers on how to avoid being co-opted or censored by the mechanisms of the television industry in both its public service (BBC) and commercial (ITV) guises. The *TV Handbook* offers specific advice on how to deal with television broadcasters covering strikes, protests or other actions: don't give TV journalists and editors too much information; don't give them anything for free; agree a fee and sign a contract before filming; ideally make the film yourself and insist on control over its final form; if all this fails, then protest and picket outside of the television studios.

The *TV Handbook* asserts that there are significant problems with television: for example, its claims to 'balance' and 'national interest' are invariably a smokescreen for the maintenance of the status quo: 'THE 'NATIONAL INTEREST' IS ALWAYS, WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT, THE BOSSES INTEREST [sic]' (Media Workers Group, 1973b, p.3, capitals in original).<sup>13</sup> The *TV Handbook* illustrates this by pointing to broadcasting interventions into the 'Poulson scandal' of 1972–1973. This controversy centred on the activities of architect John Poulson, who had secured highly lucrative building contracts using connections in the

Conservative and Labour parties. In 1973 the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) had stopped the broadcasting of *The Friends and Influence of John L Poulson*, a current affairs documentary produced by Granada Television as part of its *World in Action* series. In response, the ACTT had pulled the plug on the programme that was due to be aired in its place, a significantly less controversial documentary by photographer David Bailey on Andy Warhol.<sup>14</sup> Taking up this issue, the *TV Handbook* lists the eleven members of the IBA and details their associations with the elite of British society, listing public schools and Oxbridge colleges attended, and business and political associations. The list exposes the fallacy of the term ‘national interest’. In fact, The *TV Handbook* concludes:

What’s on trial isn’t Poulson, or World in Action. It’s the concept of ‘national interest’. And it’s been found guilty of being no more than a hollow phrase, used when convenient and forgotten when embarrassing (Media Workers Group, 1973b, p.58).

However, such problems are, the pamphlet argues, not insurmountable. Central to the pamphlet is a sense of the importance of intervening in and rebuilding the national public sphere constituted through and by television, rather than the alternative trajectory of seeking ‘autonomy’:

Many militant workers and political groups categorically refuse to co-operate with TV and the press. We think that you can refuse to co-operate with them – BUT YOU CAN’T IGNORE THEM. In any of the ways that we struggle to get decent lives for ourselves we are going to come up against the media. We have to find ways of confronting their distortions and putting out the information that WE NEED to unite or spread our struggle. (Media Workers Group, 1973b, p.iii, capitals in the original)

Arguments that the broadcasting industry was biased and skewed to the status quo, but that it could be changed with effective political intervention also emerged within

film and art school education. Stuart Hood, a staunchly Left former BBC controller (1962-64) and activist involved in the FCG and ACTT, led the film and television course at the Royal College of Art, London, between 1971 and 1978. Hood took an ‘overtly radical and conceptual approach [...] placing the emphasis on formal experimentation and oppositional politics’, and hired radical figures including Peter Gidal, Stephen Dwoskin and Noël Burch to teach on the course (Petrie and Stoneman, 2014, p.146). Hood was both an experienced industry insider, and a radical political dissident whose books *The Mass Media* (1972) and *On Television* (1980) helped to define a critical attitude towards television in the 1970s and 1980 as agents for social change (Hood, 1972; Hood and Tabary-Peterssen, 1997). Hood also popularised the notion of the broadcaster as ‘gatekeeper’ policing the content of television according to class-based tastes.<sup>15</sup> In *The Mass Media*, Hood asserted that ‘In Western democracies the role of broadcasting is, implicitly if not explicitly, to reflect the parliamentary consensus’ (Hood, 1972, p.12). Hood argues that this bias had been evident since the 1926 General Strike, when Reith sided with the government, offering no airtime to Labour representatives since the strike itself had been deemed illegal (Hood, 1972, p.19). Similar analysis was also evident in the Glasgow Media Group’s studies, beginning with *Bad News* in 1976, which analysed how television news nearly always proffered views favourable to employees and management rather than workers, resulting in a ‘cultural skewdness against one particular class’ (Beharrell et al., 2009, p.329). The Annan Committee’s 1977 report reflected these critiques when it castigated broadcasters as an institutional set-up that many people felt was ‘[...] cowed by Government and vested interests to produce programmes which bolstered up the status quo and concealed how a better society could evolve’ (Annan quoted in Scannell, 1990, p.19).

A number of students at the Royal College of Art engaged in critical reflections on television bias. For example, the Film Work Group (whose members included Clive Myer, Nigel Perkins, Stewart MacKinnon, Frank Abbott, Ed Bennett and Phil Mulloy) produced a series of films that suggest Hood's as well as Noël Burch's influence.<sup>16</sup> *News and Comment* (1978) reflects on the way that television news and current affairs programmes approach questions of race; *Some Things We Could Know about Television* (1979) features interviews with Jeremy Isaacs, who had recently been appointed controller of the new fourth channel (Channel 4), and reflexively explores the format of television interviews, asking how television relates to structures of authority; *Two Territories* reflects on questions of television reportage and class. Other students on the RCA film and television course in the 1970s worked on films critical of existing forms of television, media stereotypes, and state power. For example, Sue Clayton co-directed *Song of the Shirt* (see Chapter 2 of this thesis); while cinematographers Anne Cottringer and Jonathan Collinson (later, Jonathan Bloom) worked on *Journeys from Berlin 1971* (1980, dir. Yvonne Rainer); Cottringer worked on *Bright Eyes* (1984, dir. Stuart Marshall); Collinson with Marc Karlin (*For Memory* and the *Nicaragua* series), Malcolm Le Grice (*Finnegans Chin*, 1981) and Black Audio Film Collective (*Testament*, 1988). Hood also worked with Platform Films on their *People's Flag* series for Channel 4 in the 1980s, a coruscating history of the twentieth century and the betrayals of the radical Left by the Labour Party and the unions (see Chapter 2 of this thesis). Hood's influence was important, foregrounding social and political connections between film practice and television, emphasising the idea of film as a practice that could and should change society.

Hood viewed television as a pragmatic field open to change, albeit only as part of a wider social upheaval; his conclusion to *The Mass Media*, for example, suggested that



only a total change of the socio-political system would produce significant changes in broadcasting (Hood, 1972, p.92). Another significant voice at this time was Raymond Williams, who concludes his *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) by arguing that the Left should more actively create a public policy and legislative framework for the social and community use of cable channels and video technologies. For Williams, this would be a process that would only come about through a 'political fight' that will be 'long and bitter' (Williams, 2003, p.155), which would be 'necessarily part of a much wider social struggle' (2003, p.156). The clarion call of Williams' book is that the new technologies should be understood as '[...] the contemporary tools of the long revolution towards an educated and participatory democracy [...]' (2003, p.156). Another influential critique was proffered by Hans Enzensberger in his essay 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media' published in the *New Left Review* in 1970, which warned against a conspiratorial idea of the media as a single monolithic entity as tacitly assumed by many on the Left (Enzensberger, 1970).<sup>17</sup> Claire Johnston referenced Enzensberger's essay a number of times in her articles for journals such as *Screen* and texts for the IFA, arguing that: 'Enzensberger's essay is important precisely because it locates the question of the production of meaning in a historical and institutional perspective, stressing the necessity of opening up a radically different institutional space to challenge cultural hegemony' (Johnston, 1976, p.1). These influences were vital in the shift from countercultural practices as alternative structures to the mainstream, to practices that sought to change society through an engagement with the media.

By the time that the IFA drafted its appeal to the Annan Committee, there were a number of different currents of thought concerning the public role of television: Reith's patrician desire to mould the national citizenry; syndicalist and activist re-

thinkings of communal life; a recognition within parliamentary and alternative media discourse of media bias and social diversity; and a counterpublic discourse centred on the need to build new institutions to support radical media production. Underpinning these approaches is a commitment to an ideal of television as a site of diverse public discourse resistant to the forces of capitalism. Notably, Smith's and Annan's sense that private commercial interest would reduce the representation of social 'pluralism', would have a significant impact on the IFA. The IFA's submission to the Annan Committee (IFA, 1975b) appeals for state funds and broadcasting opportunities as a specifically non-commercial activity that might encourage diversity of taste and opinion. Drawing on the principal of state support for the arts embedded in the Reithian model, the IFA paper points out that the BBC had a longstanding charter to encourage the appreciation of classical music, which it fulfilled in part by subsidising concerts. Following this logic, the IFA argues that television should also financially support independent film and video on a non-commercial basis, to encourage a greater range in broadcasting. The IFA argued that the neglect of its members' films by the BBC revealed a fundamental unwillingness to 'include real diversity in creative form or social viewpoint' (IFA, 1975b), a 'narrow vision' that was 'failing to fulfill [sic] an obligation to their public' (IFA, 1975b) – an 'obligation' that clearly references the diversity that Smith and Annan were at that time debating. The submission also points out further specific complaints that echo the critiques made in the *TV Handbook*: existing channels are far too controlling of content, and a measure of editorial control needs to be ceded to independent producers for such diverse voices to be heard, and different non-professional gauges of film need to be accepted (such as 8-mm film). More broadly, the IFA asserted that this was not merely an issue of obtaining occasional access to

television for independent film, but rather of restructuring the former to better serve the publics that it had for so long excluded:

Only with restructuring could the broadcasting system, and the national culture as a whole, benefit from the rich and varied contribution that, we feel, the independents can make through the media of television. (IFA, 1975b)

Such a claim was justifiable to the extent that many IFA members' films explored issues of concern to a large numbers of people whose points of view were routinely excluded by existing television broadcasts – the WLM, squatters, rent strikers, unionists, Irish republicans, and numerous others.<sup>18</sup> The IFA also suggested that its members produced work that would enrich 'the national culture as a whole' due to artistic innovations (such as Gidal and Le Grice) rather than through the explicit championing of specific social causes, providing alternative ways of thinking and seeing to the common output of television.

The IFA's submission to Annan highlights the innovatory aesthetics of avant-garde film production in Britain, arguing that British television was far behind the public support of the arts compared to broadcasters in Germany and the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup> The paper also argues that, 'The nature of the selected independent sources should be of as wide a variety as possible – both in form and content' (IFA, 1975b, p.4). This key phrase from the group's submission to the Annan Committee would be repeated in later IFA documents: in 1976 the Association described the films produced by its members as 'aesthetically and politically innovatory in form and content' ('Independent Film-making in the 70s', 1976). The notion of innovation in both form and content was clearly also related to the notion of political modernism in which, '*the possibility of a radical, political text is conditioned by the necessity of an avant-garde representational strategy*' (Rodowick, 1994, p.12, italics in original). Thus, the IFA's

demand for a commitment to diversity would be underpinned by a specific conception of modernist innovation, which was evidently not the meaning of the term as used by Annan (who used it in the sense of the tastes of different regional and ethnic groups). The term was also a cornerstone of the IFA's contribution to the creation of Channel 4 as it was finally constituted under the 1981 Broadcasting Act, legislation that charged the new fourth channel with encouraging 'innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes' (*Broadcasting Act*, 1981, p.14). Significantly, the phrase in the 1981 act lacks the word 'politically', suggesting compromises made in the realisation of radical visions within the structures of liberal democracy. By neglecting the term 'politically', Channel 4 were to use a term that would be palatable to the establishment, while (at least in the first years of the organisation), actually delivering a range of challenging political films on strands such as the *Eleventh Hour* and *People to People*.

### **Reading Counterpublics: The IFA Newsletter and Other Publications**

As I have explored already (in Chapters 1 and 2), oppositional reading publics had expanded dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s, with newsletters, journals, magazines and books devoted to countercultural, socialist, feminist, gay and Black audiences. Independent filmmakers were immersed in these publishing cultures of the alternative and radical Left. Writing and discussion was central to this endeavour, and film theorists involved in or associated with the IFA, such as Claire Johnston, Laura Mulvey, Rosalind Coward, Mary Kelly and Sally Potter, all contributed articles towards the growing body of feminist literature. As Nancy Fraser has argued, the Women's Liberation Movement was a major paradigm for literary counterpublics (Fraser, 1993, p.116), creating critical readerships to challenge patriarchal structures,

and contributing to burgeoning transnational discourses (Fraser, 2014). In Chapter 2, I argued that published counter-histories by socialist and feminist historians and modernist historiographical critiques had a profound impact on independent film and video practices. Below, I will look more closely at the IFA's publications, to examine how the organisation became the site of discourses between diverse cultures of oppositional film and video, with filmmakers coming from diverse contexts in an effort to build new, expansive publics.

Independent film and video groups used the alternative and mainstream press, as well as self-publishing pamphlets, to distribute ideas and discourses beyond the immediate context of film screenings. As Michael Warner argues all publics must open themselves to the possibility of encounters with 'strangers' as a basic function of distributive publicity (Warner, 2002, p.58), and the IFA was no exception. Importantly, while celluloid is a distributive media, paper is more affordable and unlike film or video requires no specialist technology to view or read it. Published material can thus expand audiences and encounter diverse 'strangers' who were unable to attend specific screenings. A textual ecology has thus long been vital to the development of alternative film and video cultures. For example, Jeff Nuttall has argued that the Underground magazines of the early 1960s were the seed-bed of the radicalism of the late 1960s.<sup>20</sup> Internationally, studies by James MacDonald and David E. James reveal that the growth and consolidation of Underground and experimental cinema in the USA was predicated on access to print media, including newsletters and the alternative press.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, publicity was also an essential component to British avant-garde film before and after the establishment of the IFA.<sup>22</sup> Members of the IFA including Peter Wollen, Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston, Paul Willemen, and John Ellis had extensive experience as writers and critics, both

within fields of film discourse and outside of it (for example, Wollen wrote for a diverse range of publications from *New Left Review* in the 1960s, to *Screen* and *Afterimage* from the 1970s onwards). These writers all contributed to an expansion of radical ideas and the development of radical alternative intellectual currents, widening audiences beyond the immediate context of screenings. In the final section of this chapter (“Collective Bodies and Reading Publics”) I shall expand on this point by exploring how publishing communicates to and create new audiences through forms of distributed literature, as opposed to the agora of the cinema, which depends on an immediate and co-present audience.

There are other important factors in the circulation of these printed discourses. If the independent film work in Britain during this period is often situated within discourses of political modernism as outlined by D.N. Rodowick, it should be remembered that the published material of the time also consisted of more pragmatic and strategic debate, gossip and speculation. It was in the *IFA Newsletter* that members were often able to voice their concerns, and where tensions between filmmakers, theorists, and other camps could be worked through. One point of discord, for example, was between those who wrote as public intellectuals steeped in theory, and others who were uncomfortable with such language. In a letter published in the Newsletter reflecting on the first Annual General Meeting in May 1976, the artist Ian Breakwell noted the event was marked by a ‘morass of jargon’, which veered between ‘the dead anti-language of the business-management executive and the corny slogans of minority political pamphleteers’ (Breakwell, 1976). Breakwell, nevertheless commends the IFA Newsletter itself which ‘at least, is written in plain English’ (Breakwell, 1976). Indeed, some of the IFA’s most vital theoretical activity was to be found outside of the *IFA Newsletter*: in ‘unofficial’

papers written for IFA conferences, as well as in texts that appeared in *Screen* and other journals. Notably, Claire Johnston's call for a rethinking of film practice in the paper 'Independent Film-making in the 70s' (IFA, 1976), demanded both ideological and institutional activity: that is to say, forms of cinema that were politically modernist at the level of disrupting the film text, and activist-oriented in terms of involving audiences in discussions during screenings.

The newsletter also acted as a glue for fractures between those rooted in the structural filmmaking of the LFMC and those centred on the counter-cinema of the Other Cinema (although it should be emphasised that this was not a binary split, since, individuals were rarely confined to only one of these camps). By the late 1970s, the Other Cinema group assumed increasing prominence within the Association, to the disgruntlement of some on the LFMC side. Writing in the Newsletter, Deke Dusinberre complained of a 'de facto split, gentle but unmistakable' with more and more LFMC members drifting away from the IFA (Dusinberre, 1977); although he also hoped for active attempts by the organisations to keep the various parties together, one of which was the article he himself had submitted to the *IFA Newsletter*. Indeed, the IFA did seek to hold a united front, even if this was only contingently successful. For example, a rift emerged between Wollen and Gidal over the latter's essay 'Avant-Garde: The Anti-Narrative' (Gidal, 1979), with Le Grice and Schlacke from Cinema Action sent to mediate between them ('IFA London Region. Minutes', 1979).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the *IFA Newsletter* was not only a means of disseminating information, but also a means for enabling the diversity of the independent film and video to have a voice. In a 1976 newsletter, the publication is described as an 'open forum' whose articles do not necessarily reflect the policy of the Association' (IFA, 1976c, p.10); and it called for 'articles,

news and information to make this newsletter more representative of its membership' (*ibid*, p.21).

The IFA's publishing activities thus sought to reflect the concerns of independent filmmakers throughout the regions. In an IFA meeting held on 16 February 1975 at the Festival of British Independent Cinema (at the Arnolfini arts centre in Bristol), one of the discussions centred on ensuring that minutes of meetings were posted to all members ('Minutes of General Meeting', 1975). Regional filmmaking and publishing activities had been particularly strong in the South West of England, with the presence of Independent Cinema West and the production of the *IFA Regional Digest* in 1975 (a year before the launch of the *IFA Newsletter*). The spring 1978 newsletter further reflected regional diversity, being compiled from a series of submissions from regional branches (IFA, 1978a), including Birmingham, the East Midlands (Nottingham), the North East (Newcastle upon Tyne). These *IFA Newsletter's* early regional debates were often rambunctious and tongue-in-cheek. For example, in the August 1976 Newsletter, an unnamed writer from Independent Cinema West reports that the group's submission to the BFI Regional Department for funds '[...] was received with the usual burping, farting and politicking endemic in the Region of Chronic Indecision [...] The ICW group has simply got pissed off with waiting for grants' (IFA, 1976a, p.10). Another text in the same newsletter is written in the form of a fairy-tale, allegorising the failed second edition of the Festival of British Independent Film as a 'Festival of Critical Flower Throwing', with the BFI cast as the imperious 'Lords of the Manor' (IFA, 1976a, p.12).

On the other hand, the IFA's publications also reveal a more serious organisational tone, with the deepening involvement of the group in establishing a debate between



independent filmmakers and mainstream state institutions such as the BFI and (in the 1980s) with Channel 4. At the organisation's first major conference held over three days in February 1977, members of the IFA debated a range of issues about the relationship between independent filmmakers and the state, BFI regional policy, and the possibilities of expanding and developing its publishing activities. Publicity was a point of concern, and a motion was put forward recommending that, whenever IFA members had screenings at the London Film-makers' Co-op: 'a lot of [...] eye-catching publicity, must be sent to colleges, community groups, schools, galleries, etc., not only in London, but regionally as well', and that a wide public as possible should be appealed to in order to 'promote a greater general awareness of some of the issues important to most IFA members' ('Minutes for the Conference of the Independent Film-makers' Association', 1977). At the same conference, Peter Wollen chaired a session where it was proposed that the IFA should have two principal publishing strands: a newsletter would continue '[...] to contain news and draft policy articles from the Editorial group, workshops, and from any member or members'; secondly, a new IFA journal would be launched, with three issues per year. It would be:

[...] the-public face of the IFA, consisting of our position on relevant policy issues, as developed in the Newsletter and as approved by the Executive. It would not simply repeat items in the Newsletter, but hopefully develop draft ideas into coherent formulations as a basis for solid IFA positions in our dealings with funding bodies, ACTT, AIP, Government bodies, etc. ('Minutes for the Conference of the Independent Film-makers' Association', 1977)

The fact that this journal never materialised was unfortunate, but the IFA would continue to develop its 'public face' through other journals (notably in *Screen*) and it would address its 'coherent formulations' of IFA positions with papers submitted to governmental and other institutional bodies. In 1977 IFA members Fran McLean

and Jonathan Curling published an account of the IFA's conference in *Screen*, giving a much wider assertion of ideas that had been gestating within the group for the previous nine months (Curling and McLean, 1977). These include theoretical reflections on the term 'independent', which the group increasingly defined as independence from capitalist forces, and thus *dependence* on the state ('Independent Film-making in the 70s', 1976), and political commitments due to its self-conception '[...] not just as a group of film practitioners, but as a group of activists working with and within cinema' (ibid 1977, p.108), as well as the vexed relationship between independent filmmakers and the state. Curling and McLean also call for a rapprochement and mutual exchange between filmmakers and theorists, with the former engaging more with conceptual problems of representation and the latter being more open to the reality of social struggle engaged with by activist filmmakers (Curling and McLean, 1977, p.117). Thus, publishing was also a means of bringing together diverse viewpoints and approaches, of keeping together a fractured counterpublic by mediating between views and generating an ad hoc sense of common purpose.

From the late 1970s, the IFA also produced a number of pamphlets and reports to formulate policy, and to petition and win over the opinion of state institutions and figures of authority. In 1978, the IFA submitted a pamphlet to the Under-Secretary of State for Trade on 'The Future of the British Film Industry' (IFA, 1978b), a paper that very clearly sets out structural changes in the British film industry in the 1970s, petitioning the government to follow the European model of state subsidy for national film, rather than the American 'blockbuster' model. The paper advocates the adoption of recommendations made in the Terry Report (1976) for the expansion of state funding for the film industry, but suggests that this should

not mean the continued attempts to create a commercial industry based on the Hollywood model. The well-designed and produced pamphlet ‘Channel 4 and Independence’ (1979) begins with a quote from Milton’s *Areopagitica* (1644) – a foundational document of British liberalism that defends the freedom of the press – and goes on to argue that broadcasting is a ‘social and cultural sphere in which the public have rights and their representatives responsibilities which run counter to commercial interests’ (IFA, 1979, p.2).

By drawing on a tradition of liberal press freedom, the authors of ‘Channel 4 and Independence’ no doubt hoped to tap into establishment values and concerns about the (bourgeois) public realm. More contemporary authorities are also quoted in the document to bolster the IFA’s public-broadcasting argument, including Christopher Chataway (the Conservative minister who called for a debate on a possible fourth channel in 1971) and Lord Annan. The document, addressed to the newly incumbent Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, is a curious medley of existing concerns from Chataway and Annan (variety of content, regulation of scheduling), to the IFA’s own (socially engaged production processes, experiment with the ‘language of images’, workshops). Echoing Annan, but also the new anti-consensus politics of the New Right, the document argues that ‘It would be fatal for all kinds of reasons if TV4 [Channel 4] became locked into the same consensus attitudes and routine habits as the existing channels’ (IFA, 1979, p.7), a comment that reflects Annan’s own conclusions in his 1977 report discussed earlier in this chapter: that existing channels should cater for the diverse audiences that had emerged since the breakdown of the assumed uniform, stable and cohesive public since the end of the Second World War.

The IFA would continue its publishing activities in the 1980s, deepening the engagement between independent filmmakers and institutions. In the summer of 1984 the IFVA (the acronym of the organisation following its incorporation of video in 1983) produced *Views*, a publication that would be somewhat slicker than earlier newsletters (IFA, 1984). The publication was realised with funding from Channel 4, and featured articles on institutional challenges and opportunities faced by independent film- and video-makers in relation to cable television, the ACTT, and the Greater London Council (GLC). *Views* was intended as a quarterly publication, with a second edition planned that would focus on Channel 4's *Eleventh Hour* series and its contributions to the independent sector. However, like previous attempts by the IFA to produce a regular publication (earlier editions of the newsletter were intermittent), it was to be a stop-start effort. *Views No 2* emerged in the summer of 1985 and consisted entirely of a report on the various groups and institutional concerns of video producers in London, a sector that was '[...] arguably one of the essential elements in a modern cultural democracy, allowing new and different voices to be heard in the central medium of our time' (Blanchard and Lipman, 1985, p.3). In 1987 the IFVPA (its name amended again following the incorporation of photographers) produced another extensive report on the independent film and video sector in London (Blanchard, 1987).

These publications were produced by a new generation of Association members such as Simon Blanchard, Andy Lipman and Joel Clayford (as well as other figures such as Margaret Dickinson), and they provided hard-nosed data for self-evaluation and for use in the organisation's negotiations with local, regional and national funding bodies. Gone was the old *Newsletter*, with its cut-and-paste, vaguely Constructivist typography running both horizontally and vertically on the page;

instead there was a new typeset rendered on an Apricot computer, whose look was more stripped-back, functional and somewhat corporate. By this time, the IFA and its members were able to draw on funds directly from Channel 4 – these came through the ACTT Workshop Declaration, commissions from the *Eleventh Hour* and *People to People* slots, as well as one-off grants such as the £10,000 provided by the channel for an IFVA Legal Action Service in 1986, while the organisation also received direct funds from the BFI. Such discussions suggest an increasingly institutionalised organisation, doggedly seeking funds rather than setting out to change the face of broadcasting and to expand the publics of independent film and video as it had done in the 1970s.

While the IFA did indeed continue to push for a vision of a public that was critical, discursive and open, it was after 1983 increasingly on the back foot, fighting to hold on to territories eroded by the onslaught of Thatcherite policies of deregulation and privatisation. In particular, in 1985 the Tories had removed the Eady Levy, which had taxed box offices to help fund British films; and in 1986 they had also dissolved the GLC, one of the major funders of the independent film and video sector.

Notably, the independent sector had to defend itself against the damning Boyden Southwood/Comedia report on independent production in London commissioned by the BFI, which had concluded that the sector was unfocussed and unprofessional. This was, of course, not a neutral report, since the very formulation of the independent sector was that it was built on modes of generative creation of publics (see discussion below), not only serving but also contributing towards social diversity. Indeed, independent film groups such as Fantasy Factory and Circles attacked the report, criticising its reduction of a social practice to ‘monetarist analysis’ (Fantasy Factory, 1989, p.1) and argued that its analysis was ‘grossly

incorrect' (Dunphie et al., 1989, p.2). In the December 1989/January 1990 edition of the newsletter, the editors simply noted 'It's hard times for independent film and video makers' (IFA, 1989, p.1). In January 1990, the Association announced to its members that it had been defunded by the BFI; the organisation that had built independent film and video in Britain since the mid-1970s was finished. This reveals a great deal about the relation between the BFI and alternative film cultures. While the BFI had supported independent production a great deal through the Production Board (which I detail later in this chapter), overall the organisation had a fundamentally different vision of cinema in Britain to the IFA. While the IFA explored cinema and television as a tool for social change, the BFI dreamt of a national cinematic art, an anodyne and pleasant form that merely decorated the cultural landscape.

### **Forming New Publics for Independent Film and Video**

Independent film- and video-makers were not only interested in distributing their works to pre-existing audiences; they also set out to develop new ones as part of a larger process of social change. As outlined above, the written output of independent filmmakers helped to publicise concerns and ideals to readers beyond specific screening situations. Nevertheless, the prime concern for the IFA was to build pressure for the development of policies, subsidies, distribution networks, and institutions that might encourage the development of new audiences for the films themselves. An optimistic sense that an audience for independent film might be created pervades IFA and independent film writings, and it was sometimes argued that if there could be new opportunities for distribution, then new audiences with

an appetite for independent film would naturally follow. In the draft submission to the Annan Committee, the IFA argued that ‘In effect, you, as TV viewer, don’t know us – because you haven’t been allowed to see our work’ (IFA, 1975b). These comments suggest that they perceived that it was primarily the ‘gatekeepers’ of the media that were hampering the development of audiences for newer social forms of expression, innovative in ‘form and content’, as represented by the independent filmmakers of the IFA.

If the IFA’s approach to the Annan Committee was related to broadcasting policies, the group was also very much concerned with rethinking the nation’s moribund film industry. In their report ‘The Future of the British Film Industry’ (IFA, 1978b), the IFA developed a critical response to the government’s ongoing strategy, endorsed by the recent Terry Report (1976), of providing financial aid to the British film industry, in particular the duopoly of Rank and EMI. According to the IFA, this approach was doomed to failure, since it assumed that the industry could be revived and a new mass audience for films encouraged. In fact, the IFA argued, there was no longer a ‘mass’ national audience for cinema, since television had largely taken this place. Instead, the IFA argued, there had developed, on the one hand, the Hollywood ‘blockbuster’ system whose financial resources the British government could hardly match; and, on the other hand, smaller and more diverse audiences for alternative 16mm films. Here, the model of state funding for film that the IFA looked to were France and Germany, which had both successfully encouraged domestic film cultures, rather than simply propping up ailing commercial interests. The IFA report argues that: ‘Independent cinema has [...] been particularly active in developing new audiences for the cinema, and have been aided in this by the growth of film education and the proliferation of film journals both locally and nationally’

(IFA, 1978b, para.15). The IFA's report thus suggested that, on an evidenced-based analysis, small-scale independent filmmakers were the most promising sector worthy of subvention.

What was tactically unmentioned in the 'Future of the British Film Industry' report were those critical aspects of independent film that went beyond these evidence-based claims. For, central to the IFA's conception of the cinema was its use as part of processes of social change and as a tool for critiquing bourgeois society. If such criticisms are not made explicit in the 'The Future of the British Film Industry' report, it is precisely because an appeal for state subventions for the independent sector depended on adopting some of the language of the Terry Report: pricking nationalist pride in cultural terms. The IFA argued that government aids to independent cinema would produce '[...] a strong and healthy cinema whose various sectors would be cultural assets to the nation as a whole'; and pointing towards the example of the government support of the cinema in France, the IFA argues that the '[...] benefits of the fund lie in its enormous contribution to the internal strength of French film production and to its international prestige, rather than in its paper returns on investment' (IFA, 1978b, para.12). Here, the IFA carefully plays the game of arguing for state support in terms of 'international prestige' producing films of 'artistic and cultural merit' (IFA, 1978b, para.14), rather than developing its own arguments about the need for the production of audiences through political modernist texts or the radical cinema of 'social practice' (see Chapter 2).

This is not to say that the IFA's proposals were watered down. The attack on the existing ideas of the government is explicit, and the IFA's allegiance to the radical



ideas of nationalizing the film industry, as proposed by the ACTT and the Labour Party Arts Study Group, is clearly stated (IFA, 1978b, para.20). The document also proposes a radical idea: the establishment of a new fund for workshops and film production facilities on a regional basis (an idea that would mutate and come to fruition in a different form with the establishment of the Workshop Agreement in the 1980s). Nevertheless, the emphasis on cultural ‘prestige’ jars with the group’s repeated hostility to the BFA and BFI’s encouragement of art-house cinephilia, especially through the BFI’s plans for the creation of network of regional cinema centres. In a 1976 article published in the *IFA Newsletter* defending the Other Cinema’s new theatrical venue, the Charlotte Street cinema in central London, Paul Marris asserted that: ‘We’re interested in cinema as an agency with the potential to contribute to social and political awareness, because we’re interested in social and political change not hothouse cinephilia’ (Marris, 1976, p.5). Rather than appealing to existing middlebrow art or cinephile audiences, independent filmmakers set out to actively develop and create an oppositional cinema audience through an alliance between diverse groups seeking social change – the radical counterculture, unionists, the Women’s Liberation Movement, among others.

Here, it is useful to examine how the process of addressing a public might also be considered a process of world-making. Warner observes that: ‘Writing to a public helps to make a world, insofar as the object of address is brought into being partly by postulating and characterizing it’ (Warner, 2002, p.63). The process of writing to or addressing a public thus carries with it an impulse to form an ideal social worldview, which is only retroactively validated by the creation, or expansion, of that public:

Public discourse says not only: “Let a public exist,” but: “Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way.” It then goes out in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success—success being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world-understanding it articulates. Run it up the flagpole, and see who salutes. Put on a show, and see who shows up’ (*ibid*, p.82).

What was intended in independent film and video was not to simply cater for audience’s existing tastes, but to actively foster new social and socialist ideals (such as collectivity, solidarity, new ideas of gender relations), which were to be validated through the growth of those new publics. Reflecting on the work of the IFA in the context of feminist filmmaking, Annette Kuhn has noted that:

The culturally marginal status of all non-dominant forms of cinema often means that audiences for them do not already exist, but must in a sense also be produced. The IFA recognised the potentially active role in this context of constituencies, apart from the filmmakers themselves, concerned with the production of meaning of cinema. These included those involved in teaching or writing about film and others working with audiences, whose practice might inform the reception or reading of films (Kuhn, 1994, p.174).

As I have already examined in Chapter 1, this utopian impulse is especially evident within the discourses of political modernism in the tarrying with notions of realism and promotion of avant-garde style as a corollary for social contingency, change and development. One of the complaints about diverse forms of realism, naturalism and even empiricism was precisely its (perceived) inability to imagine social contingency. Thus, for example, Nicolas Garnham boldly asserts that the ‘aesthetic’ of naturalism ‘[...] rules out progress. If things are as they are, it is impossible to even contemplate showing them as they might be’ (Garnham, 1972, p.111); similarly, Willemen and Johnston asserted that the problem with *cinéma vérité* was that it claims ‘to capture the world as it really is’ (Johnston and Willemen, 1975, p.103), and thus failed to imagine a new world.

There were, however, different means of interpreting the agencies behind this radical process of social change. Was the agent of social and political change the film itself, the audience or the filmmaker? One significant position was that audiences would be developed, and created, through the production of new avant-garde texts. In a revealing interview by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen with Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen on *Penthesilea*, Wollen asserts an ideal viewer is part of a 'cadre' of interested cinemagoers, and who can understand the film as a densely conceived 'text'. As Wollen asserts:

One of the objects of the film, to my mind anyway, is to say that people should be prepared to make the same effort and approach a film in the same way as they would a book. It is a text, and just as when people read a book they are prepared to do further reading or they are prepared to encounter difficulties, so they should in a film. That is implicit in the transfer of the idea of reading. (Mulvey et al., 1974, p.131)

Here, the ideal audience was conceived of as a *reader*, a conception that D.N Rodowick has convincingly argued is built on the semiological heritage of Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and other critics involved in journals such as *Tel Quel* and *Cahiers du cinéma* (Rodowick, 1994). Within political modernism, the film is akin to a text both because it can be 'read', and also because the viewer is constructed, is 'hailed' by it in a process of subject formation (Althusser, 1971). The semiological framework, which was central to film discourses such as those that took place in *Screen* in the 1970s and 1980s, has since been undermined from a number of positions within film studies. In the 'Post-Theory' of Bordwell and Carroll, for example, the notion of the film-as-text is seen as unfounded in the realms of evidence (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996, p.18). From a quite different perspective, Gilles Deleuze writing in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1989), has argued that Metz's

conception of the film-text is an act of methodological ‘recklessness’, where the complex dynamic of images is forced into the model of spoken language (Deleuze, 1989, pp.25–43).

Such a position was, moreover, only part of the picture of political modernist discourse. In the above interview, Johnston and Willemsen probe Wollen, asking:

Isn't there a problem regarding the 'cadre' audience, as you put it? The work of reading required is very specialised and not at all widely available. In fact, people who at the moment are able to perform the reading work required, are, from the point of view of class politics, rather marginal. The best one could say is that they are politically progressive. (1974, pp.131–132)

Wollen responds that: ‘You can say that the audience for that kind of film is marginal, but the problem is not marginal. So you begin with the problem, and you hope that the audience will find it, and enjoy it’ (Mulvey et al., 1974, p.132). Wollen suggests that there should ideally be three main forms of film in the socialist struggle: theory films for a ‘cadre’ audience, agitational films for specific political campaigns, and propaganda films designed for the ‘mass’ audience, and that these forms should complement one another as part of the same struggle.<sup>24</sup> In Wollen’s conception, film culture would trickle down from top-to-bottom, with avant-garde filmmakers leading the way for a wider public engagement. Here, Wollen appears to be dodging a question that sits at the core of the practice of counter-cinema production: how is it that a radical, and thus a marginal, film culture engage with broader audiences than those of its immediate peers? Partly as an answer to this question, Johnston advocated for a cinema as a ‘social practice’. In ‘Notes on the Idea of an “Independent Cinema”’, an unpublished IFA paper distributed amongst members in 1976, Johnston more directly criticised Peter Wollen’s emphasis on the text and the ‘cadre’ audience in the 1974 *Penthesilea* interview (Johnston, 1976).

Instead, she asserts that new publics could be developed through creating a discursive cinema, in which the screening event is responsive to diverse and specific audiences.

Michael Warner argues that this generative process is rarely boldly and openly discussed because new publics must be shaped from existing populations, and few would consciously wish to be moulded into another's ideal social world: '[...] people do not commonly recognize themselves as virtual projections' (Warner, 2002, p.82). Nevertheless, Warner argues, publics are created precisely as the virtual projections of specific worldviews, whether through the bourgeois vision of a normative public built on liberal ideals, or of a counterpublic founded on the values of oppositional groups. However, it is the case that the project of political modernism did often set out the terms of this virtual projection. I have argued elsewhere that the social practice that Johnston and others within the IFA advanced was based on a Brechtian ideal of the audience as a synecdoche for a wider political body, which could be moulded and shaped as part of a voluntary process of social change brought about through the pedagogical ideals of the epic theatre and the *Lehrstück* (or learning play) (Perry, 2017). I shall return to Brecht's ideas of publics in the final section of this chapter; but for now it is important to note that the avant-garde took its role as an agent of social change in the generative process outlined by Warner as a specific aim.

However, as Johnston's question about 'class politics' reveals, sitting barely below the surface of this debate about the relation between avant-gardes and its publics is the problem of class, taste and privilege. It should be noted that for all the very real social commitments of independent filmmakers, many were middle or upper-middle

class: Peter Wollen, Laura Mulvey, Marc Karlin, Humphrey Trevelyan, Jonathan Curling, Alan Hayling, and others, attended private schools or attended Oxbridge colleges.<sup>25</sup> It is useful here to recall Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the class-based underpinning of avant-garde art and its desire to 'rupture' with the bourgeoisie (Bourdieu, 1996, pp.57–60), leading to both an identification with the non-commercial status of the aristocracy, and a frequent alignment with excluded social groups such as the revolutionary proletariat. Hidden within the conception of an 'ideal reader' and a 'cadre' audience, then, appears to be a class position that regards itself as a principal catalyst of social change. Of course, there were within the IFA diverse class backgrounds and ways of working with film in terms of production, distribution and exhibition. Yet (as Bourdieu's text suggests) a radical social commitment may not in itself cancel out asymmetric class relations (a middle- or upper-class filmmaker may situate him/herself as an ethnographer, community worker or activist). On the other hand, there is no simple correspondence here between the class position of upper- or middle-class filmmakers and working-class audiences. While no formal analysis of audiences for independent work of this period was produced in the 1970s, anecdotal reports suggest that workers appreciated films by London Women's Film Group (*Fakenham Occupation*, 1972), as well as the early screenings of Cinema Action, while films by Newsreel Collective were used as part of specific union campaigns.<sup>26</sup> This appreciation may, perhaps, be explained by the fact that these viewers were often either identical with the film's subject or shared class, gender, sexuality, or socio-political sympathies, or that they simply appreciated solidarity. Indeed, even avant-garde forms might be acceptable to working class audiences, with reports suggesting that screenings of *Nightcleaners* were received well by the cleaners themselves; by contrast, many in the Women's Movement were initially unhappy with the film with some activists viewing it as an

indulgent and belated experiment rather than a useful tool.<sup>27</sup> Certainly, it is often intellectuals who have argued against the use of experimental works to non-film-specialist audiences, with arguments in the 1970s and 1980s often echoing the Brecht-Lukács debates of the 1930s, of the battle between realism and modernism over the question of audiences and popular reception (Brecht, 1974; Adorno et al., 2007) (See Chapter 1).<sup>28</sup>

The reference to class here also points towards the confidence and the ability of independent makers and activists to speak the language of the establishment that they opposed. A number of radical independent filmmakers were clearly able to move between the opposition and the establishment with relative ease: notably, Cambridge-educated Alan Hayling moved from being a member of Newsreel Collective to taking a job on a production line at a Ford factory in Langley, to working as Channel 4's commissioning editor, and briefly, the BBC's Head of Documentaries.<sup>29</sup> This ability to move between oppositional and establishment rhetorics is also quite evident in the IFA's ability to speak the language of nationalist arts patronage when arguing for independent film as a 'cultural asset to the nation as a whole' (IFA, 1978b, para.12). To return to the IFA's argument in the 'Future of the British Film Industry', and the group's appeal to the Annan Committee, it is clear that the arrangements it proposed would potentially benefit its own members. However, the IFA repeatedly focussed on its vitality to a larger public, in order to chime with the increased governmental focus on racial/ethnic and Scottish or Welsh national sympathies that had been discussed as part of Annan's investigations. In their appeals to Annan, the IFA was to use key words such as 'diversity' that at once referenced the range of film style and politics of oppositional practice, as well as the rather different concerns of the Annan committee. For

example, in the document 'Channel 4 and Independence' (1979), the IFA argued for 'diversity' as meaning 'not just variety but a determination to welcome the controversial, the committed and the unfamiliar, beyond the dead grip of the consensus' (IFA, 1979, p.3)

Because of this evident self-advocacy, some commentators have argued that the IFA was merely a partisan group opportunistically jumping on the bandwagon of structural changes within the broadcasting and television industries (Darlow, 2004, p.162; Potter, 2008, p.80). Michael Darlow, for example, describes the IFA as merely a 'lobby group', which although suspicious of television saw it as 'a useful outlet for their work and a source of funds' (Darlow, 2004, p.162).<sup>30</sup> This may be true in one sense: some IFA members appear to have felt that television was a lowly medium compared to the 'art' of cinema, and that its principal appeal was as a funding stream for works whose outlet would remain in cinemas and alternative screening venues.<sup>31</sup> However, it is also clear that the IFA was no different in its self-serving demands for state sponsorship than other groups seeking to change the structures of television broadcasting in the 1970s, including the Association of Independent Producers (AIP), and the various ITV networks, all of who appeared to champion their own agenda in appeals to the Annan Committee.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, it is also clear that processes of deregulation were increasingly pitting independent makers against one another in the scrabble for funds. Reflecting on almost ten years of IFA activity in 1983, Simon Blanchard and Sylvia Harvey argued that the IFA had failed to resolve conflicts between individualism and collective goals, arguing for the need for the independent film- and video-makers to mobilize '[...] support for the principles of public, collective and democratic provision as



against the principles of independence and the free market' (Blanchard and Harvey, 1983). Like other activist groups, the IFA was complex, being made up not only of social ideals, but also of careerists with sharp elbows.

It is nevertheless also clear that the self-serving aspects of an appeal for state funding were related to wider socialist worldviews, to the prioritizing of social value over monetarist ones. It was precisely through the development of the independent sector that the IFA conceived that society as a whole might be pushed and developed towards a socialist future. In a text that looked forward to a time when independents might have access to television, the group's May 1976 *Newsletter* asserted: 'The aim is not to use the air-time as a simple showcase, but as an opportunity for independents to enter into a dialogue with a wider public' (IFA, 1976b). This should not be taken as disingenuous, for the political beliefs of independent filmmakers were, as outlined earlier, part of an attempt to use culture as an agent for social change. More importantly, Darlow's suggestion that there might be a non-partisan position in representing the public is itself deeply problematic. Public sphere theorists such as Warner and Nancy Fraser argue that bias is neither avoidable nor undesirable in public speech and discourse, and that to argue for such is to hide behind a normative ideal of rational-critical (bourgeois) locution. Instead, bias should be admitted and foregrounded to avoid normative social arguments and phrases ('the public', or the 'national interest') that exclude others along the lines of class, race, or gender (Fraser, 1993; Warner, 2002). While all publics are necessarily sectarian as Fraser and Warner have asserted, I shall examine in the next section how groups negotiated the ideals of the nation-state as it sought funding from institutions such as the British Film Institute and the Arts Council.

## **Representing the Nation: Regional Publics and State Funding**

This process of advocacy was a vital aspect of counterpublic struggle in the 1970s, and it is useful here to situate the IFA's campaigns within the broader institutional struggles in Britain during this period. The IFA was just one of a number of Left groups that was able to tap into an expansion of state and regional support for the arts in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, the 1970s saw the state increasingly recognise the value of avant-garde groups (Moore-Gilbert, 1993), resulting in a flowering of support for independent film and video practices. The Arts Council's Experimental Projects Committee was set up in 1971, and the Community Arts Committee was set up in 1975, and by the early 1970s, the Council was funding experimental films such as David Hall's *Vertical* (1969) and Derek Boshier's *Link* (1970) (Curtis, 2006, p.66). The Arts Council's Artist's Film Subcommittee (1972–1999) also subtended vital currents in artists' film practice during this period, while the BFI supported independent film from the 1950s onwards (Curtis, 2006, p.75).<sup>33</sup> The BFI's Experimental Film Fund had been founded in 1952, and for the two decades of its existence would only provide a 'trickle of funding' (Curtis, 2006, p.62) based on 'a total budget hardly sufficient to produce a feature film trailer in the commercial sector' (Dupin, 2012, p.199). The Fund was re-launched in 1966 as the BFI Production Board, and awarded a major funding injection of £75,000 in 1972 (Dupin, 2012, p.200), allowing it to develop larger-budget films, such as Bill Douglas's *My Childhood* (1972) and Brownlow and Mollo's *Winstanley* (1975). Thus, the IFA's activities in seeking new funding streams were partly predicated on already existing pools of money (however limited) and, more vitally, an existing notion of the worthiness of arts funding for alternative arts practices.

Art and cultural historians such as Stuart Laing and John Walker have observed that along with relative increases in state support for such practices, the remnants of the late 1960s counterculture underwent profound structural changes in the 1970s, making ‘a series of hard-headed claims upon the resources and objectives of the established cultural institutions’ (Laing, 1993, p.39).<sup>34</sup> The IFA was thus only one of a number of organisation that developed in the 1970s along national and regional lines: these included the Independent Theatre Council, the Theatre Writers Union, the Women’s Art History Collective, the Association of Video Workers, and the Artists’ Union. In 1974 the Production Board established a small equipment fund, giving awards to CATS & Graft On (John ‘Hoppy’ Hopkins and Sue Hall), the Berwick Street Film Collective, London Women’s Film Group, Liberation Films, Cinema Action and others (Curtis, 2006, p.75); in 1975, the Production Board awarded the London Filmmakers’ Co-op its first significant grant, a sum of £16,000 (Mazière, n.d.). A number of British independent works by radical film collectives were funded from 1974 to 1975, including works by Cinema Action, Berwick Street Film Collective, London Women’s Film Group, and Newsreel. Peter Sainsbury became Head of Production in 1975, and he tapped into his own social network of independent filmmakers, with funds channelled to Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey’s *Riddles of the Sphinx*, amongst other works. By 1979 the Board had increased its funds to £480,000 – a major boost that allowed it to increase its distribution activity and seek out opportunities for broadcasting sales and co-productions (Dupin, 2012, p.208); BFI/Channel 4 co-production agreements were ironed out in 1981 (Dupin, 2012, p.209). These increases were partly brought about by activities and involvement of the IFA: notably with the involvement of key members of the Association such as Malcolm Le Grice with the BFI Production Board since the

early 1970s. By the late 1970s, the IFA had established strong ties with the Production Board which helped pave a way to a future involvement with television. In the late 1970s, Production Board members included two IFA nominees, Margaret Dickinson and Alan Fountain, who were appointed to advise on selecting applications for film funding. In 1979, Jeremy Isaacs became Chair of the Production Board and the following year he also became the Chief Executive at Channel 4. Isaacs quickly appointed one of these IFA members – Alan Fountain – as the Senior Commissioning Editor of the Channel's newly created Independent Film and Video Department. There was thus a continuity of personnel between the independent film of the 1970s and the television of the 1980s.

The expansion of regional arts funding also had a profound impact on independent film, with branches of the IFA flourishing across the UK. In February 1975, the Festival of Independent British Cinema was staged at the Arnolfini in Bristol, with financial support from one of the Regional Arts Associations (South West Arts), along with further funds directly from the Arts Council and the BFI helping to cover filmmakers' travel costs and the staging of the event. The IFA organised its third general meeting to coincide with the Festival (IFA, 1975a), where it was agreed that the group should lobby for an expansion into the regions, with the South-West-based artist-filmmaker Mike Leggett placed in charge of liaising with the BFI Regional Board (Leggett was also involved in producing the *IFA Regional Digest*, an occasional newsletter for IFA members outside London). As a national organisation, the IFA drew on the experience of groups such as Independent Cinema West (established in 1973, a year before the IFA) in Bristol, and Amber Films in Newcastle (founded 1969). By late 1975, the IFA had twenty-two members outside London (and over eighty based within the capital), including Dave Hopkins

of ICW, Rod Stoneman in Bath and Murray Martin of Amber Films. Soon, there were independent cinema groups in Sheffield (Sheffield Film Co-Op), Leeds (Leeds Animation Workshop), Northern Ireland (Derry Film and Video) and Wales (Chapter Video Workshop), while in 1975 Margaret Tait (in Scotland) is also listed as an IFA member ('IFA Regional Digest', 1975).

The IFA's regional development and nationwide coverage was vital to its public mandate in negotiations with the BBC, the BFI and Annan. Only by representing a cross-section of the nation of independent filmmakers could the IFA hope to be seen as at once diverse and worthy of the attention of government policy centred on nationwide policy making. This does not mean that the IFA's appeals were necessarily successful. In the paper 'The Future of the British Film Industry', the IFA argued that funding for the British film industry should be withdrawn from the duopoly of Rank and EMI, and redistributed towards the BFI Production Board, the Art Council Artists' Film Panel and the Regional Arts Associations, which were '[...] unique in devoting funds to building workshop facilities, for buying equipment, and for staff salaries to operate these units' (IFA, 1978b). These proposals, which flew in the face of the government's support for a more mainstream cinema were quietly ignored by parliament.

The IFA's counterpublic ambitions were also at loggerheads with the BFI Regional Department's ambitions to establish a number of Regional Film Theatres (RFTs) across the country, which the IFA viewed as out-dated, ill-conceived and culturally regressive attempts to foist a hopelessly bourgeois European art-house scene into the English regions. A 1974 IFA Newsletter sardonically commented that the RFT scheme was a ploy to create a '[...] a small number of bouncing baby BFIs [...]

inflicted on major connurbations [sic]' ('Minutes of General Meeting', 1975). In turn, the Head of Regional Board Alan Knowles was staunchly opposed to the aspirations of radical Left filmmakers (Nowell-Smith and Dupin, 2012, pp.166, 172), and simply ignored a number of letters from Independent Cinema West and IFA appealing for funds. Some of the exasperation of this encounter, cut with a good dose of acerbic humour, is evident in an 'IFA Regional Digest' from 1975:

It may be recalled from the last issue [of the IFA Regional Digest] that the Bloody Film Institute had not replied to a request made in March [1975] for funds; the request was detailed and laid out along the lines suggested by the head of the Regional Department, Alan Knowles; no reply of any kind has been received from him not even acknowledgement of the original letter [...] the fact that the Institute appears to me as ever to be in a state of utter chaos fighting hard to prevent in this financial year an embarresment [sic] even greater than that which befell them at the end of the last one does not improve any feelings of confidence that may have existed at any time in the past in the relationship that film-makers have had with that body, (or as it may well be soon, that corpse .... ). ('IFA Regional Digest', 1975, ellipsis in original)

Like other constitutive visions of potential publics, the BFI Regional Department felt that '[...] given a proper education and a choice, the British people would opt to watch quality films' (Porter, 2010, p.59), a process that echoes my earlier description of the IFA's activities in both locating and generating publics. However, the BFI's vision of 'quality' was markedly different to the independent's vision of film as a process of struggle and resistance against ideology.<sup>35</sup> If the Regional Department was at odds with the IFA, it nevertheless allocated over fifteen per cent of its regional funds annually to the London Filmmakers Co-op between 1976 and 1980 (Porter, 2010, p.64), perhaps indicating a taste for films more familiarly described of as 'art' and a bourgeois refusal to perceive the political meaning of materialist film practices. Meanwhile, by 1977 independent filmmakers could much more readily tap

into Arts Council funding, notably through the Filmmakers on Tour scheme (1976-89), which funded filmmakers to travel and show works across the country. With access to such funds, IFA member Mike Leggett organised the first South West Independent Film Tours (1977), a 'mini regional tour' for films by Berwick Street Film Collective, Laura Mulvey, Tony Sinden and Margaret Tait (Knight and Thomas, 2011, p.151). The 1978 tour was organised by Rod Stoneman (an IFA member and future Channel 4 Commissioning Editor for Independent Film and Video) with funding from the Regional Arts Association. Stoneman's programme included *Rapunzel Let Down Your Hair* (1978, Susan Shapiro/Esther Ronay/Francine Winham), *Hogarth* (1976, Ed Bennett), *Justine* (1976, Film Work Group), '36-'77 (1978, Berwick Street Film Collective) and works by Guy Sherwin and Stan Brakhage, amongst others.

These regional and national activities would play an important role in the 1980s with the establishment of Channel 4. The Workshop Agreement, which set up the terms within which independent filmmakers could make works for television companies below union rates, was negotiated between key IFA members including Marc Karlin and Murray Martin, and representatives of the ACTT union. Also involved in the agreement was the BFI Production Board, Channel 4, and the Regional Arts Associations. As a result of these negotiations, the BFI agreed to establish a fund of around £200,000 a year taken directly from the Production Board's budget to feed a Regional Production Fund '[...] under the authority of a committee whose members were chosen from key organisations in the independent sector', including the IFA (Dupin, 2012, p.210). Addressing itself to ideals of diverse national publics, the IFA was highly successful in petitioning legislative bodies and adapting to their rhetoric of regionalism and citizenship. While all publics are necessarily sectarian as

Fraser and Warner have asserted, it is necessary for such groups to operate within the ideals of the nation state when they seek to petition its institutions for funding. The IFA was only unable to pursue these convergences of interest in the late 1980s, when the valuation of public value in broadcasting, film and the arts were eroded by monetarist ideals as embodied in the Boyden Southwood/Comedia report of 1988, which presaged the loss of funding for the IFA (by then, the IFVPA) in 1990.

### **Collective Bodies and Reading Publics**

So far, the public sphere theory that has helped frame this chapter have centred on ideas of a 'reading public' outlined by Kant, developed by Habermas, and carried on in a different form by Fraser and Warner.<sup>36</sup> As I have outlined, distributive forms of publicity were vital to the IFA's capacity to broaden its public and to influence state bodies and representatives, from Annan to the BFI and Arts Council. Nevertheless, this conception of a public developed through the circulation of texts flies in the face of the discourses of the 1970s that frequently understood critical publics in spatial terms – that is, of publics that gather on the street in protest or celebration, in political assembly halls and meetings, and as groups in the theatre or the cinema. Notions of collectivity, of people gathering together in a space, are fundamental to many of the diverse practices of avant-garde film art, documentary, and independent film and video. Indeed, spatialized conceptions of production, reception and film discourse have long been vital to the self-perception and ethics of oppositional and countercultural filmmaking. These spatialized forms of collectivity are fundamental to many counterpublics, often intertwining with media representations of those collective gatherings. Recently, for example, this can be seen in events as diverse as the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement, with mass



gatherings in city squares and streets that are quickly reproduced in social media, television and newspapers. In such situations, Rosalind Morris notes:

The crowd calls in the name of a public that it appears to incarnate but that exceeds it both temporally and spatially. The crowd appropriates a material place of definitive parameters, while circuiting its discourse through the dematerializing space of the global media. (Morris, 2013)

Depictions of gatherings in alternative spaces were also important in independent film and video. In films by Cinema Action, London Women's Film Group and Newsreel Collective audiences could watch a mirror of their own mass actions: street rallies, union meetings and picket lines, and voice their own opinions on the ways events had been represented. Here, the cinematic experience might be understood as 'an encounter of the mass with itself' and an image of 'project of collective becoming' (Blom, 2011, p.148). Certainly, this notion of the identification of the mass audience with the mass spectacle of crowds and orchestrated bodies has a long history, notably in Kracauer's 1927 essay on the 'Mass Ornament' (Kracauer, 1995). Moreover, in the social practice of cinema, the ideal viewing condition was often construed as the participatory climate of the political agora. Filmmakers would ideally be present at screenings, and assembled audiences were encouraged to ask questions in post-screening debates. Alternative screening venues both offered opportunities for encountering independent and avant-garde film, and also functioned as spaces for social discourse that allegorize the rituals: here, viewers were revolutionaries or citizens. In an article in the IFA Newsletter in 1976, a reflection on the importance of the Other Cinema's Charlotte Street screening theatre hailed the importance of the venue's clubroom:

A cinema with a clubroom offers the advantages not only of showings in a cinema – giving the technical quality that the films deserve, but also the advantages of showings at meetings – offering the chance to discuss and argue back. (IFA, 1976c)

Spatial practices thus can be seen to emphasise an ideal of ‘cinematic sociality’ in the collective reception of film (Blom, 2011, p.139). Furthermore, spatial co-presence of audience and image was vital to the materialist ethics of encounter in avant-garde film and video. Through the use of black leader or rephotography (as in *Nightcleaners*), viewers’ attention could be drawn towards the materiality of the film experience. By intervening live in the projection process, by stitching (Annabel Nicolson’s *Reel Time*, 1973), standing mid-beam (Le Grice’s *Horror Film 1*, 1971), or rupturing the screen itself (Guy Sherwin’s *Paper Landscape*, 1975), filmmakers could draw viewers’ attention to the materiality of film or the relation between viewer and screen (Le Grice, 1972, 1977). A significant theme of expanded cinema and video installation addressed the audience’s mobility within a screening or exhibition space: an ambulatory form of agency that contrasted the viewer’s freedom within space with the filmic spectacle’s apparently docility as an immobile viewer (Baudry, 1974). These ideals of agency are open to critique, for as numerous commentators have asserted, a mobile audience is not necessarily a thinking one, and a sitting viewer is by no means intellectually supine.<sup>37</sup>

Independent film and video’s use of spatial practice was also pragmatic: film- and video-makers needed access to production equipment and places of exhibition. Organisations such as London Film-makers Co-op, Cinema Action and Lucia Films, provided facilities for filmmakers to meet, share skills and equipment outside of the frameworks of commercial film production. These systems of resource pooling and integrated practice relied on the physical co-presence of makers and equipment. A

number of independent organisations were housed in neighbouring streets or even the same buildings in London's Soho: in the mid-1970s, the IFA, Other Cinema and the headquarters of *Afterimage* were located at 12-13 Little Newport Street; and in the 1980s the IFA, Other Cinema and London Video Arts shared an address at 79 Wardour Street. Nearby were the BFI headquarters (Dean Street), Lusia Films and London Women's Film Group (Earlham Street), ACTT (Soho Square), Newsreel Collective (Denmark Street), and SEFT (Old Compton Street). At the LFMC shared facilities allowed filmmakers to grasp the means of production and engage in artisanal forms of film processing. Collective practices were also widespread, and members of the LWFG swapped technical roles to learn new skills. Film- and video-makers worked with communities to reflect on social issues in processes that recalled the consciousness-raising groups of the Women's Liberation Movement (See my discussion of *Song of the Shirt* in Chapter 2 of this thesis).

The disparity between many independent filmmakers' own conception of their public role as situated within a community of viewers who are known and physically co-present with one-another, and the notion of a reading public that my argument has hitherto drawn from is at first glance contradictory. Indeed, this division reveals deep divergences between public sphere theory and traditions of critical theory (Perry, 2017). For Kant, Habermas, Negt and Kluge, Fraser and Warner, a public is defined by the communicative possibilities of letter writing, publishing and reading. By contrast, a classical conception of an assembly of publics in the *polis* and *agora* was developed in the writing of Bertolt Brecht, Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt. While Brecht and Benjamin did develop theories of distributive forms of media (Brecht in his radio theory, and Benjamin on mechanisms of photographic reproduction), both retained a sense of politics as

rooted in space.<sup>38</sup> These ideas became highly influential within theories and practices of independent film in the 1970s and 1980s, notably through the translation of key texts by Brecht and Benjamin in *Screen* and *New Left Review*, and the widespread influence of the former on filmmakers from Godard to Gidal.<sup>39</sup> Brecht's theatre practice is perhaps the most paradigmatic antecedent: he not only authored plays as part of collectives of thinkers and historians, he also wrote key theoretical reflections on his work. Brecht's friend and interlocutor Benjamin outlined the case for the collective most clearly when described the Brechtian stage as a 'public platform' (Benjamin and Mitchell, 1998, p.1):

For its public, the stage is no longer 'the planks which signify the world' (in other words, a magic circle), but a convenient public exhibition area. For its stage, the public is no longer a collection of hypnotized test subjects, but an assembly of interested persons whose demands it must satisfy. For its text, the performance is no longer a virtuoso interpretation, but its rigorous control. For its performance, the text is no longer a basis of that performance, but a grid on which, in the form of new formulations, the gains of that performance are marked. For its actor, the producer no longer gives him instructions about effects, but theses for comment. For its producer, the actor is no longer a mime who must embody a role, but a functionary who has to make an inventory of it. (Benjamin and Mitchell, 1998, p.2)

It was from these traditions that the independent filmmakers of the 1970s and 1980s drew an account of the possibility of a new form of the 'collective production of art works' (Brewster, 1975, p.31). In 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', Benjamin asserts that it was at the barricades of the 1871 Commune, which 'stretches across the great boulevards, often reaching a height of two stories' (Benjamin, 2002, p.12), that a new revolutionary proletarian social consciousness was born. It was in the spatialized setting of urban resistance, union meetings, and political rallies that a model for social change was found: Brecht described his

*Lehrstück* as a ‘collective political meeting’ (Weber and Heinen, 1980, p.34); and, in ‘The Author as Producer’, Benjamin writes that the revolutionary socialist ideal should be the transformation of plays and even musical concerts into ‘a political meeting’ (Benjamin, 1970). Less frequently referenced, but important for the present account of the agency of spatial publics, is Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1958), where she revisits an array of classical texts to argue that to be human is to have a sense of belonging to a mass, to a community of embodied others who work and labour, who gather together to speak and be heard (Arendt, 1998, pp.22-23). These are theories of action and ethics, in which interpersonal discourse takes place within a circumscribed space, and which human action and agency is evidenced through speech and conversation, rather than through distributive forms of writing (as in the Kantian model).

This understanding of the ethical force of collectivity was problematized early on, and the relations between architectural or urban space, the masses, and group and individual agency has been a subject of ongoing debate. For if public space was potentially liberatory, it was also incessantly dictated by capitalism (in the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s, by Nazism). Indeed, Benjamin and Kracauer’s notion of a mass public took such commercialised spaces seriously, with the street, arcade, world’s fair and the cinema as paradigms for an ambivalent spatially constituted commonality of experience. Benjamin’s primary examples of public spaces are paradoxically also private ones: shopping arcades and the world’s fairs of the nineteenth century. Indeed, for Kracauer, the cinema experience was an ambivalent collective immersion in capitalist rationalisation, potentially liberatory as well as potentially coercive.<sup>40</sup> For Benjamin, the herald of modernity is Baudelaire, the poet-allegorist whose gaze is that of an ‘alienated man’ (Benjamin, 2002, p.10). Moreover,

where Benjamin and Kracauer were ambivalent about collectivity, Adorno was positively hostile to a notion of a Jungian ‘archaic collective ego’ (Adorno et al., 2007, p.113).<sup>41</sup> By the 1970s, writers such as Johnston and Willemsen, Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe drew from Althusserian and Lacanian notions of the subject to develop critiques of straightforwardly utopian ideals of collectivity (see Chapter 2 for more on this idea in relation to historical accounts of class and nation). More recently, Peter Osborne has argued that the independent film and video culture of the 1970s and 1980s retained a lingering concept of ‘[...] political collectives as bodies, as collective bodies in Euclidian space’, where ‘[t]he cinematic audience becomes metonymic for the mass demonstration, which is itself metonymic for a class collective’. For Osborne, this notion was already outmoded in the 1970s, precisely because the media sphere had already become ‘geographically diffuse’ through the decentring and atomizing forces of television and video (Osborne, 2013, p.40).

Osborne’s polemical critique nevertheless fails to point out that independent film and video’s investment in spatial gatherings were not merely the result of a conceptual misunderstanding of the media; rather, by creating new alternative spaces for viewing film and video, these were pragmatic responses to the very real lack of access to television and cinema spaces outlined earlier in this chapter.<sup>42</sup> Spatialised collectivity formed the essential gravity around which independent and avant-garde film developed as a social practice and a coming-together of peers. At the same time, as I have already outlined, independent film and video put extensive energies into distributive media including film and video, broadcast television, and the printed word. Moreover, cultures of cinema and art, whether it is the boisterousness of early cinema audiences (Hansen, 1994) or the shared ‘quiet

attentiveness' of other audiences (Hanich, 2014), cannot be conceived of as exclusively spatial. Moving image cultures, like Habermas's 'bourgeois public', are dependant on the circulation of texts, the sharing of ideas in print (and today online). Film and exhibitions are publicised and reviewed; these texts are circulated and read, very often before the viewer sees a film or visits an exhibition. Writing underpins these cultures of discourse and kinship: academic theory, popular histories, biographies of artists and movie stars, as well as film and arts policies, white papers, and parliamentary bills. By looking at the interrelation between the IFA's publishing activities and film exhibition practices together, it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the dynamics involved in the movement from oppositional counterculture rooted in alternative spatial publics, to a counterpublic that set out to change the mainstream of British film and television through the use of media including film, video and print publications.

## **Conclusion**

Recent histories of the moving image in Britain have generally failed to recognise these complex interactions between distributive media and spaces in which films and videos are watched. The assumption that certain spaces such as the cinema are *de facto* public, and that others such as the domestic space of television are inherently private, has limited discourses about the uses of television as a site of counterpublic activism. For example, in their recent history of filmmakers' and artists' engagement with Channel 4 in the 1980s, Julia Knight and Peter Thomas assert that the experience of watching films on television lacks the collective quality of screenings in a cinema theatre, gallery or meeting-place:

While watching television is not necessarily a solitary pastime, it does not replicate the communal activity of a group or public screening. 16 mm might have been an inflexible medium but that very inflexibility usually meant films were watched by groups of people who came together specifically for the purpose. This in turn opens up the possibility of discussion – to help promote not only greater understanding of the films themselves or the issues they addressed, but also in some cases social change. (Knight and Thomas, 2011, p.124)

Here, the notion of ‘public’ remains spatial, with very little recognition of the role of the ‘reading public’ of oppositional practice. Television is implicitly understood here as not-public, as a private, ‘solitary pastime’ viewed in the home, away from the agora of the cinema or screening room. This understanding of a public/private dichotomy delineated by *place* masks a series of interpenetrating fields of ownership, interest and accessibility. Arendt has pointed out that, in the modern state, the maintenance and care of private property, of private capital, is a fact of public interest (Arendt, 1998, p.68), and Warner has asserted that the contemporary world is striated with organisations and objects that are public and private, depending on how they are framed (Warner, 2002). To illustrate this, we might think of how a privately owned art museum may legitimise itself as having a public function; how a privately owned cinema may show films to a paying public; or how a private company might have public stocks, or undertake ‘public sector’ work. Similarly, television is at once private and public, depending on the frame of reference: it is situated within an individual’s home (and the broadcaster may be a private company), but it receives news reports, dramas and advertisements addressed to diverse, complex, multifarious audiences. Moreover, such a confusion may have political consequences that a careful critical analysis should steer clear of: Fraser has argued that untheorised uses of the term ‘public’ as ‘that which lies outside the home’ by some feminists have undercut the fundamental argument that ‘the personal is political’, that what takes place in the home can be of public importance



(Fraser, 1993, p.110). By equating the 'private' with the home, the politics and subjectivity of domestic labour is in danger of being sequestered from public discourse and national legislature. This also does not explain Knight and Thomas's own extensive and enormously useful research in creating The Film & Video Distribution Database, a large open-access archive of scans of publicity material and correspondence on artists' film and video in Britain.<sup>43</sup>

A spatial account also does not explain how a film screening within a limited spatial setting may effect broader 'social change' beyond the gathering of co-present interlocutors. Fraser and Warner have both pointed towards the need for counterpublics to find means of influencing sovereign power by negotiating changes at the state level; yet the notion of spatialized collectivity fails to fully account for this need. Certainly, diverse audiences for 16mm film and alternative video may already hold many of the political views espoused during individual screening, and may partake in larger social movements advocating for social change; this was the intention of screenings by groups such as Cinema Action or the London Women's Film Group when they presented films at union meetings, factories, or gatherings of the intellectual Left. What such screenings are much less likely to do, however, is to perform as publics or counterpublics: to win over those unknown viewers who exist outside the ambit of these various Left social groups, and to petition and change social norms through legislative and juridical means. In the case of an analysis of the IFA, a group formed of smaller units distributed across the regions of the UK, an overly idealised concept of spatial collectivity fails to account for the practical difficulties of association, co-operating and working with others.

In writing a history of the practices of art and film in this period, it would be as unproductive to dismiss the close communality offered by workshops, film screenings and live debate as it would be to ignore their print and distributive functions. Many, but not all, film and art cultures depend on physical co-presence to generate a sense of community and kinship. Without the proximal cultures of smaller counterpublics, there would be little of the gravity for the orbit and circulation of print and film literature; it may thus be that smaller counterpublics very often need groups to collect together in space in order to thrive. These cultures have extraordinary rich interpersonal, community-binding, phenomenological and affective qualities. If I have focussed in this chapter on the relationship between independent film and video and ideas of distributive 'reading publics' through my study of the IFA, it is in order to examine the ways in which minor cultural groups such as independent film and video-makers might attempt to effect change within a modern nation state, and not only to examine them as discrete cultural forms. Independent filmmakers constituted themselves as a counterpublic, and they did so not only through their own conception of spatial collectivity, but also through the production and circulation of texts including newsletters, articles, journals, films, videos and television programmes. Spatial gatherings provided havens to nurture a culture that desired sociopolitical change. However, it is precisely the transference from the spatial to the discursive notion of publicity that allowed the IFA to communicate regularly to its members and to influence social and cultural policy within the arenas of broadcasting and television.

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<sup>1</sup> Others including Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen would join the IFA in subsequent meetings.

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<sup>2</sup> These points are detailed in the Minutes of the IFA's first meeting. ('Minutes of the First General Meeting', 1974)

<sup>3</sup> According to the later paper 'Independent Film-making in the '70s' (1976), the BBC eventually scaled down the ambition to broadcast a whole series of independent films and instead produced a single programme hosted by Melvyn Bragg that consisted of clips lasting between thirty seconds and five minutes, and which censored most of the films submitted.

<sup>4</sup> The IFA delegation to the Committee was led initially by Le Grice and later included Gidal, Margaret Dickinson, Nick-Hart-Williams and Diane Tammes.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Darlow has detailed how the Annan Committee became a site of ideological battle between commercial ITV lobbyists keen to establish a new commercial channel ('ITV 3') and those who advocated for the development of a new channel free from both the influence of the BBC and the IBA (the Independent Broadcasting Authority, which oversaw the ITV channels) (Darlow, 2004, p.75).

<sup>6</sup> These challenges were part of a broader historical flux that had taken place on the Left since the 1950s, with new oppositional groups and ideas replacing allegiances towards the Communist Party following the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 (for example, E. P. Thompson left the Communist Party following the invasion of Hungary). These changes were not restricted only to those on the Left: a sense of a unitary British 'people' was also increasingly strained with rising nationalism in Scotland and Wales, and an increasingly fraught situation in Northern Ireland. According to Tom Nairn, Britain itself was breaking apart into its constituent geographical parts as a 'civic nationalist' backlash against the forces of English imperialism (Nairn, 2015). At the international level, Britain's sovereign borders appeared increasingly enmeshed within a new transnational sphere with its accession to the European Economic Community in 1973, and the rise and consolidation of multinationals able to sidestep and even steer national-sovereign powers. Against this evolving backdrop, the notion that there existed a singular national 'public' appeared to many, on both the Left and the Right, to be increasingly untenable. With the emergence of the New Right and Thatcherism, there was a move away from the 'Butskellism' of the post-war era to one of socio-political fragmentation. Butskellism is portmanteau word describing the consensus politics centred on the Welfare state that developed in the 1950s in the UK: the term is a fusion of the names of two key politicians Rab Butler (the Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Hugh Gaitskell (the leader of the Labour party in the 1950s).

<sup>7</sup> Smith was a former BBC editor who was also a key figure advising the Annan Committee, as well as the Director of the BFI from 1979 to 1988.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 2 of this thesis for a discussion of these critiques of collective identity, especially as they emerged in the writing of Stephen Heath, Claire Johnston and Colin MacCabe (in the 1970s), and Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer (in the 1980s).

<sup>9</sup> Ann Guedes of Cinema Action was involved in the ORTF (Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française) broadcasters' strikes in Paris in 1968, and was ejected from the country for her activities (Dickinson, 1999, p.268). Members of the Newsreel Collective in 1974 showed their films at union meetings and other events often to support specific social campaigns (*An Egg is not a Chicken* (1975) lent support to the National Abortion Campaign; *Stand Together – Grunwicks* (1977) was made in support of the picketing workers at the Grunwick Photo Processing Plant in Willesden).

<sup>10</sup> See: Anon (1971) *MASS MEDIA COMMUNICATION*. [online]. Available from: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1971/feb/03/mass-media-communication-1> (Accessed 21 March 2015).

<sup>11</sup> See: Briggs, A. (1995) *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V: Competition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>12</sup> The group was also involved in East London Big Flame. Alan Hayling worked at the BBC before helping found Newsreel Collective; he subsequently became Commissioning Editor for Documentaries at Channel 4, and in the 1990s was head of documentaries at the BBC (Silver, 2006). Pascoe MacFarlane, another member of Big Flame and Newsreel, also previously worked at the BBC (MacFarlane, n.d.). Linda Dove worked at the BBC and was

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a member of Newsreel Collective and the London Women's Film Group (Campbell, 2001). The group produced a number of pamphlets, such as the *Gas Workers Leaflet* (1973), which was distributed to striking gas workers and offered a point-by-point refutation of the factual accuracy of media reports of the strike (Media Workers Group, 1973a). Other members included Paul Morrison, Noreen MacDowell and Andy Metcalf.

<sup>13</sup> The *TV Handbook* lists specific cases of television news and current affairs programmes that had been made directly against the interests of workers: in 1971, striking Dagenham Ford workers demonstrated outside BBC studios against their misrepresentation on the news; tenants on rent-strike in Glasgow, Liverpool, London and Manchester in 1972 had been ignored by the media; and – the handbook argues – women, black people and the Irish are routinely stereotyped or victimised by television. Also included is useful information for media campaigners: the names, personal addresses and phone numbers of key industry figures, as well as sketches and maps of the headquarters of the BBC and the ITV company headquarters.

<sup>14</sup> The documentary *Warhol* was also subject to censorship: produced for ATV by photographer David Bailey, it was scheduled for broadcast in January 1973 but was withdrawn due to complaints about possible offence to 'public decency' (Walker, 1993, p.104). It was subsequently cleared for broadcast in February, but ACTT technicians blacked out the broadcast in protest against the IBA's censorship of the *World in Action* programme on Poulson.

<sup>15</sup> The notion of the BBC as a 'gatekeeper' was a common one in the 1970s and 1980s (Hood, 1972; Ellis, 1982, p.282; Hood and Tabary-Peterssen, 1997, pp.8–10; Calvert et al., 2007, p.10). However, it is unclear whether it provides an adequate account of the political stance and elisions of viewpoints and news stories in the media (McQuail, 1983, pp.114–115), what is most pertinent here is that – from its very first meeting – the IFA understood their role as intervening in and breaking open those 'gates'.

<sup>16</sup> Film Work Group members included Clive Myer, Nigel Perkins, Stewart MacKinnon, Frank Abbott, Ed Bennett and Phil Mulloy. For an informative history of the RCA and the National Film School and London Film School at this time see Petrie, D. & Stoneman, R. (2014) *Educating Film-makers: Past, Present and Future*. Bristol: Intellect Books.

<sup>17</sup> Enzensberger's essay was also a key influence on Negt and Kluge's attack on public television as an extension of the disintegrating 'bourgeois public sphere' (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p.100), and their argument for the need for workers to take over the means of production.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Newsreel Collective's film about the National Abortion Campaign, *An Egg is Not a Chicken*, (1975); Cinema Action made numerous committed documentaries supporting low-waged or unemployed people engaged in rent strikes (*Not a Penny on the Rent*, 1968), Irish republicans (*People of Ireland!*, 1970) and industrial strikers (*Arise ye Workers!*, 1973). Independent collectives such as London Women's Film Group and later groups such as Leeds Animation Workshop distributed works inspired by the WLM.

<sup>19</sup> The document concludes with a number of proposals, including the following: any restructuring of British television should guarantee a minimum amount of material from British independent filmmakers; independent filmmakers should be involved in selection of programmes; filmmakers will be paid properly; that these regulations should apply to any new broadcasting organisations that might emerge from restructuring.

<sup>20</sup> See: Nuttall, J. (1970) *Bomb Culture*. London: HarperCollins.

<sup>21</sup> For example, David E. James asserts that Jonas Mekas's writing for *Film Culture* and *The Village Voice* was 'instrumental in creating an art world of avant-garde film' (James, 1992, p.306); and James MacDonald asserts that Canyon Cinema's newsletter *Cinemanews* from 1962 onwards was 'crucial to the evolution of the organization'. See: MacDonald, S. (2008) *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.37.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the London Filmmakers' Co-op produced *Cinim* from 1967-1969 with contributions from Bob Cobbing, Raymond Durnant, Simon Hartog (also a founder member of the IFA) and others; in the 1970s, Peter Gidal and John Du Cane publicised the

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activities of the LFMC and its members in *Time Out*; Le Grice wrote a regular column for *Studio International*; and Gidal, Le Grice, David Curtis and Stephen Dwoskin produced books that documented and theorised this developing avant-garde film scene. See: Curtis, D. (1971) *Experimental Cinema: a Fifty Year Evolution*. London: Studio Vista; Dwoskin, S. (1975) *Film is ... The International Free Cinema*. London: Peter Owen; Gidal, P. (ed.) (1976) *Structural Film Anthology*. London: BFI Publishing; Le Grice, M. (1977) *Abstract Film and Beyond*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

<sup>23</sup> The split emerged in the pages of *Screen*. In Stephen Heath's essay 'Narrative Space', he had argued for a radical film practice that took narrative practices seriously, implicitly asserting that those who sought to engage with problems of ideology only at a formal level were misguided. Later, Peter Gidal attacked the depiction of 'profoundly reactionary archetypes' in films by 'The Berwick Street Collective, Godard, The London Women's Film Group, Oshima, Comolli, Ackerman, Mulvey/Wollen, Le Grice, etcetera' (p.77). See: Heath, S. (1976) Narrative Space. *Screen*. [Online] 17 (3), 68–112. Gidal, P. (1979) Avant-Garde: The Anti-Narrative (1978). *Screen*. 20 (2), 73–93.

<sup>24</sup> Here, Wollen, consciously or otherwise, appears to invoke Lenin's classic conception of the tiered role of the Marxist intellectual in the essay 'What is to be Done' (1901–1902), which lays out the theoretical groundwork for revolution as led by a vanguard organisation of experts. See: Lenin, V. I. (1961) 'What is to be Done?', in *Lenin's Collected Works*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House. pp. 347–530. [online]. Available from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/> (Accessed 29 July 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Karlin was educated at the Bryanston boarding school in Dorset; Mulvey and Wollen both attended Oxford University; Alan Hayling (of Newsreel Collective) attended Cambridge. By contrast, Murray Martin (of Amber) went to a comprehensive school and his parents were potters and miners.

<sup>26</sup> These were mentioned in a post-screening discussion at the BFI with Sue Clayton and Helen de Witt (11 April 2015). Ann Guedes also mentioned the contexts where Cinema Action showed films in a post-screening discussion at the BFI (23 June 2015), including showing a film in French about May 1968 to English factory workers. Guedes, A (2015) *Ann Guedes and Steve Sprung on Cinema Action | BFI*. [online]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvxB7T3eSXw>. (Accessed 29 July 2015)

<sup>27</sup> Historian Sally Alexander, who features in the film, noted that she and others were hostile to *Nightcleaners* when they first saw it for these reasons, although it retrospect she admires it. Comments made by Sally Alexander at a question and answer event after a screening of *Nightcleaners*, 29 November 2013.

<sup>28</sup> A significant example of this somewhat prescriptive argument is Salman Rushdie's coruscating review in the *Guardian* newspaper in January 1987 of a screening of *Handsworth Songs*, where he accuses the Black Audio Film Collective of being more concerned with experiments in filmic representation than with the representation of second generation black Britons (Procter, 2000). An ensuing disagreement between Rushdie and Stuart Hall, devolved on the issue of whether audiences of difference needed a 'new language' or whether such formal ruptures would be meaningless to them (Hall, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> See: Silver, J. (2006) 'The Radical who fled the Revolution'. *the Guardian*. 6 December. [online]. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2006/jun/12/mondaymediasection7> (Accessed 23 July 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Ian Potter also dismisses the IFA as a marginal, one-sided and 'conventional broadly left-wing group' (Potter, 2008, p.80).

<sup>31</sup> In April 1975, the IFA minutes report that, 'Up to now the discussions on distribution have centred on the possibilities of using or being used by TV. There are some of us who feel that attention should be given to distribution in cinemas' ('Minutes April 1976', 1975). The conference document 'Independent Filmmaking in the 70s' (1976), which Margaret Dickinson considers to be as close as possible to a foundation document for the group, is very much concerned with the specifics of film practice as an 'art' rather than with the less prestigious terrain of television (Dickinson, 1999, p.50).

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<sup>32</sup> The AIP was a group founded in 1976 advocating for commercially oriented film producers, championed a version of Smith's 'Foundation', with a new fourth channel acting as a 'publisher' that would commission content from independent producers, which were to be drawn from the ranks of the AIP. In the run-up to the formation of Channel 4, the ITV networks advocated for a commercial 'TTV-2', whose structure would favour the existing commercial broadcasting networks and their advertising revenues.

<sup>33</sup> The Arts Council would also sometimes support institutions through direct grants: a grant was given to London Video Arts in 1978 (Mazière, n.d.). Established galleries with Council funding also showed experimental film and video, including the Serpentine (*The Video Show*, 1975), Hayward (*The New Art*, 1972; *Film as Film*, 1979) and the ICA (which held regular film screenings and would later feature both a cinemathèque and videotheque)

<sup>34</sup> The Artists' Union is a case in point of an artist-organised institution with national ambitions: formed in 1972, membership reached 400 and a constitution was designed intended, amongst other things, 'to seek affiliation to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and to support the Labour Movement in general', and ensure that 'rights of artists were represented and their views made clear to state bodies' (Walker, 2002, p.85). Regional development in the arts had been advocated since the 1960s through the funding of a network of Regional Arts Associations (semi-autonomous bodies in the English regions joint funded by the Arts Council and BFI).

<sup>35</sup> For example, the early RFTs attempted to lure audiences through a haphazard series of sorties: screenings packaged into mini-festivals (a 'Best of Pop' season in Tyneside in 1972); celebrity appearances (Peter Cushing, Harold Pinter), and European art house premiers. In the 1960s and 1970s, RFTs had been developed in Canterbury, Cardiff, Exeter and York, which were all sited on university campuses, and by the mid 1970s had opened 48 regional theatres (Porter, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> See: Kant, I. (1996) 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', in James Schmidt (ed.) *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. pp. 58–64. See also: Habermas, J. (1992) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; Negt, O. & Kluge, A. (1993) *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press; Fraser, N. (1993) 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in Craig Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. pp. 109–142; Warner, M. (2002) Publics and Counterpublics. *Public Culture*. 14 (1), 49–90.

<sup>37</sup> See: Balsom, E. (2013) *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press; and Carroll, N. (1988) *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory*. First. New York: Columbia University Press. For useful anthologies on expanded cinema, see: Joseph, B. et al. (2004) *X-Screen: Film Installations and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s*. Matthias Michalka & Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig (eds.). Köln: Walther König, Köln; Rees, A. L. et al. (2011) *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance and Film*. London: Tate Publishing. Other forms of experimental film emphasised a more sedentary collective experience of contemplation and communion, such as the immobilized audiences of Peter Kubelka's Invisible Cinema that had been specifically planned 'with the collective aspect in mind' (Hanich, 2014, p.340).

<sup>38</sup> See: Benjamin, W. (2007) 'The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Hannah Arendt (ed.) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York, NY: Schocken. pp. 217–251.; Brecht, B. (2001) *Brecht on Film and Radio*. London: Methuen.

<sup>39</sup> For a fascinating analysis of the influence of Brecht on *Cabier du cinéma*, see: Lellis, G. (1983) *Bertolt Brecht: Cabiers du Cinema and Contemporary Film Theory*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research.

<sup>40</sup> In a startling passage of his 'The Mass Ornament' essay, on the popularity in Germany of American films of choreographed dancing girls, he offers a mirror-image view of collective viewership: 'One need only glance at the screen to learn that the ornaments are composed of thousands of bodies, sexless bodies in bathing suits. The regularity of their patterns is

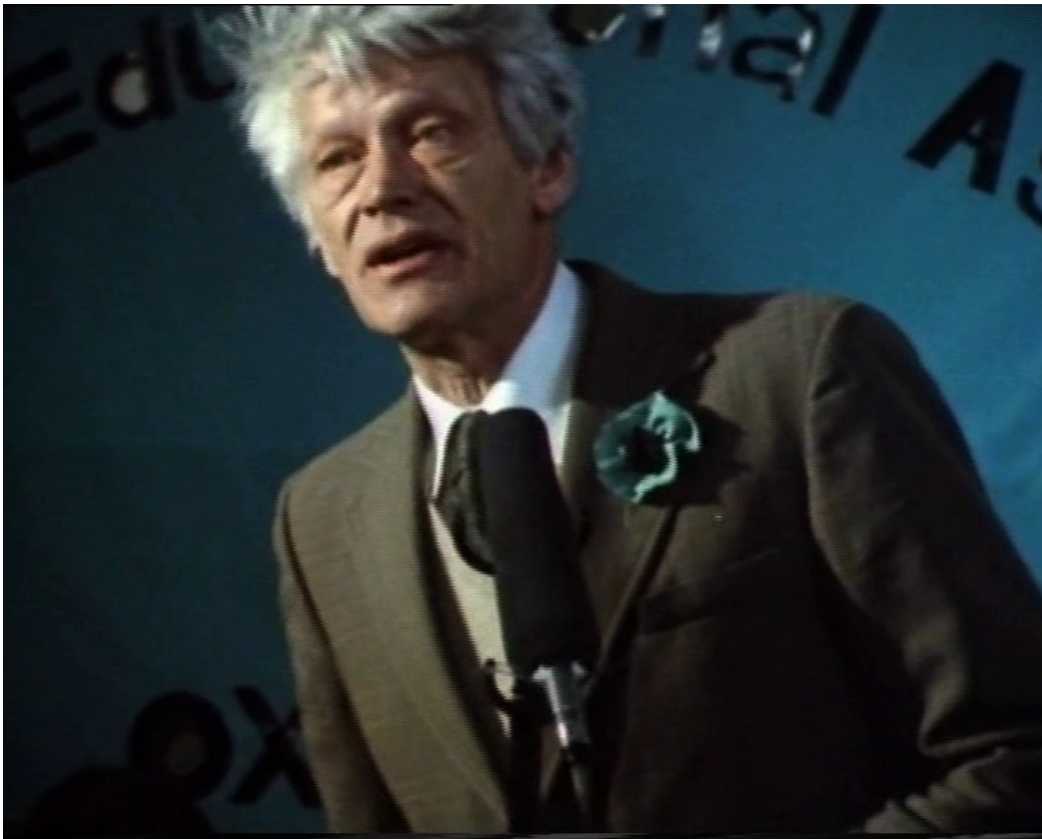
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cheered by the masses, themselves arranged by the stands in tier upon ordered tier.’  
(Kracauer, 1995, p.76)

<sup>41</sup> In a 1935 letter to Benjamin written in response to a draft of ‘Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century’, Theodor Adorno pointed out that there were deep problems with the essay’s conception of a collective consciousness in its theological assumptions of an ‘archaic collective ego’. Adorno warns that the notion of a collective consciousness is problematically non-dialectic and unhistoric: ‘in a dreaming collective no differences remain between classes’ (Adorno et al., 2007, p.113).

<sup>42</sup> Osborne also misses the much earlier iteration of distributive media in the eighteenth-century printing technologies.

<sup>43</sup> See: The Film & Video Distribution Database [Online] <http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk>. (Accessed 21 March 2015)



Screen shots of *For Memory* (1986, Marc Karlin). Top: appropriated imagery from *Holocaust* (NBC, 1978). Bottom: historian E.P. Thompson delivering a speech at a Workers Education Association meeting. Courtesy of the Marc Karlin Archive.



## Chapter 4. Counter-television: Marc Karlin's *For Memory*

Among the concepts that the counterpublic discourses of independent film and video inherited from critical theory is that bourgeois capitalism is an amnesiac force that insistently erases historical memory. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the capitalist state was structurally incapable of locating its own past or future – ‘there is incessant talk of ideas of novelty and surprises’, they write, but ‘[t]he machine is rotating on the spot’ (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p.107). Far from simply ignoring history and memory, Adorno asserts that capitalist and bourgeois modernity seeks to absorb and defuse these forces through what he calls a ‘museal’ drive, the process in which artworks and cultural remnants are sequestered into museums that operate as ‘mausoleums’ (Adorno, 1997, p.173).<sup>1</sup> This notion of an oppositional memory, a memory that can resist the amnesiac mainstream, has been a recurrent motif in the diverse strands of critical theory, from Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin to Michel Foucault and beyond.<sup>2</sup> In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I have outlined some of the ways in which these politics of memory and ‘people’s history’ became entwined with a political modernist historiography in aspects of 1970s film theory. What must be addressed in further depth is the fate of these ideas within the context of independent film and video’s encounter with populist television histories in the late 1970s and 1980s. In this chapter, I shall explore these themes through a close case study of Marc Karlin’s television film *For Memory* (1986), a work that explores themes of the fragility of memory in an era of forgetting.

This encounter, I argue in this chapter, posed fundamental problems to historiographical ideas within political modernist film theory and practices of independent film and video. While these ideas were not resolved, they became in

the work of Marc Karlin, a generative conflict, enabling enquiring, questioning, and complex investigations into the powers and politics of history and memory. In this chapter, I examine how these tensions became manifest in *For Memory*, locating it at a moment of struggle over cultural memory in Britain in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This was a moment of struggle over the preservation and inscription of competing historical narratives. On the one hand, there was the influence of Marxist, feminist and socialist historical research by Left cultural historians such as Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Sheila Rowbotham, Raphael Samuel and E.P. Thompson, as well as oral history projects, plays and films, and a range of independent film and video productions (see Chapter 2). On the other hand, there was broad shift in British cultural production towards nationalist heritage industries and the construction of jingoistic and mercantile values through Margaret Thatcher's advocacy of 'Victorian values'. This production of historical narratives was articulated increasingly by both the political Left and the Right in the 1980s, and constitutes what Andreas Huyssen has called a 'memory epidemic' (Huyssen, 2003, p.27) and Jeffrey Olick has called a 'memory boom' (Olick et al., 2011, p.9). The 'epidemic' is found in diverse cultural arena, including the British 'heritage film' (such as Hugh Hudson's *Chariots of Fire*, 1981), and U.S. televisual productions with an international market (such as *Roots*, ABC-TV, 1977; and *Holocaust*, NBC, 1978), as well as diverse film and video practices. Since this time, moving image practices centred on film festivals and art galleries have also continued to explore ways of thinking the past (such as Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, 1988) (Skoller, 2005; Marks, 2000). The memory boom that started in the 1970s is thus still a powerful force within contemporary culture and discourse.

*For Memory* draws on influences including those of Adorno to assert that television, like capitalism itself, is a threat to memory. Against this erosion, *For Memory* asserts a politics of active, embodied memory and presence: a politics of memory rooted in the spatial agora of local communities, in bodies and rituals, rather than in apparently dematerialised spectacle of television (see my conclusion to the previous chapter for a discussion of these tensions in relation to counterpublics). In order to analyse the dynamics of memory in Karlin's work, it is useful to draw from memory studies, a transdisciplinary field that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, incorporating influences including the writing of Pierre Nora on *lieux de mémoires* (memory spaces or memory sites) (Nora, 1989).<sup>3</sup> For Nora, a fundamental shift in memory has taken place since the nineteenth century: a movement away from spontaneous expressions of collective memory, to ones that are performed as self-conscious attempts to recover lost collectivity (his primary example is the nation state). Nora asserts that this new memory culture can be seen in diverse places: in the empty and routine performance of history in state rituals, in television history or in public monuments, as well as in the development of oral history and 'people's memory' projects. *For Memory* has a complex relation to Nora's *lieux de mémoires*. Karlin's film is highly critical of the return to the New Right's uses of history to valorise the nation, while at the same time it offers counter-examples of grassroots attempts to preserve memory at a local level. In fact, I argue that *For Memory* is itself a *lieu de mémoire*: a space, carved out of the flow of televisual amnesia, for the remembrance of social and socialist histories.

On the other hand, other developments in media-based memory studies can also be used to critique the assumption that television, and realist conventions of drama and fiction, are related to capitalist forms of forgetting. Broadly, memory studies

examine the way that individuals absorb memories through groups (friends, family, publics), and the ways in which a shared past is preserved and perpetuated in objects, places, oral traditions and social practices. Media analysis of memory also emphasise that television and film, both mainstream and experimental, can help to preserve and develop historical consciousness. This chapter draws from studies of the mediation of history and memory in cinema and television, as well as writing about the memorialisation of the Holocaust through media (Kerner, 2011; Haggith and Newman, 2005; Hornstein and Jacobowitz, 2003; Insdorf, 2002; Shandler, 2000; Liss, 1998; LaCapra, 1996). A number of writers have examined how television has generated and encouraged widespread critical engagements with the past (Anderson, 2001; Edgerton and Rollins, 2001; Huyssen, 1980). I will examine how the uses of history in film and television have often opened new values of engagement of affect and embodied identification, both in mainstream and in oppositional film (Landy, 2015; Rosenstone, 2006). Studies of film and television could thus be seen to contradict Adorno's idea of amnesia under conditions of capitalism and, indeed, the broader project of political modernist historiography that casts realist accounts of the past in a wholly negative light.<sup>4</sup>

Commissioned by the BFI in partnership with the BBC in 1980, but only broadcast on BBC2 in 1986, *For Memory* is concerned with a perceived fragility of memory in a televisual era. The delay between initiation and completion can be put down to a number of reasons: Karlin's own meandering thoughts and struggle to find an appropriate way to articulate his concerns with memory and history; as well as the BBC's reluctance to screen the work (as discussed later in this chapter). As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, Karlin was a key figure in the independent film scene of the 1970s, as a member of Cinema Action in the late

1960s and as a founder member of the Berwick Street Film Collective in the 1970s, and as an active member of the IFA from 1974 onwards. Karlin was a deeply committed socialist, a non-aligned or libertarian radical with a deep interest in histories of dissent. The early 1980s was a time that was, Karlin clearly felt, beset by both widespread cultural forgetting and an obsessive return to the New Right's fantasies of the past ('Victorian values'), a cycle that he felt was particularly evident in television. In his lengthy preparatory notes for the film, Karlin imagines a fictional city where '[...] all books had been destroyed and giant TV screens provide all knowledge of the past. Against this tyranny, the only defence was people's memory' (Karlin, [no date]). Karlin was motivated to make the film after watching *Holocaust*, a televised melodrama mini-series produced by the U.S. network NBC and starring Hollywood actors Meryl Streep and James Woods, which was franchised for broadcast in the UK in 1978. Later in this chapter, I will outline the impact of this series on immediate public discourse in the UK, USA and Germany, as well as in later accounts of Holocaust studies and in memory studies more widely. As I shall detail, the series was a spectacularly well-publicised and internationally distributed work whose shock for many was its representation of the genocide of Europe's Jews using the light-entertainment format of melodrama.<sup>5</sup> Karlin's notes and draft scripts of *For Memory* reveal that he was outraged, upset and disorientated by the series.

Yet *For Memory* was only partly concerned with the representation and memorialisation of the Holocaust. More broadly, *For Memory* seeks to resist the apparent erasure of social and socialist memories in the late 1970s and early 1980s within the context of the New Right's invocation of nationalist and jingoistic pasts. In his notes, Karlin asserts that *For Memory* is '[...] a film about memories in crisis'

that grapples with ‘an alienation that has assumed such constancy that it is both feared, yet loved [...] the film tries to confront the fear of changing a relationship to the past’ (Karlin, [no date]). Karlin argues that this ‘changing relationship’ is felt in the imposition of capitalism on memory, whereby ‘alienation’ is the result of the gap between historical representations on television and popular experiences. The film articulates this problem by looking at different ways of engaging the past through images or objects. These include reflections on *Holocaust*; the use of haptic and optic *aides-memoires* at a ‘Senile Dementia Ward’ at the hospital in Mile End, East London; the performing of a jingoistic account of the life of Frances Drake by the National Trust Youth Theatre; the chanting of revolutionary songs from the seventeenth-century by E.P. Thompson; a community-based photographic archive in the mining town of Clay Cross in Northern England; and the memorialisation of the Battle of Cable Street in a mural in East London.

The film’s broad subject is the way memory links personal identity to group politics, and how right-wing media spectacles and ceremonies of nationalistic belonging seemed to threaten the recollection of social history and socialist pasts. I shall argue in this chapter that an analysis of the film enables a rich understanding of the ideological and political tensions between independent production and television during the 1970s and 1980s. Ultimately, *For Memory* reveals an ambivalent attitude towards television: a political modernist rejection of its standard forms of realism, melodrama, and didactic forms of documentary, exacerbated by an incessant ‘flow’ of images (Williams, 2003); but also a more positive desire to use it as a counterpublic forum for alternative histories, memories, stories and the identities that are made from them. *For Memory* also develops a number of concerns rooted in Karlin’s own experiences and memories. Although these are not mentioned in the

film, they undoubtedly influence it: the work is haunted by a sense of being both inside and outside of British identity (he was born in France and educated in England, and was bilingual; he also had a Jewish heritage, a Russian father and a French mother). In an undated note in his archive, Karlin quotes T.S. Eliot's patriotic lines from the poem 'Little Gidding' (1942): 'A people without history/is not redeemed from time'; Karlin responds that, 'not feeling part of that ancient location [England], I must let his lines [...] speak for another people in another place' (Karlin, [no date]). As a figure whose work reveals an identity caught between cultures and nations, Karlin might also be considered in light of what Laura U. Marks terms 'intercultural' cinema, that is a cinema located at the intersection of migratory identities and memories (Marks, 2000).<sup>6</sup> While Marks here refers to diasporic cultures particularly from outside the West, her argument is germane here in situating Karlin as a figure for whom cultural identity was one articulated in terms of a struggle carried out through memory.

The emphasis on television is important here, and is intended partly as a counterbalance to the recent exhibition of Karlin's films in film festival and art gallery contexts, and the discussion of his work as an 'essay' form.<sup>7</sup> While these sites and discourses may offer significant insights into Karlin's influences and specific qualities of his works, it should be recalled that Karlin's films in the 1980s and 1990s were made almost exclusively for television. I shall argue in this chapter that his films were underpinned by a sense that a paradigm of film, community and historical memory was challenged by television; and that his work constitutes an attempt to rethink the possible place of independent film within this context. While Karlin had a deep concern for the cinema (evident, for example, in his work with the Other Cinema in the 1970s, and as a significant contributor to the film journal

*Vertigo* in the 1990s), *For Memory* captures broad difficulties in a serious attempt to negotiate a path between the commercial populism of television and oppositional film and video. Karlin's work offers a vision of oppositional film with a deep commitment to a form of counter-television that might help expand and consolidate the earlier counterpublics of independent film and video. The project, I shall argue, was underpinned by a deep sense that television had a vital role to play in public and counterpublic discourse, and ultimately, in the preservation of socialism.

### **The Counter-Television Structure of *For Memory***

I wish to examine *For Memory* as a work that is both for and against television, as what I would like to call a work of 'counter-television'. *For Memory* has an episodic structure, being divided into segments concerned with disparate time periods – including the Holocaust, the Elizabethan period (1558–1603), the English Civil War (1642–1651) and the Battle of Cable Street (an anti-fascist protest in London in 1936). Using spatialised metaphors, Karlin divided the film up into 'zones', 'circles', or 'chambers of memories', which are arranged sequentially in the film so that the viewer 'walks' from one 'chamber' to the next (Karlin, [no date]). These segments may loosely be said to correspond to the uses of 'episodes' in neo-Brechtian cinema of Godard and Straub-Huillet (Walsh, 1981), in the work of filmmakers such as Rossellini, as well as the British examples detailed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. An early draft title for the film that Karlin had toyed with was *Stations on a Return Journey* (Karlin, [no date]). While this unused title may simply refer to train stations, it also suggest that each partition of the film are akin to the Stations of the Cross, those



icons that mark a person's progress as they proceed down the nave of a Catholic church or along a pilgrimage route – images to stop at and contemplate.<sup>8</sup> In his notes, Karlin states that there is a typological reason for this, since each zone represents a different politics of memory:

In each zone, different memories are told: how identity slips away as memory is lost; how memories of a nation survive beyond individuals in legends and myths; how television collects and stores electronically all those fragments and becomes the guardian of memory itself. (Karlin, [no date])

Karlin clearly struggled to find this 'episodic' formal device. The writing process began in 1978, five years before the eventual completion of the film in 1983, with Karlin writing with the assistance of Don Macpherson, a film journalist who had also worked at The Other Cinema and co-edited the volume *Traditions of Independence: British Cinema in the Thirties* with Paul Willemen (Macpherson and Willemen, 1980). Various ideas were tried, and many were rejected. One notion was that the film should be structured around a love story, a romance set in two apartments in Paris and London, taking place across generations and connecting an older man, who had experienced the socialism of the 1930s, with a younger woman.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, Karlin and Macpherson would abandon the romance structure, finding it too unwieldy for their concern with the subject of memory. Other unrealised possibilities include a scene set in the church at Blythburgh, Suffolk, which had experienced iconoclastic attacks during the Reformation. Karlin's notes also make numerous literary references (to John Milton, Stephen Spender, Tom Paulin, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953)), which while they do not appear explicitly in the final film can be detected either in *For Memory* or in his later television films.<sup>10</sup> These influences suggest that Karlin was concerned deeply with issues of

freedom of expression (Rilke, Spender), press freedom (Milton) and censorship (Bradbury) – all variant notions of ‘reading’ counterpublics.

Before analysing the film’s themes and ‘cycles’ in depth, I will first explore some of the implications of this innovative structure for Karlin’s committed engagement with television. There are numerous allusions in both the film itself and in his notes of the need to preserve memories against the threats of cultural amnesia that he saw emerging from capitalism. In an undated letter sent to his partner Hermione Harris, Karlin criticises the tendency that is manifest in the TV series *Holocaust* as merely ‘waving of the hat to the departed’ (Karlin, 2015b), a mournful approach to the past rather than an attempt to activate memories for the present. In the letter, Karlin sets out the concerns of *For Memory* as a set of questions that invoke Benjamin’s call to ‘seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger’ (Benjamin, 2007, p.255):

What do the methods of recreating our past tell us as to how we are conjugating the present. Amnesia. Seizing the images of history at the moment of danger. How we treat images in the archive as illustrations rather than as documents. What subjects do the films summon in the historical feast? (Karlin, 2015b)

Karlin here explicitly echoes the political modernist emphasis on exploring different formal solutions to the realist presentation of the past (which Karlin calls ‘illustrations’). In this letter, Karlin aired concerns that had also been earlier aired at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1977 on the discussion and publication on ‘History/production/memory’, and which I have already examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis. In that publication, Colin MacCabe had criticised the television series *Days of Hope* as hypostatising the past through the use of realism (MacCabe, 1977). Similarly, in his letter to Harris, Karlin cites the series as a problematic historical

representation. While Karlin was not engaged deeply in the Althusserian theory that informed *Screen*, it is clear that major currents of Frankfurt school literature such as Benjamin had embedded themselves in his wide-ranging literary interests. In another typewritten note Karlin states that:

Our film will run against the grain and expectancy of TV as a place where all tenses are conjugated in the present. Thus the attitude will be one of 'resisting' the pace of the film – a reluctance to participate in the journey.

The goal is the acceptance of the need to search out 'real' memory and how TV affects that vision. Therefore the reality of the crisis we are in vis a vis where we come from and what future we have giving rise to the need to develop forms of resistance to the monopoly of TV over our social memory. Thus the need to develop spaces such as this film to re-encounter our loss. (Karlin, [no date])

Karlin's rethinking of the structure of the film in relation to television was thus rooted in a critique of televisual realism for its role in the erosion of what he called 'social memory'. *For Memory*'s structure and slow pace is austere and deliberately resistant to 'the grain and expectancy of TV'. It is a film that requires patience and commitment to watch all the way through: requirements of concentration that television viewing is generally said to lack (Ellis, 1982; Williams, 2003). *For Memory* has no rapid-fire editing to excite the eye, no explicit presentation of arguments, and no continuous narrative or voice-over to hold the viewer's attention and guide his or her thoughts. Moreover, there are no recourses to the televisual editing techniques of 'novelty and repetition' that John Ellis asserts are used routinely in television to attract the attention of the viewer, who is constantly bombarded by competing social intrusions from family members, phone calls, and the temptation to switch channels (Ellis, 1982, p.116). Because of this context of distraction, according to Ellis, television seeks to keep hold of the viewer's attention with 'segments':

The basic organisation of material [in television] is that of the segment, a coherent group of sounds and images, of relatively short duration that needs to be accompanied by other similar such segments. The segment as the basic unit according to a short burst of attention is matched by the serial and series form. These provide a particular kind of repetition and novelty that differs markedly from that found in the narrational patterns of classic cinema. (Ellis, 1982, p.116)

However, while Karlin also divides his film into 'segments', his are qualitatively different to both the 'repetition and novelty' of television or the narrative continuity of 'classic cinema'. In television documentaries, for example, it is common to intercut a series of different interviews together to develop a single overarching narrative, with each voice backing up, reinforcing or developing the film's argument. By contrast, each section of *For Memory* is distinct and whole: after watching the interview with two of the soldiers involved in filming Bergen-Belsen, we do not encounter them again for the rest of the film; likewise for the other sections.

Karlin's sequences focussed on a single 'witness' thus avoid the tendency in television editing to interrupt interviewees to knit together a coherent recollection, to elide silences, pauses and verbal stumbles. This desire to avoid the violence of the cut accords with Karlin's reaction against fast editing that troubled him from his early days with Cinema Action: many of their films during this period were edited into very short, rapid-fire sequences that lent them something of the machine-gun aesthetic of late 1960s militant cinema.<sup>11</sup>

Against the precepts of television repetition, loops and fragments, *For Memory's* structure is stark and unhurried. *For Memory* undertakes an engagement with the shot that is perhaps more common in traditions of the cinema, rather than in television documentary or drama. The structure of Karlin's film relates strongly to the episodic and 'elliptical' quality of the Italian neorealism, in extended shots preserved

the integrity of the profilmic event, and in its use of extended chapter-like sequences. Certainly, *For Memory*'s episodic structure might be compared to Rossellini's ambulatory sequences of wartime and postwar stories in *Paisan* (1946) – narratives that are thematically related (survival, resistance, martyrdom) but that do not overlap into causally connected narrative. Indeed, Karlin's notes indicate that he had been thinking about Rossellini's films, in particular *Rome, Open City* (1945), both in terms of its structure and its reflection on the sacrifices of Left resistance. André Bazin praised these qualities of long shots and elliptical structure in the 1940s and 1950s for an ethical treatment of time and subject, and it is precisely this moral force that seems to echo in Karlin's work.<sup>12</sup> Karlin's preference for extended shots also echoes a wide spectrum of practice that valued an ethics of slowed time or unedited shots: for all their differences, Italian Neorealism, and the work of Straub-Huillet, Andrei Tarkovsky and even Peter Gidal, might be rooted in this commitment to the ethics of shot and duration. Moreover, Karlin suggested the notion of 'history as a disruption of television's flow' (Karlin, [no date]); and *For Memory*'s use of extended sequences suggests a disruption of what Raymond Williams had called the 'planned flow' of television (Williams, 2003, p.91) between commercial breaks or programmes. Thus, the pauses and stillness of *For Memory* act as an ethical intervention into a flow that seems to operate as a process of endless archiving and forgetting.

*For Memory*'s formal qualities were in this sense anti-televisual, potentially putting off viewers by perversely ignoring or contradicting common conventions of reception. However, such challenges should not be overstated, since viewers in the UK in 1986, when *For Memory* was broadcast, were offered only four channels. The result was, as Paul Giles has noted, that '[...] makers of television products could be

confident of how even their minority products would reach a huge audience' (Giles, 2006). Indeed, while *For Memory* may strike contemporary viewers as a perversely slow-paced film to show on television, my own experience of watching archival programmes broadcast at this time suggests that most programmes at this time had a fairly unhurried pace. *For Memory* was also up against fairly slim competition when it was broadcast on an Easter Monday in 1986 on BBC-2 (the 31 March, at 1.55 pm): the timeslot was filled on BBC-1 with a ham-fisted British sci-fi series (*The Galactic Garden*), a game show on ITV (*Mouthtrap*), and a dated Bob Hope movie on Channel 4 (*Road to Singapore*, 1940). Moreover, this was also a time in which, as I have argued in Chapter 3, broadcasting was increasingly catering for diverse tastes, rather than assuming a normative mass audience.<sup>13</sup> It was a moment in which counterpublic discourses and television programming might seek out what Michael Warner calls 'strangers' in a 'subjunctive' process of world-making – not just catering to known tastes and political views, but also creating them (Warner, 2002, p.422).

Karlin ran into significant problems not with audiences or television reviewers (who seemed to quietly ignore the film), but rather with television bureaucracy. In developing techniques that confounded norms of televisual pace, and in giving voice to politically Left concerns, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that the officials working within the BBC that co-commissioned the film were not enthusiastic about the results. The practical upshot of Karlin's film was a lengthy delay to the final broadcast of *For Memory* on the BBC. While a co-production agreement was signed with the BBC's Bristol Arts Unit and BFI in 1980, and the film was completed in 1983, it was only finally broadcast on the BBC in 1986. As Holly Aylett (the organiser of the Marc Karlin Archive) has noted, for a work exploring the

vicissitudes of television's role in obfuscating histories, '[...] it is a wonderful irony that the film, once made, was promptly forgotten' (Karlin, 2015a, p.36). While the exact reason for the three-year delay from completion to broadcast is unclear, it appears that it was partly due to foot-dragging by key figures within the Corporation. Letters held in the Karlin's archive suggest that Alan Yentob (Head of Music and Arts at the BBC at the time) was as uncomfortable with the film as Peter Sainsbury was enthusiastic. Indeed, *For Memory* was only broadcast after Sainsbury and Barrie Gavin, as well as Karlin himself, had sent a number of letters of protestation to the BBC demanding that they telecast it as soon as possible.<sup>14</sup>

Karlin's first experience with BBC television was not a happy one, and he would complain about the BBC's 'cowardly' behaviour in a letter to Colin MacCabe sent a month after the film's broadcast (Karlin, 1986). This, Karlin's first major television commission, would seemingly prove all the critiques over access and gatekeeping that the IFA had made in its first dealings with the BBC-2 Controller Aubrey Singer, who asserted in 1974, 'I'm not having that kind of film on *my* television' (see my discussion of this in Chapter 3). Even when it was broadcast, the irony was not over, since *For Memory* was followed shortly afterwards (at 4.35 pm on BBC-2) by a screening of Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944), a jingoistic cry for national unity rooted in monarchical tradition made at the close of World War Two. Indeed, where the BBC dragged its feet, *For Memory* had some non-broadcast distribution, having been screened at the Edinburgh Television Festival in August 1984, and in the American Film Institute Film Festival in Los Angeles in 1985. Yet, for all these disappointments, and for all the ways in which they reveal the institutional difficulties that the BBC seemed to have still at this time with innovative and difficult work, television remained Karlin's principal area of concern. Karlin appears

to have made little effort to get his work into film festivals, or other alternative modes of distribution, and his primary engagement remained with television, even if the specific experience of working with the BBC had been upsetting. By 1986, he had already been involved with the new broadcasting upstart, Channel Four, and his *A Dream From a Bath* had been broadcast as part of the channel's 'Visions' series (24 April in 1985), while his films on the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua had been broadcast as part of the 'Eleventh Hour' slot over four consecutive weeks in October to November of the same year.

*For Memory* also reveals some of the changes that took place in the movement of independent film and video into broadcasting. The film marks a shift away from Karlin's group-oriented activity as part of the Berwick Street Film Collective, and towards the more authorial television films that he would direct right up to his death in 1999.<sup>15</sup> This authorial presence is felt in a number of ways. For example, in *For Memory*, Karlin utilised, for the first time, an intermittent authorial voice-over. It is a voice on the move, which refuses the acousmatic sedimentation of televisual 'voice of God' commentary, and owes a great deal to the epistolary films of Chris Marker in works such as *Sans Soleil* (1983) (Marker was a friend and sometimes colleague of Karlin). The voice in these films is very often Karlin's own. While he often speaks from different subject positions (as in *Between Times*, in which two figures enter into a Socratic dialogue on the fate of socialism), it is often clear that these are voices very close to his own, akin to an internal dialogue. Karlin's television films also moved further away from the freewheeling camerawork in *Ireland Behind the Wire* and *Nightcleaners*, films whose 'Brechtian' reflexivity emerges in the editing (the use of black leader and rephotography) rather than in the initial cinematography. A quite different approach is used in *For Memory*: scenes are shot in



theatrical sets using a smoothly operated dolly, with artifice emphasised to highlight the construction of televisual truths. Filmed by cinematographer Jonathan Collinson (formerly, Jonathan Bloom), these shots suggest a new artistic innovation: a rethinking of the overused ‘Ken Burns effect’ (a type of panning and zooming effect across photographs and documents) popular in television documentaries.<sup>16</sup> *For Memory* deployed these techniques and motifs not for their own sake, but in an attempt to reconfigure television’s relationship with memory and history, creating a new form of counter-television that worked with the institution of television but against its formal conventions.

### **Testimonies, Witnesses, *Holocaust***

*For Memory* opens with interviews with two elderly gentlemen: Major Hugh Stewart, an officer in charge of Army Film and Photography Unit (AFPU) during the Second World War, and Joe West, one of the cameramen with the Unit. Stewart and West were among the first British troops to enter the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945 and were responsible for recording what they saw there. Both give accounts of their memories of the camp, describing how they went about filming the starving, emaciated or dead inhabitants. Karlin filmed the two men against a simple cloth backdrop, in a standard head-and-torso shot, facing directly into the camera as they speak; they are both respectfully dressed in a suit jacket, shirt and tie. West explains the horrific scenes he witnessed and that he was unable to film:

Then you went about and you saw these groups about, and it was a nice day, I remember that. And filmed all the people laying down on the ground, crouched together, dead, dying. You could see one go as if he had just died, and I walked around and was walking around this encampment, and I suddenly saw – I was

looking through some wire fencing and I see three heads, and I looked and thought, what's going on here? And I managed to get round and go back and there was these three people eating a body. I wasn't sick, but I was so shocked, I couldn't film it, I couldn't photograph it. It was so horrific. How I hated the Germans. How could man let anybody get into this state? And not do anything about it? It was so awful. I began to think: am I on Earth, am I alive, is it true? I must be in hell, I must have been killed. I must be in hell. To see people in such a state. (Joe West in *For Memory*, 1986)

While the account is shocking enough, the interview also establishes some of the dynamics of Karlin's film. In choosing to place this comment by West near the opening of *For Memory*, Karlin introduces a vital ethical problem faced in all depictions of the Holocaust: should these images be recorded? Should they be shown? Those filmmakers who recorded the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust had to decide what to film and what not to, what was to reach later publics as a visual testament to the camps, and what was not to become part of the visual archive. For West, some elements of the horror of the camps are beyond filmic representability (he couldn't film the scene, he can only describe it verbally), and the sight of starved survivors eating a body provoked a sense of unreality in him ('am I alive, is it true?'). In his notes, Karlin writes: 'It would have been obvious to speak with the victims of the camps. But instead he had chosen those who, like himself, had lived with those images' (Karlin, [no date]) (Karlin is here semi-fictionalising himself as another 'he').<sup>17</sup> Karlin interviewed the filmmakers who recorded the camps, rather than Holocaust survivors or Nazis who perpetrated the crimes, in order to focus on problems of both memory and representation, rather than on the crimes committed by the Nazis *per se*. This very specific choice of subject thus frames *For Memory* as a reflexive work on the mediation of the past, and on the lines between the archives of history, personal and cultural memory.

*For Memory* is thus partly a film about the fate of documentary representation and truth (see Chapter 1 of this thesis), rather than a work on any single historical event. The discussion about representation in *For Memory* should be seen within the film's larger concern with the mediation of cultural memory: how film and television have represented, or failed to represent, historical events and the people that have experienced them. Karlin's invocation of the problems of image-making and representations of the Holocaust also opens up a much broader set of concerns articulated, since the opening of the camps, by writers including Giorgio Agamben, Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Primo Levi, Eli Weisel, and others (Agamben, 1999; Adorno, 2003, 1990; Wiesel, 1978; Arendt, 1958). For Levi, who had survived Auschwitz, the Holocaust could not be captured and represented in full because the only true witnesses were the 'drowned' who had died in the camps or had been rendered mute by their experiences there (Levi, 2013). In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt asserted that the camps could not be explained fully because 'there are no parallels to the life in the concentration camps' and, consequently, those who had not endured such experiences would have no way of relating to them (Arendt, 1958, p.444). In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno outlined numerous objections to the depiction of the Holocaust, following trajectories developed from ethics, epistemology, materialism and psychology: the Holocaust's horrors destroy our ability to make sense of the world; its brutal material fact shatters humanist metaphysics; and, he asserts (following Freud) that the human ego cannot think of death, that it does not have the capacity to imagine its own obliteration. For Adorno, our feelings 'balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate' (Adorno, 1990, p.361); indeed, he argues, 'human consciousness to this day is too weak to sustain the experience of death, perhaps even too weak for its conscious acceptance'; indeed, death is 'alien to the ego' (ibid, p.369).

These arguments and crises of representation seem to underpin *For Memory*. Yet the film is also haunted by another sense: the imperative of remembrance. Importantly, Adorno would later argue that the ethical imperative of the post-war era is to find ways with which to utter the unutterable, to speak of and to represent the Holocaust. Writing in a series of articles in the 1960s, Adorno repeatedly argued for the need to resist the German bourgeoisie's insistent glossing over its part in the Nazi past, and to do so by emphasising the reality of memories of the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup> More recently, Georges Didi-Huberman has argued against the evolution of a 'lazy' discourse that would see the Holocaust as unimaginable and beyond representation (Didi-Huberman, 2012, p.25). Indeed, for Didi-Huberman, to proclaim the Holocaust as beyond words, images or thought, is to implicitly accede to the Nazis' own programme of obliteration. Drawing on Arendt, he notes that the Nazis' tactic was to hide their great crime by placing it beyond comprehension, language and thought: the Nazis were aware that the genocide was on a scale too enormous for Western powers to believe (Didi-Huberman, 2012, p.19). Furthermore they set out to destroy other forms of evidence of their machinery of death: they regularly killed entire groups of *Sonderkommando*, the Jewish prisoners who were forced to maintain the crematoria and pits; the SS even obliterated crematorium V at Auschwitz before evacuating the site in January 1945 (Didi-Huberman, 2012, p.21). Against this engineered invisibility, the imperative for us today, argues Didi-Huberman, is to remember and represent in spite of the Nazis' attempt to obliterate both the Jews of Europe and the memory of their genocide. For Didi-Huberman, to maintain that the Holocaust is 'unsayable' would ultimately be to tacitly follow the Nazis' own programmatic erasure of history.<sup>19</sup>

Karlin, the cineaste, would certainly have had a deep knowledge of how this discourse had played out in terms of film practice. Indeed, it is clear that documentary and actuality footage of the camps has long served a purpose against this form of forgetting, and that the discourse of the camps as ‘unsayable’ would come only in the long period of self-reflection in the years and decades after the war. Immediately after the camps were liberated, and then filmed by the AFPU (as well as by units of Soviet and US film-makers), the footage was used for propagandistic purposes, to provide visual evidence of the horrors of the camps and the extent of the Nazis’ crimes. The footage was subsequently used in private screenings seen by western diplomats and politicians; it was arranged into the newsreel film *Death Mills* (1945) and presented at a series of screenings in cinemas in West Germany as part of the de-nazification process that was intended to convince viewers of the guilt of the Nazis and to forestall any denial that these events had occurred; the same newsreels were shown in public cinemas in the UK and the USA; and this and other footage was used in the trials of senior Nazi officials in the years afterwards (Gladstone, 2005; Lennon, 2005).<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the function of the films of the camps was to act as an indexical record, as a witness and as legal evidence – to follow the ‘categorical imperative’ after the Holocaust that mankind should ‘arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen’ (Adorno, 1990, p.365). The defence of the indexical record in *For Memory* is articulated in these terms: as a record of the past that can attest to its horrors.

Karlin would also have been aware of the complexity of this issue, particularly in relation to Resnais’s *Night and Fog* (1955), a film that articulates itself in terms of the visible and the unrepresentable, the force of memory and imagination, through

colour footage of the peaceful contemporary countryside intercut with black-and-white footage from the camps. Post-war filmmakers were faced with a complex of problems related to this newsreel footage. As Arendt argued, 'pure reportage' might neither persuade a viewer of the reality depicted, nor convince a committed racist that the actions of the Nazis were inherently contemptible:

If the propaganda of truth fails to convince the average person because it is too monstrous, it is positively dangerous to those who know from their own imaginings what they themselves are capable of doing and who are therefore perfectly willing to believe in the reality of what they have seen. Suddenly it becomes evident that things which for thousands of years the human imagination had banished to a realm beyond human competence can be manufactured right here on earth, that Hell and Purgatory, and even a shadow of their perpetual duration, can be established by the most modern methods of destruction and therapy. To these people (and they are more numerous in any large city than we like to admit) the totalitarian hell proves only that the power of man is greater than they ever dared to think, and that man can realize hellish fantasies without making the sky fall or the earth open. (Arendt, 1958, p.446)

The volume of explicit images of suffering and the dead in concentration camps, may thus, in certain situations, operate pornographically – as is evidenced by the large number of photographs of victims presented as a gift by SS-Obersturmbannführer Rudolf Höss to Nazi minister of justice Otto Thierack (Didi-Huberman, 2012, p.24).<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is increasingly evident that the spectacle of violence is a feature of modern propaganda made by the perpetrators (*pace*, the extreme violence shown today in the propaganda of ISIS in Syria, Iraq and Libya). To counter any possible misunderstanding or misuse of footage of the Nazi camps, documentary makers use cinematic and narrative techniques in order to more actively persuade viewers of the abhorrence and criminality of the Nazis' acts. In *Night and Fog*, which was based on a script by Jean Cayrol (a survivor of the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp), a voice-over 'calls upon its viewers to [...]

search their own souls to find tell-tale signs of racist “contagion” (Pollock and Silverman, 2012, p.x). *Night and Fog* also makes a wider humanitarian appeal, urging contemporary viewers to reflect on France’s actions in Algeria (Delage, 2005, p.130).<sup>22</sup> For Michael Darlow, director of the major TV series *World at War* (1974, Thames Television), the series was intended to ‘demythologise events which because of their unique horror, had taken on the aura of the inexplicable’ (Darlow, 2005, p.140), and that he would thus include accounts provided by both victims and perpetrators in order to offer an explanation that echoes Arendt’s argument about the banality of evil.<sup>23</sup>

The representation of the Holocaust is thus a fundamentally ethical issue, which draws on a long discourse of the problems of extreme visual representation (Friedländer, 1992; LaCapra, 1996; Eisenstein, 2003; Didi-Huberman, 2012). This is particularly pertinent in relation to the numerous depictions of the Holocaust in cinema and on television, in documentary, drama and experimental or artists’ film and video, in which images range from documentary records to re-enactments (Shandler, 2000; Insdorf, 2002; Haggith and Newman, 2005; Kerner, 2011). The function of these images is evidently not stable, for as Susan Sontag argued, they can become over-seen, and there can be a waning of affect in the face of repeated exposure to horrific imagery: ‘At the time of the first photographs of the Nazi camps, there was nothing banal about these images. After thirty years, a saturation point may have been reached’ (Sontag, 2005, p.15). One means of avoiding the perverse reception of Holocaust imagery noted by Arendt or the over-exposure noted by Sontag is through eschewing horrific imagery entirely. Oral histories are a significant means in gathering memories that go beyond the visual spectacle of horror. For Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah* (1986), the imperative was to record the

accounts of the very few survivors of the death camps (those such as Chelmno, Treblinka and Auschwitz designated specifically for mass killings, and of which almost no visual records survive), as well as some of the perpetrators, but not to offer any explanation or larger interpretative framework that might suggest that a moral lesson might be gleaned from the overwhelming horror they have experienced.<sup>24</sup> Oral history projects and the cinema have also been closely interconnected with the database of oral histories collected by the Shoah Foundation, founded by Stephen Spielberg in 1994 following *Schindler's List* (1993).

For Karlin, at least part of the answer to these complex issues was to not stake any claim to represent the survivors' or victims' experience of the camps, but instead to interview the AFPU men who recorded the camps on film. These both witnessed the camps with their own eyes and were responsible for creating some of the iconic imagery of the Nazis' crimes. In *For Memory*, Karlin draws out the vital importance and the fragility of the individual's memories; their memories may be failing, but the documents themselves live on; and while these images have evidentiary value, it is the force of their makers' commentary which articulates their meaning. While *For Memory* uses apparently straightforward, direct-to-camera interviews, this produces a reflexive exploration of both the possibilities and the ethical limits of representation. *For Memory* should be situated in the context of a widespread use of direct-to-camera address in oppositional documentary in the 1970s, which were to gain a more reflexive turn in the late 1970s and 1980s – for example, in Connie Field's *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980) or Michelle Citroen's fake documentary *Daughter Rite* (1979). In a 1983 article, published in *Film Quarterly*, Bill Nichols notes that the use of multiple direct addresses avoids the problems of overarching meaning in voice-over narration, but it often fails to inscribe the role of the film text



or the voice of the filmmaker (Nichols, 1983). By contrast, *For Memory* situates its interviews within a complex set of historical concerns, through a constant shifting of authority and perspective. The ‘voice’ of the film – in Nichols’ sense, the inscription of the film as a text – is evident from this first set of interviews with Stewart and West, precisely because the interviewees’ comments bring forth Karlin’s own concerns about problems of filmic and televisual representation.

This reflection on the ethics of photography and film within the recording and preservation of memory is made explicit in the introduction of a number of still images from the camps, which Karlin places between interviews with the two AFPU men. Karlin does not show the actual AFPU film footage; neither does he show us the worst possible still images – the piles of corpses, the naked and splayed, half-dead and dying bodies. Instead, he shows a few still photographs of individual survivors at the camps, who are clothed, sitting or standing, badly bruised, dazed and uncertain; in these images, survivors are allowed a degree of dignity – they are not indiscernible bodies in an open pit, but individuals whose faces are inscribed with the horrors they have witnessed. They are anonymous portraits presented within a pedagogical slide-show format: the image occupying the screen for a while, for the viewer to consider and remember, before slowly fading to black. There is an ethics to these images, one that recalls the notion of the face-to-face encounter described by Emmanuel Lévinas, whereby an encounter forces a recognition of the Other without reduction to the Same.<sup>25</sup> These images are not presented in *For Memory* to convince the viewer of the full horrors of the camps, of the numbers killed or left to starve, as was the case with the early newsreel footage. Karlin’s choice of photographic records assumes that we have seen these other, more

horrific images, and that the horror of such images cannot, as Sontag had argued, easily be repeated without a loss of affect.

What is of concern for Karlin at this point in *For Memory* is a contrast between what he articulates as the apparently waning power of the documentary record and the shocking dramatisation of that history in the NBC miniseries. The film presents this as a conflict between drama and document, between fiction and the real, a contest that the former appeared to be winning with the popularity of historical dramas such as *Holocaust* and *Roots* in the USA and the increased production of heritage films in the UK (particularly those of Merchant Ivory). As Raymond Williams had observed in his 1975 lecture 'Drama in a Dramatised Society', '[...] we have never as a society acted so much or watched so many others acting', and this constant watching of drama in television and film was itself having a social effect, creating a constant desire for simulated images of other spaces and times (Williams, 2013, p.3). By the 1980s, a number of French public intellectuals such as Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio began to assert that reality itself was slipping away from this televisual society, that processes of simulacrum and simulation had fundamentally reordered experience and communication.<sup>26</sup> While expressing these prevalent postmodern concerns, the first part of *For Memory* also examines the uncertain authority of witnesses' testimonials. In his interview, Hugh Stewart, the officer in charge of the AFPU, repeatedly reads from notes that he had made during his time at Bergen-Belsen. Karlin films him struggling to recall:

Well I think that the only thing that one can say here about all of this is that these are instants, which again it is just as well that I have written them down because I had quite forgotten them. After all this happened in 1945, 35 years ago, so it is not surprising I have forgotten them, but these... these...

As his words falter, Stewart can be seen rifling through his papers, and the shot fades to black. The use of fade-outs is a stylistic trope used by Karlin throughout the film, suggesting the ellipses of memory as witnesses age. Yet this should not be taken as an image of truth's undoing, of the proof of the impossibility of memory in a postmodern era of hyperrealism, simulacra and simulation. In the context of the debate on the limits of representability, and the ethical use of specific photographs of the Holocaust, the attention that Karlin draws to gaps and ellipsis may also invoke a central quality of Laura U. Marks's notion of intercultural cinema. For Marks, such a cinema must '[...] begin from the inability to speak, to represent objectively one's own culture, history, and memory; [such films] are marked by silence, absence, and hesitation' (Marks, 2000, p.21). In *For Memory* these stuttering moments, these ellipses of memory and visual fade-outs, are images of resistance against the seamless flow of television, defiant pauses that insist on the importance of articulating history despite the slippages of time and vicissitudes of representation.

This discourse also emerges in the section of the film following the reflection on the Holocaust, which is filmed at the Hospital of St Clements, a former mental health hospital in Mile End, in the East End of London. This part follows on from the interviews with the two AFPU men, and is similarly concerned with the power and fragility of witnesses' testimonials. The hospital's residents are elderly working class men and women, and the first man to speak stumbles through his words with a series of stutters, before saying: 'if you don't study it you forget it. You can't help it. It's like something you lose. You let things go'. Patients are shown handling items, *aides-memoires*, which come together in *For Memory* in terms of what Laura U. Marks calls 'haptic images [...] a kind of knowledge based in touch' (Marks, 2000, p.22).

An elderly woman holds a blue cube with the words 'Reckitt's Bag Blue' printed on the side (these were washing aids, helping keep linens white). Other patients are shown looking at and touching a variety of everyday objects from the early part of the century: a pipe, cigarette cards, an iron, some marbles, docker's hooks and a tin of Lyle's Golden Syrup. The sequences are slow, visual recordings. The elderly patients are frequently unable to vocalise, to recall, or to provide even the most basic of narrative substance. The camera shows the body-as-witness: a man's aged skin and liver spots, the mucus coagulating in the corner of his mouth, the hooded skin-folds over his watery eyes. An elderly lady appears. An inarticulate shell of a person, she offers her carer a friendly and toothless smile, while her eyes give a look of incomprehension. *For Memory* is precisely concerned with the inscription of faces and bodies as testimonies – as witnesses – to the underbelly of capitalism and the labour market. These haptic images suggest processes of remembering that are obliterated within the rupture of signification signalled by *Holocaust*, and within the disembodied flow of television more widely.

### **The City and the Strange Museum**

*For Memory* is punctuated by a number of short dream-like sequences depicting a city of the future. As the only recurrent sequences in a film, they provide a sense of cohesion to the otherwise discrete episodes. Following the interview with West and Stewart, there is a slow tracking shot of a number of urban tower blocks filmed at night, and lit in an eerie blue light. As the camera moves closer to the buildings, it becomes apparent that they are models rather than real urban structures. In fact, these are the actual models for Richard Rogers' Lloyd's building, which was then in

the process of being built in the City of London, and which today stands as an icon of postmodern architecture and the financialization of the economy.<sup>27</sup> Although Karlin could not have fully anticipated the financial transformation of London by the end of the decade, his use is significant here, for the city was always meant as a dystopian site of capitalism and forgetting; in an interview for BBC Radio 3 in 1999, Karlin noted that his imagined city would later be made real in the development at Canary Wharf (Wright and Karlin, 1999). Karlin had borrowed the models for the shooting of the film (Bloom, 2013) – although this fact is not made clear in the film itself. Filmed in a cavernous space at the Polytechnic of Central London School of Communication by Collinson, the artificial lighting lends the scene an otherworldly theatricality. The effect of this is at once atmospheric and distancing, recalling the neo-Brechtian use of tableaux in independent film and video to signal the artifice of the film (see Chapter 2).

A soundtrack of Romantic music adds a sense of aching pathos to the sequence: Schubert's *Quintet in C Major for Strings, Opus 163* (1850/53).<sup>28</sup> The 'city sequences' are also notable for their voice-over, in which Karlin himself delivers an allusive, imagistic reflection on the politics of representation, memory and history. Karlin deploys this voice-over judiciously, never laying it over the film's other interview-based or observational sequences.<sup>29</sup> This suggests an ethical sense of allowing others to speak, without the narration obscuring the testaments and witness accounts that are vital to Karlin's exploration of social histories. The use of voice-over here also lends *For Memory* its essayistic quality, foregrounding the densely scripted text that Karlin had spent so many years refining and re-writing. The text here breaks with television conventions: it does not provide a transparent commentary on events in

the film, but rather spirals outwards into an allusive realm of imagination and critical thought. As Schubert's opus fades into the background, Karlin speaks:

A traveller once wrote, in our dreams of future cities, what frightens us is what we most desire, namely to be free from the tyranny of memory, to be self sufficient, without sense of past or future. (*For Memory*)

The image track then switches from the nocturnal city to a series of still images from the *Holocaust* mini-series. Characters are shown dressed in the striped pyjamas of concentration camp prisoners, but they retain their Hollywood glamour: their hollowed cheeks are mere make-up. Following this, we return to the fictional city. The camera pans through it: a cold, lifeless facsimile of a place.

How does this 'city sequence' relate to the still imagery from the fictional *Holocaust* and the testimonies of West and Stewart? What thoughts does this dystopian city enable? The city here has no single meaning, but is rather a springboard for a multitude of thoughts. One of the inspirations for Karlin's city was Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, which describes a dystopian society in which dissident ideas are suppressed through the burning of books.<sup>30</sup> In Karlin's film, the city is a walled enclave, a privileged place in which some histories are preserved and others forgotten. The city is thus an allegory of television itself, a motif that echoes those critiques of television as a gated community marked by censorship and elitist power structures (I discuss this idea in Chapter 3 in relationship to Stuart Hood's writing on 'gatekeepers' in the media). For Karlin the city is not only marked by censorship and exclusion – its entire modus operandi is centred on a flow of imagery, a perpetual archiving, forgetting and replenishing. In his preparatory notes for the film, Karlin directly references the city in relation to Adorno's essay 'Proust and Valéry at the Museum', where Adorno asserts that the term 'museum' is but a short

phonetic leap to ‘mausoleum’ (Adorno, 1997, p.173). Karlin’s city is thus also an archive designed to defuse the political urgency of the past. In a later ‘city sequence’, Karlin narrates:

It might be thought that because the city’s inhabitants had resigned themselves to living in a permanent present, and yet are unable to overcome their fear of forgetting, they would have to live with a constant sense of loss. But this strange museum, open all night, and with attendants in every room, beams its maps so that citizens can dream themselves away from their predicament knowing that nothing has been lost. (*For Memory*, 1986)

The city here is a vast archive designed to keep the disruptive force of memory at bay. However, to return to Adorno’s essay, we may also think of another, perhaps more fundamental problem that bears on Karlin’s work with television. Adorno examines the artist’s dilemma, represented by the figures of Proust and Valéry: to either exhibit paintings in the distracting viewing conditions of the salon, with numerous canvasses hung alongside one another (as championed by Proust), or to reject public exhibition altogether (as argued by Valéry). To adopt Valéry’s position, Adorno points out, would be to withdraw from engaging with diverse publics, and in doing so to reach the ‘inevitable conclusion of the radical cultural conservative: the renunciation of culture out of loyalty to it’ (Adorno, 1997, p.177). The predicament that Adorno outlines is compromise or self-isolation. Adorno asserts that ‘In the litigation implicitly pending between them, neither Proust nor Valéry is right, nor could a middle-of-the-road reconciliation be arranged’ (*ibid.* p.182). Karlin is keenly aware of this binary, this apparently irresolvable paradox and tension between an ideal of radical cultural autonomy and a pragmatic need for new tactics. In the city sequence, Karlin explores narrates:

For some, ill-prepared to deal with the transformation of a sacred memory into a fictional melodrama, the images of Holocaust were a desecration. A betrayal of what had been considered an untouchable testimony to those events, but for others these new reminders were the best that could be done to save these memories from the threat of oblivion. In the space of a generation, photographs and documents were judged to be no longer able to carry the weight of the events they once portrayed. (*For Memory*, 1986)

*For Memory* thus makes clear how television posed a fundamental challenge to the avant-garde mantle of political modernism. Clearly, to refuse the agora of television would be to retreat back to a position of marginality; to participate in it might be to concede to its power structures and ideologies. To use conventions of television such as melodrama would be to give up on political modernism's argument that form really was political. For Karlin, television's uses of history were deeply disturbing but impossible to ignore. In a twenty-minute-long sequence introduced with the intertitle 'A Walk through the Strange Museum', Karlin presents an archive of television imagery. The sequence is framed in a thick blue border, as if placing it visually within quote marks, and drawing viewers' attention to the fact that it uses re-mediated footage. Karlin's 'Strange Museum' is a metonym for television archives (indeed, the footage used here was taken from the BBC Film Archives). Karlin selects a vast array of clips: a miner hacks at rocks with pickaxe; service men and women in World War II uniform walk down a street; Neville Chamberlain and others socialise in a garden; a man stands beside a fast-moving river.<sup>31</sup> It is apparent that for Karlin, this sequence may be seen as another view of the television-city, with its motifs of televisual amnesia, the *museal* neutralisation of memory, and a flow that seems to erase both the past and the future. Over the archival footage, Karlin says in voice-over:



Imagine a city where the past is the past and the time is always now. Where the thought of anything ever being lost is as much a cause for alarm as a memory being allowed to disrupt the city's daily life. In that city that dreams of living in a permanent present, but dares not let go of its past, freedom is advertised as freedom from history, its promises, its temptations and its demands. (*For Memory*, 1986)

In this 'Strange Museum', we see the histories that the status quo chooses to remember: a sample of a programme on the General Strike emphasises the efforts of middle-class strike-breakers who kept transport services running; there are also excerpts from Elizabethan costume dramas, programmes about British imperial history, and a speech in honour of Lord Nelson. Karlin's use of this footage highlights that television is, itself, a form of history making, and that it is controlled and policed by the structures of patriarchy, class and state. Yet there seems also to be another layer of discourse here. Karlin plucks from the flow of imagery a sense of embodied action by slowing the footage down, and selecting specific moments of physical action and contact: a politician's handshake, a cigarette being lit, a soldier running. Most of the footage is played silently without a soundtrack, giving it a meditative quality. This is a technique that Karlin had used before with *Nightcleaners* and *36-77*: both films emphasise the haptic quality of experience, bodies and the parallel between human physicality and the materiality of celluloid. *For Memory* might thus be linked with other film and video practices since the 1980s in which fractured archival imagery is mined for embodied memories, often to express intercultural or migratory identities and aesthetics, to grasp and hold on to a history that is fragmented and fractured (Skoller, 2005; Marks, 2000). Yet the images here are only partly recovered by Karlin: he deliberately renders them as distant, ghostly images spied fleetingly through the blue video frame; they are haunting televisual

memories rather than the fully embodied celluloid visages that fill the screens of *Nightcleaners* and 36-77.

Karlin's use of the image of the nocturnal city to evoke the fragility of memory within the regimes of television has another resonance in terms of the politics of representation. The discourse on depictions of history on television within political modernism had, after all, principally focussed on the use of drama to inscribe images of the past. The use of realist drama in Loach and Garnett's *Days of Hope* series (1975, BBC), which sought to give a history of the working classes from the First World War to the General Strike, had been a special target for criticism in the 1977 'History/production/memory' event at the Edinburgh Film Festival (see my discussion of this in Chapter 2). When *Holocaust* was broadcast on the BBC in September 1978 after its initial screening in the USA on NBC in April of the same year, the critiques of historical drama developed had expanded far beyond the specialist debates of *Screen* and *Cahiers du cinéma*. *Holocaust* created a global media sensation, provoking a wide variety of commentators to question the suitability and compromises made in the communication of this history within the conventions of television. The reception of the film varied from the euphoric to the hostile, with Elie Weisel (a writer, activist and Holocaust survivor) condemning the depiction of the Shoah as crass, kitsch and commercial opportunism (Wiesel, 1978; Friedländer, 1993). On the other hand, other commentators asserted that *Holocaust* reached vast audiences and provoked widespread and ongoing debate about the Holocaust. In the USA, *The New York Times* reported that an estimated sixty-five million viewers saw the first episode of the series (Anon, 1978). Retrospectively, it is clear that the series had a significant impact on the recognition of the Holocaust. In the USA, the series would open the doors to widespread debate about the Second World War,

while the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. was reportedly given the go-ahead after Jimmy Carter saw the series (Liss, 1998, p.xix). In West Germany, over 20 million viewers saw the series, and it became a catalyst within a larger debate about the National Socialist period, which would culminate in the 'historians debate' (*Historikerstreit*) of the 1980s over the necessity of recognising for the first time the role of ordinary people and the state in the genocide.<sup>32</sup> The broadcasting of *Holocaust* in Germany is now seen as:

[a] decisive turning point in in the West German public's acknowledgement of and relationship to Germany's genocide of the European Jews and crimes against other groups in the Second World War (McGlothlin, 2014, p.473)

Reactions in the UK were less pronounced, but there were extensive reviews and previews of the series in a wide range of daily newspapers and popular magazines (Cole, 2013, p.72). In his analysis of the reception of the series in the UK, Tim Cole notes a frequent complaint of British reviewers was that *Holocaust* was an unashamedly commercial enterprise, part of the 'Holocaust industry', which had been purchased by the BBC for \$550,000 following a biddings war with ITV (Cole, 2013, p.73). These criticisms clearly reveal the apparent contradiction between the public service role of the BBC and the unashamedly profit-oriented motives of NBC. Furthermore, according to Cole's analysis, a number of articles argued that *Holocaust* was simply bad television; that it was a crass form of American culture, dumb and tasteless. Cole asserts that, 'One unique element to British press criticisms of *Holocaust* were reminders that British TV had already done the Holocaust, and so it was claimed, done it better than Hollywood' (Cole, 2013, p.79). A number of reports contrasted the crassness of the American series to the lauded *World at War* series (1973-74, Thames Television), which was produced by Jeremy

Isaacs (the future head of Channel) and narrated by Laurence Olivier. While this suggests a strong strain of national pride and snobbery in the rejection of the series by a number of British commentators, this does not account for all audiences. For example, Cole also notes that *Holocaust* was also received by some commentators as a potential tool for combating the rise of the neo-Nazism and the National Front in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s (*ibid*, p.81).<sup>33</sup> As an intercultural filmmaker – socialist, Jewish, French and British – Karlin’s work is particularly sensitive to the needs for a new generation to feel the affective force of the past, even if that means a use of melodrama. Karlin’s notes reveal that while he was shocked by the series, he also recognised its sociopolitical force at a time of waning political affect for the original documentary images of the Holocaust (as noted by Sontag).

These wide-ranging discourses on *Holocaust*, and subsequent highly popular dramatic depictions of the Shoah have also had a significant impact on critical discourses on the depiction of history and memory in film and television.<sup>34</sup> These reflections began directly in the wake of *Holocaust*. In a special edition of the *New German Critique* published in 1980 and themed as a response to the broadcast of *Holocaust* in Germany, Andreas Huyssen focuses on the challenges that the series poses for the historiographical traditions of the Left inherited from Brecht and Benjamin.

Huyssen’s essay ‘The Politics of Identification: “Holocaust” and West German Drama’ argues that critical theory had been hampered in its understanding of the specifically anti-Semitic nature of the Holocaust due to its desire to see Nazism as coextensive with capitalism. He accuses many of the Left of an ‘instrumentalization of the suffering of the Jews for the purpose of criticising capitalism then and today’ (Huyssen, 1980, p.177). This critique is aimed in particular at Adorno, for whom fascism was an ‘evil bourgeois dream’ (Adorno, 2003, p.9), and who had elsewhere

written extensively on the problems of historical memory under conditions of capitalism:

That fascism lives on, that the oft-invoked working through of the past has to this day been unsuccessful and has degenerated into its own caricature, an empty and cold forgetting, is due to the fact that the objective conditions of society that engendered fascism continue to exist [...]. (Adorno, 2003, p.13)

Huyssen contends that this hitching together of fascism and capitalism has blocked attempts to broach popular discourse on the Holocaust. For Huyssen, the voluminous discourse generated within West Germany about the National Socialist past in the wake of the broadcast of *Holocaust* challenged basic assumptions of the Left that there is a need to undermine modes of representation in order to foment historical consciousness. He asserts that:

[...] the success of Holocaust forces us to rethink certain aesthetic and political notions mostly concerned with Brechtian theatre and its politics on the one hand and with the Frankfurt School avant-garde aesthetics on the other hand. (Huyssen, 1980, p.122)

What the TV series demonstrates for Huyssen is the ongoing need for audience identification and popular emotional outlets – impulses that are programmatically denied by Brechtian epic theatre and its legacies.<sup>35</sup> Huyssen argues that *Holocaust* allowed audiences in Germany to recognise and begin to come to terms with the extermination of Europe's Jews, and this vital fact must demand a rethinking of the tactics of Brechtian approaches to history.<sup>36</sup>

Following critiques such as those offered by Huyssen, memory studies have become attentive to the impact of melodrama, science fiction, as well as avant-garde forms of historical inscription on audiences, and on the wide nuances with which they articulate narratives of the past (Landy, 2015; Rosenstone, 2006; Landsberg, 2004;

Anderson, 2001; Shandler, 2000). These studies have been particularly influenced by the historiographical work of Hayden White, for whom history is a literary narrative form rather than a recording of unmediated events, or a scientific inscription in academic textbooks (White, 1978). Rosenstone has argued that the task for historians engaged in cinema to not judge film in terms of accuracy, but rather to admit the social impact of historical dramas, and then to '[...] investigate exactly how films work to create a historical world [by investigating] the codes, conventions, and practices by which they bring history to the screen' (Rosenstone, 2006, p.12). In his analysis of television's treatments of history Steve Anderson has similarly argued for an emphasis on the social effects of the media:

TV has modelled highly stylized and creative modes of interaction with the past. Although these modes of interaction are subversive of many of the implicit goals of academic history, they play a significant role in cultural memory and the popular negotiation of the past. (Anderson, 2001, p.20)

The recognition that dramatic and lowbrow depictions of the past have a vital role to play in the memorialisation of traumatic experience is a significant shift away from the polemics of political modernism, and the dismissal of historical drama in discourses such as the 'History/production/memory' debate of 1977. While *For Memory* retains a deep affiliation with the critiques of the ideological misuses of history in television and dramatic fiction, it is not dismissive of the widespread affective resonance of the media. Karlin's work operates on the nexus of a deeply troubled encounter between independent film and television, suspicious of its ideologies but recognising that drama had a significant role in developing historical awareness.

## Constructing Embodied Historical Publics

Huyssen asserts that the key to *Holocaust's* social and political impact is its capacity to provoke identification, empathy and pathos. Such affective qualities are certainly not absent from *For Memory*, although Karlin articulates these qualities through different means to the conventions of continuities of editing, narrative and character in *Holocaust*. Central to *For Memory* is a conception of historical experience rooted in bodies, mimesis and affect, as well as in the spatialized notion of public encounter (which I have described in Chapter 3 in terms of the public 'agora' in Benjamin, Brecht, Arendt). The theme of mimetic and embodied memory emerges first in *For Memory* in the sequences recorded in the 'Senile Dementia Ward' of the Hospital of St Clements, with the elderly patients engaging with a number of *aides-memoires* – looking at old photographs of streets in the East End, handling domestic objects from yesteryear, and singing old songs, prompting recollections of group activity and collective class endeavour. This sequence has a strong affective quality, with the passage of past into the present being traced in the touching of objects and the evident pleasure or discomfort posed by these memories with the elderly patients. Another sequence of *For Memory* depicts the rather more dubious training of young minds and bodies to think and feel the nationalist ideals of British imperialism through a participatory-play staged by the National Trust Youth Theatre on the life of Sir Francis Drake, the Elizabethan privateer, slaver and politician.<sup>37</sup> This section can be considered as a realm of top-down performative discipline, which is marked by obedience and order, rather than the affective passage of action and memory in the St Clements scenes.

The 'Drake' section begins in a large room, with various ladders and sheets of fabric arranged like parts of a sea-going ship. Men dressed in Elizabethan costume direct a

group of primary school children in an imagined re-enactment of a voyage undertaken by Drake through the straits of Magellan 400 years earlier. The adults lead the children, who act as the crew, with militaristic chants that they must repeat – ‘By the eight!’ and ‘By the ten!’ – as invisible sails are lifted and imaginary anchors sunk. Karlin’s camera is constantly roaming: it tracks along a long line of children who mime the action of pulling ropes; in another room, it tracks alongside another row of children who have been offered a small goblet of ‘spiced wine’ that they are all allowed to mock-drink from. Throughout these sequences, the actors speak in a theatrical approximation of Elizabethan English, insistently calling the children ‘gentlemen’, even though at least half of them are girls. The children are told to swear their allegiance to Drake while putting one hand on a large, black, leather-bound bible. A hirsute actor, playing Drake, instructs a group of boys how to ignite cannons and blow up Spanish ships. He asks them: ‘What do you think we should do with the crew of the Spanish Ship [once it is captured]?’ The boys reply: ‘lock them up!’, ‘throw them overboard’, and most disturbingly, ‘use them as slaves’. The ‘Drake’ actor delivers a speech on the perils of mutiny, and urges the ‘gentlemen’ and the ‘mariners’ (the two classes of the crew) ‘to be of one company’, reminding them that ‘we not only sail for ourselves, but we sail for the Queen and for England!’. Finally, ‘Drake’ dances with ‘Queen Elizabeth’, before she takes a sword and bestows the knighthood on him, tapping his shoulders with the blade as he bows before her.

Throughout these scenes, Karlin keeps tracking and panning shots of the children: they looked generally bored by the speeches, but retain an air of polite attentiveness. This sequence provides evidence of an emergent heritage culture mixed with a modern sense of participatory experience that Karlin had encountered during his



early research for the film. In a diary entry from 17 July 1978, Karlin recalls attending a 'Historical happening' recreating the ambience of seventeenth-century England at Kentwell Hall in Suffolk, in which 'supercilious young 'Tory' actors refused to admit the radical history of the period that Karlin knew from watching *Winstanley* (Karlin, 1978). This programmatic conformity of the 'Drake' sequence is also very much of its time, with the very choice of Drake's navigation through the Magellan straits invokes the dreams of a maritime empire at reworked in the jingoism of the Falklands Crisis of 1982.<sup>38</sup> The National Trust Youth Theatre thus explicitly seeks to invoke a nationalistic identity with direct pertinence to a right-wing discourse of imperial might manifest in contemporary neo-colonial warfare.

Despite the bellicose historical narratives at play here, this sequence may also recall Brecht's ideas of learning through mimesis, for the training of bodies in action to lead thought in the production of revolutionary citizens.<sup>39</sup> However, in the case of the Drake play, these processes of embodiment, action and mimesis are clearly used for the purposes of freezing and enforcing social norms, rather than for provoking social change, collective action or critical reflection. The children are being trained into the imagined community of nation (Anderson, 1991), with bodies literally induced to bow to authority, to kiss the bible, and to take part in the collective game of war. Eric Hobsbawm in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) argues that these learned traditions are produced through mimetic and repetitive training:<sup>40</sup>

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past [...] In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which

establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012, pp.1–2)

Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger assert that many of the traditions of monarchical pomp and pageantry have emerged precisely in relationship to the growth of radio and television, both of which have immensely expanded the ability for seemingly ancient traditions to become part of a national way of life. Hobsbawm specifically identifies the royal Christmas broadcasts first instituted by the BBC in 1932 as an example of this (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012, p.1). Thus, British television (as well as newspapers and tabloids) has long asserted the values of empire and class order through the inscription of bodies, spaces and ceremonial acts of the royals and the army within the domestic, but not private, sphere of the home.<sup>41</sup>

If the sequence on Drake suggests a process of discipline and mimesis in the production of embodied memory, Karlin returns to more spontaneous affective relations in a subsequent sequence filmed in a community space in the coal-mining town of Clay Cross, in the North of England. Clay Cross has a long history of radical activism stretching back to rent strikes in the early twentieth century as well as in 1972, when the local Labour council refused to implement rent increases demanded by central government. It is this radical memory that Karlin taps into with his footage of an exhibition of photographs organised by local historian Cliff Williams. This sequence is introduced with the intertitle ‘The Memory Keepers’, indicating that what follows is in contrast to the previous sequence’s miasmic trawl through the television archives. An elderly lady looks at old photographs of the town and its inhabitants, mounted on a temporary exhibition walls. Speaking to herself, she notes that the buildings in the photograph have now all gone; she gently touches the photograph, as if in bidding it a final farewell. This haptic encounter

loaded with pathos is repeated as various members of the community gather round and offer memories of collective action and endeavour. An elderly man, a former coal miner, handles a pickaxe to demonstrate how it was used, and how teams of men would work together to share the underground labour, supporting one another as friends became tired. As his arms grip the axe, he recalls communal recollections tied to work, ritual and repetitive action. Memory, Karlin suggests here, can emerge through objects and bodies; and affect and even pathos can be found in these depiction of these tender and revelatory moments.

These sequences may also be addressed in relationship to my previous discussion of public sphere theory in the two models of a 'reading public' and of a collective or spatialized public (see my conclusion to Chapter 3). For Karlin, the Clay Cross sequence asserts the value of physical co-presence in rituals of communal memory, in stark contrast to the distributive media of television, which is presented here as an alienating 'Strange Museum'. As I have previously noted, there are significant complexities in the different models of a localised 'agora' community as opposed to the discursive potential of public and counterpublic discourse (see the conclusion to Chapter 3). The tendency to romanticise the spatial arena of the cinema and the physical sharing of space as a platform for political discussion became something of a theoretical cul-de-sac during this period, notably in the theorisation of cinematic reception in terms of immobility as passivity.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, it may be said that Karlin romanticises the spatialized performance of memory within sites such as Clay Cross as sites that resist the erosion of memory in the simulacra of television. At the same time, the emphasis on embodied memory in *For Memory* may also be important for the consideration of public discourse in this thesis. As I have previously explored

reference to Negt and Kluge (in Chapter 1), the embodied and psychic lives of people who may not have access to those discursive tools of rational-critical debate on which Kant and Habermas built their ideals of deliberative democracy.

Furthermore, as I argue in the conclusion to Chapter 3, notions of spatial practice are vital to counterpublics. *For Memory* powerfully makes the case that counter-memories, oppositional uses of memory against capitalism and the state's official histories, can be articulated at a local level, where personal and collective experience are articulated through speech and bodies.

But Karlin was above all a filmmaker riddled with self-doubt. *For Memory* makes clear that he is troubled by the possibility that television drama such as *Holocaust* may be the best means for recording the horrors of the past. At the same time, Karlin's film performs an alternative idea of memory and television: it is both a counter-history and a work of what I have called counter-television. In *For Memory*, the Clay Cross exhibition is not merely a condemnation of televisual amnesia; it is a counterpublic expression of the need for oppositional embodied memory to enter the discursive and affective arena of television. *For Memory* is deeply concerned with how images might potentially operate in a televisual age to harness and direct collective memories into a socialist imagination for the present. It can also be seen as a defence of the use of oral histories within television as part of a process that had already existed since the BBC's Community Programme Unit and Open Door in the 1970s, and which would gather pace with Channel 4's strands such as the *People to People* (which centred on oral histories), *Bandung File* (including black histories) and *Out on Tuesday* (gay, lesbian and queer histories) in the 1980s and 1990s. Such series are notable for the discourses of identity and embodied experience and desire. In transmitting images of bodies and discourses of desire,

these programmes move beyond any simple binary of the public as agora or as deliberative and distributive media, suggesting that television was itself an ideal arena for the performance and inscription of embodied memories. A close consideration of *For Memory* suggests that although the televisual medium seemed fluid and intangible, it held within it the potential for engaging with and creating embodied, oppositional publics.

## Conclusion

Karlin's films for television are frequently concerned with the problem of finding images that bind oppositional publics, yet at the same time resisting the transformation of images into icons of authoritarian power. In his research for *For Memory*, Karlin became particularly interested in the iconoclasm of the English Civil War, where symbols of the old order were swept aside, an historical interest that echoes those engagements of independent film that I have examined in Chapter 2.<sup>43</sup> In a later sequence in *For Memory*, E.P. Thompson is filmed delivering a speech at a Workers' Education Association meeting about the influence of revolutionary ideas from the Levellers and Diggers within a breakaway group of Cromwell's Model Army. Thompson, in full rhetorical flow reads out the lines of the rebel's marching song: 'The Lords begin to honour us/ The saints are marching on/ The sword is sharp, the arrow swift, to destroy Babylon/ Against the Kingdom of the Beast, we witnesses do rise'. Thompson describes how this song was sung and repeated through the years and centuries after the revolution, with the 'images' of this song coming down to William Blake, forming the dissident core of his poem 'Jerusalem'. Thompson's genealogy thus recuperates the chant and the poem from the

nationalism of William Parry's hymn version (1916), locating in it a unifying cry of rebellion and dissent. Within the context of *For Memory*, the sequence also draws attention to the galvanising rites and ceremonies of oppositional, anti-authoritarian religious sects.

*For Memory* concludes with a sequence on another example of a community-binding image and history, in a sequence depicting the painting of a mural commemorating the 1936 Battle of Cable Street. The scene depicts the clash between anti-fascist protesters, the police and Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts, and it can still be seen today on the side of St George's Town Hall in Stepney, East London. In *For Memory*, footage of the painting of the mural is presented alongside an interview with Charlie Goodman, a socialist militant who had fought in the 'Battle'. For Goodman, the mural is an image that keeps alive the memory of a time of solidarity between socialists and other marginalised or oppressed peoples: it was a moment in which socialists in Britain supported the struggles in Spain, and when Irish dockers stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Jewish workers in London's East End against Mosley's fascists. Goodman argues that the image is also vital to the present, pointing out how racism was still prevalent in the early 1980s, notably with violence against Asians in the East End instead of against Jews. The attacks, he asserts, are exactly the same as those of the 1930s, in which the 'fascists are protected by the police'. Goodman asserts that it is vital to hold on to collective images of the past that will enable cooperative resistance to these renewed instances of intolerance.

In the interview, Karlin asks Goodman a number of questions that clarify his own concerns that television has changed the way that older forms of collectivity were performed. This tension may be articulated as emerging from the two principal

models of publics: that of the public-as-agora, based in street demonstrations and political meetings, and the notion of a reading public, based on a literary exchange in articles, newsletters and other media. Karlin's work emerges from the vertiginous disorientation of a filmmaker whose political experiences were moulded in the agora of the street battles of May 1968 in Paris and the co-operative filmmaking of the 1970s, but whose impression of society as it moved into the 1980s and 1990s was one in which experience was increasingly mediated through television and media. Karlin's later films explored these problems: *Utopias* (1989) asks how socialists may hold on to these struggles, and whether 'there is still a place for the word "us" in the current political vocabulary'; in *Between Times* (1993) explores the possibility that society is waiting for a future that could not yet be conceived. In his films about Nicaragua made between 1985 and 1991 for Channel 4, Karlin turns these ideas over and over, questioning his own ideals against a successful revolutionary movement outside of Europe.<sup>44</sup> The first episode of the series consists of a voice over (Karlin's) and still photographs taken from Susan Meiselas' depictions of the socialist revolution of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), questioning how photojournalism impacts on the lives of those depicted, and also how those images can be misread by outsiders. Other episodes assert that in Nicaragua, images still seem to be able to translate into direct action: images of Augusto César Sandino (the original revolutionary of the 1930s) and Carlos Fonseca (the founder of the FSLN) are widely distributed and turned into billboards. Karlin is troubled by these images, for they suggest a pathway back to authoritative iconographies of power and party political allegiance that many of his own post-1968 libertarian generation had negotiated, contested and rejected.

As I have indicated in the introduction to this chapter, Karlin's work may be related to Pierre Nora's theorisation of *lieux de mémoires* (sites of memory) For Nora, these sites of memory were a particularly modern phenomenon, which had arisen within the context of a widespread emphasis on the recording and analysis of history. For Nora, memory is spontaneous and pre-modern; while history is mediated, being constructed through written texts, formalised ceremonies, and in films and television programmes. Memory itself is fragile, Nora argues, because formalised history has come to dominate consciousness: 'We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left' (Nora, 1989, p.7); indeed, for Nora, history and memory 'appear to be now in fundamental opposition' (*ibid*, p.8). Aspects of this pessimistic view may also be seen in *For Memory* in Karlin's sense that the top-down heritage culture of *Holocaust*, the National Trust Youth Theatre, and the television archives, inscribe a sense of the past that is removed from collective experience and action. These are *lieux de mémoires* in their most frigid form – stale attempts to foster a collective sense of belonging within a society that sees the past as frozen and separate to the present.

Against the melodrama of *Holocaust*, the archives of the BBC, and the disembodied qualities of television, Karlin asserts a politics of activity and presence: of memory-objects in the Dementia Ward, of collective experiences of the past at Clay Cross, and of the agora-like Cable Street mural. Yet for Nora, these kinds of performances of memory are equally futile reactions to an age that recognises only individualism and the self, an era in which every individual and 'minority' group 'has felt the need to go and search for its own origins and identity' (*ibid*, p.16). Nora sweepingly describes all such activity – from the state's empty ceremonies to the drive for



‘people’s histories’ – as symptomatic of the malaise of memory under the museal impulse of modernity. Nora argues that:

[...] if history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no *lieux de mémoires*. Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces *lieux de mémoires*—moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore where the sea of living memory has receded. (Nora, 1989, p.12)

While Karlin’s images seek to recover memory against official heritage cultures, *For Memory* itself can thus be considered as another example of Nora’s *lieux de mémoires*: for it is itself a call to memory for an historical Left whose agency was waning in the face of Thatcherism and neoliberalism.<sup>45</sup>

If *For Memory* fits within Nora’s sweeping account of the fate of memory under modernity, I do not think we should therefore dismiss the counterpublic argument of such works. Karlin’s interest is in collective forms of memory as part of wider sociopolitical struggles. As a socialist filmmaker, Karlin was committed to activating and generating counterpublics through the medium of film. Unlike the pessimistic Nora, Karlin’s work suggests the positive aspect of world-making, of historical inscription and struggle. *For Memory* is a very deliberate attempt to develop counterpublic discourses of socialist, social and oral histories within the institutional and technological spaces of television. This suggests a continuity between the uses of distributive media in the publishing of socialist, feminist, and ‘people’s histories’ in the 1970s, and the increasingly mediated social experiences of the 1980s. Karlin was fully aware of the challenges of technologies of electronic communication – of an era dazzled by satellite television, fax and minitel – to the old ideals of social gathering in proscribed physical space.<sup>46</sup> If his work suggests a yearning for the discursive space of the agora, it is also a work that self-consciously sets out to

recreate that realm within the electronic flow of television. Karlin's television work reveals a desire to create new forms of history and memory that communicate the vital importance of communal and embodied memory, as well as acknowledge television as a significant site for the consolidation and expansion of counterpublic discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> See: 'Valéry Proust Museum' in Adorno, T. W. (1986) *Prisms*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, pp. 173-186. Fredric Jameson is similarly sceptical of the museal impulse in postmodern culture: '[...] the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture' (Jameson, 1991, p.65). This criticism of museums as dead culture goes back at least to *The Futurist Manifesto* (1909), where F.T. Marinetti railed against: 'Museums, cemeteries!'. See: Marinetti, F. T. (1909) 'The Futurist Manifesto'. *Le Figaro*. 20 February.

<sup>2</sup> See: Benjamin, W. (2007) 'The Storyteller', in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York, NY: Schocken. pp. 83-109, and 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', *ibid.* pp. 254-267.; Foucault, M. (1977) 'Film and Popular Memory', *Cahiers du Cinema/Extracts. Edinburgh '77 magazine: number 2: history/production/memory*. 18-25.

<sup>3</sup> Memory studies is a transdisciplinary fields, crossing disciplines such as history, sociology, art, literary and media studies, philosophy, theology, psychology, and the neurosciences. The field draws on the early twentieth-century writing of Maurice Halbwachs, who popularised the term 'collective memory' in the 1920s; unlike him, recent studies tends to examine cultural and mediatic forms rather than immediate social structures. See: Halbwachs, M. (2011) 'The Collective Memory', in Jeffrey K. Olick et al. (eds.) *The Collective Memory Reader*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press USA. pp. 139-149. See also: Olick, J. K. et al. 'Introduction' in Olick, J. K. et al. (eds.) (2011) *The Collective Memory Reader*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press USA. pp. 9-62.

<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, such research does not necessarily revoke Adorno and Horkheimer's critique that capitalism encourages a specific forgetting of itself, a sequestering of the exploitation in its own unfolding. For an analysis of this condition informed by the critical theory tradition, see: Huyssen, A. (1995) *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> The melodramatic conventions of *Holocaust* are evident in its heightened emotion, its use of music to accentuate this, as well as its centering of historical events on a family dynamic and fate. For a classical exposition of these ideas, see Thomas Elsaesser's 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', published in *Monogram* no. 4, 1972, pp. 2-15. This text is reproduced in Elsaesser, T. (1991) 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', in Marcia Landy (ed.) *Imitations of Life: Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. pp. 68-91. See Chapter 5 of this thesis, on Stuart Marshall's *Bright Eyes*, for further reflection on melodrama within television and in relation to debates within film studies from the late 1970s onwards.

<sup>6</sup> This exploration of identity permeates Karlin's work more widely, with later films returning to what it means to identify with and remember socialism. These concerns are evident in films such as *Utopias* and *Between Times*, which explore the idea of socialism at the apparent 'end of history'; and the series of films Karlin produced on the revolution in Nicaragua between 1985 and 1991, which looks to Latin America as a potential arena for a reborn socialism. These films are discussed further in the conclusion to this chapter.

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<sup>7</sup> Karlin's films have been screened frequently over the past few years at film festivals, art galleries and universities, including: Courtisane Festival, Ghent, 2016; AV Festival, Newcastle, 2016; Raven Row, London, 2016; Colloquium for Unpopular Culture, New York, 2015; DMZ International Documentary Film Festival, South Korea, 2014; Vivid Projects, Birmingham, 2013; Arnolfini arts gallery, Bristol, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> It also suggests Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoire* ('memory sites') – places in which public memory is enshrined under modernity, such as museums, public monuments and historical literature. See my discussion of Nora in the conclusion to this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> In a note dated 21 January 1979, Karlin states:

The whole idea of the film seems uncertain to me at the moment, after getting so far along one strand of it. The idea of a couple – older man of the 1930s + younger woman and the series of encounters with the past in order to live in the present still survives. But as a film or a drama, the idea has no substance, and the additions that I give it to gain substance really are wholly new additions, incompatible with the mood of the first. (Karlin, [no date])

<sup>10</sup> The Bradbury reference may be the inspiration for the 'city sequences' in *For Memory*; Karlin's *A Dream From the Bath* (1985) is centred around a fractured love story evocative of the one sketched out in his notes for *For Memory*; and the incomplete *Milton* (1999) that Karlin was working on before his death in 1999 centred on the writings of John Milton.

<sup>11</sup> Karlin would later cite this as one of the reasons that he, James Scott and Humphrey Trevelyan broke away from the group and set up Berwick Street Film Collective in 1970 (Karlin, 2000, p.151), making a number of films that cut its source footage far less frequently (see discussion of *Nightcleaners* in Chapter 1). The camera-as-gun is a metaphor used in Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's manifesto 'Towards a Third Cinema', first published in October 1969 in the international Cuba-based journal *Tricontinental*. n.14. pp.107-132. For an English translation of this document, see: Solanas, F. & Getino, O. (1997) 'Towards a Third Cinema', in *New Latin American Cinema Volume One*. pp. 33-58. For more on the impact of militant cinema on European and US independent cinema, see: Hartog, S. (1970) 'Newsreel, or the potentialities of a political cinema'. *Afterimage* (1), unpaginated; and Eshun, K. & Gray, R. (2011) 'The Militant Image: A Ciné-Geography'. *Third Text*. [Online] 25 (1), 1–12.

<sup>12</sup> For an early examination of the structural qualities of Italian neorealism, see André Bazin's essay 'An Aesthetic of Reality: Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation' and 'De Sica: Metteur en Scene' in *What is Cinema. Volume 2*. See: Bazin, A. (2004) *What Is Cinema? Volume 2*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>13</sup> This notion of diversity applies most obviously to Channel 4, rather the BBC where *For Memory* was shown. See chapter 3 of this thesis for more on Channel 4 in relation to publics and counterpublics.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Somerset-Ward, an Assistant Head of Music and Arts at the BBC, responsible for the *For Memory* agreement, had apparently abandoned the film in 1983, handing over supervision of the project to his assistant Huw Williams (see Barrie Gavin's letter of 16 May 1985). Sainsbury sent a letter to Graeme McDonald, Controller of the BBC, dated 17 September 1984 and another to Alan Yentob, on the 4 May 1985, urging the BBC to broadcast the film. Barrie Gavin also sent a letter on 16 May 1985 to Alan Yentob to the same effect, also accusing the BBC of treating Karlin with a 'shoddy, evasive and hypocritical ineptitude'. Karlin wrote to Colin MacCabe at the BFI on the 2 September 1985, stating that he had still not heard from Yentob; and again to Yentob on 25 October 1985 and 27 November 1985. In a letter dated 25 April 1986 to MacCabe (after the broadcast of the film), Karlin stated that when he had met with Yentob he had found out that it was not Yentob's 'kind of film'. These documents are contained in the 'For Memory' files at the Marc Karlin Archive.

<sup>15</sup> The Berwick Street Film Collective was largely 'over' by 1980, continuing only as an equipment resource used by independent filmmakers. See (Karlin et al., 1980, p.22).

<sup>16</sup> Collinson also worked on *A Dream From the Bath* (1985), the four Nicaragua films of 1985, *Utopias* (1989), *Scenes for a Revolution* (1991), *Between Times*, *The Serpent* (1997), *The Haircut*

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(1998) and *Milton* (1999). Collinson had been involved with a huge number of independent films including *Song of the Shirt* and *Riddles of the Sphinx*.

<sup>17</sup> In another note in his archive, Karlin writes (again in a fictionalised third-person): ‘It seemed as though fiction had declared war on those documents. His fears of fiction’s tyranny made him want to go to those who had produced them [i.e the documents]’ (Karlin, [no date]).

<sup>18</sup> See the essay ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’, which includes the famous line ‘To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’ (Adorno, 1997, p.34). Adorno argued in subsequent essays in the 1960s that Germans must come to recognise the role of the state, class and capitalism in the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust. He argued that attempts to avoid facing the past in Germany ‘[...] would draw the moral from the saying: “And it’s good as if it never happened,” which comes from Goethe but, at a critical passage in Faust, is uttered by the devil in order to reveal his innermost principle, the destruction of memory.’ (Adorno, 2003, p.5). In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno asserts that: ‘perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems’. (Adorno, 1990, p.362).

<sup>19</sup> Adorno wrote in his 1960 essay ‘The Meaning of Working through the Past’ that West Germany was busily disavowing its responsibility for its recent past, ‘the murdered are to be cheated out of the single remaining thing that our powerlessness can afford them: remembrance’ (Adorno, 2003, p.5).

<sup>20</sup> The AFPU’s footage was used in the American film *Death Mills* (1945), which was shown across the U.S. Zone of Military Occupation in post-war Germany as part of the de-nazification process (Gladstone, 2005, p.50). Footage of mass exterminations and murder was also used in the Nuremberg Trials (Lennon, 2005). The AFPU footage was also used in the film that the British began to assemble in 1945, which was also intended to be shown to German audiences, but was never completed. The AFPU imagery has also been used in *The World at War* (1973–74, Thames Television), and is frequently used as stock footage in accounts of the Holocaust. The first five reels of footage was arranged into *Memories of the Camps* (1984), but without the sixth reel. A final version with all six reels was assembled as *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey* (1945/2014), completed in 2014. The television producer and director André Singer has also made a documentary about the AFPU film, which is titled *Night Will Fall* (2014). Details of the 2014 restoration are available on the Imperial War Museum website: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/research/german-concentration-camps-factual-survey/about-german-concentration-camps-factual-survey> (Accessed 4 March 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Photography was officially banned in the death camps, the *Sonderkommando* who manned the gas chambers and pits were themselves killed every few months, and the Nazis’ communiqués about the genocide was shrouded in euphemistic jargon (Didi-Huberman, 2012, pp.20–21). There was, however, a paradox to the ban on photography – at Auschwitz, there were two photographic laboratories operated by the Nazis documenting executions and torture victims (Didi-Huberman, 2012, p.24)

<sup>22</sup> Resnais conjured some of the horrors of the experience through the point-of-view placement of the camera tracking along the railway line towards Auschwitz; he also established a set of dialectic contrasts between the sumptuous colour of the 1955 footage and the horrors shown in the black and white, between the luxuries enjoyed by the SS and the starvation, disease, torture and rape endured by their victims; as well as in a moving soundtrack by Hanns Eisler (a colleague of Bertold Brecht).

<sup>23</sup> See: Arendt, H. (2006) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York, NY: Penguin Classics.

<sup>24</sup> See the extensive discussion of Lanzmann in: Didi-Huberman, G. (2012) *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>25</sup> Levinas’s writing on the ethics of the face-to-face appear in a number of texts. See: Lévinas, E. (1996a) ‘Ethics and the Face’, in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. pp. 194–209.; Lévinas, E. (1996b) ‘Is Ontology

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Fundamental', in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. pp. 1–10.

<sup>26</sup> These theories were crucially different from earlier articulations, such as Guy Debord's 'society of the spectacle', for they asserted that images were not merely a veil over the real, but that there had been a fundamental rift between the signified and signifier. See: Baudrillard, J. (1994) *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.; Virillo, P. (1991) *The Lost Dimension*. New York, NY: Semiotext[e].

<sup>27</sup> Built by Richard Rogers between 1978 and 1986, incidentally, also the period of the first developments to final broadcast of *For Memory*. The building was given Grade I listing by English Heritage in 2011.

<sup>28</sup> The Opus has been used in a number of other films concerned with the Second World War. It is used in Stuart Marshall's *Desire, Sexuality in Germany 1910–1945* (Hornstein and Jacobowitz, 2003, p.129) (See Chapter 5); it was also used in Axel Corti's trilogy on the Holocaust, which was finished in 1986. See: Insdorf, A. (2002) *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*. 3rd edition. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. p.195.

<sup>29</sup> The ethics of this deployment of authorial voice-over is in distinct contrast to Chris Marker's tendency in *Sans Soleil* to overlay his own voice over images of others, toying with the play of power between narration and the camera's gaze and counter-gaze of the subject.

<sup>30</sup> François Truffaut's film version of the book was released in 1966.

<sup>31</sup> The framing and flow of imagery also recalls an idea of the image as simulacrum. I have found no record that Karlin had read Baudrillard's *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981). However, the idea here seems pertinent in the sense that television becomes a disembodied circulation of signs; while I argue that Karlin wished to inscribe the relationship between the body and the image.

<sup>32</sup> This debate erupted in the summer of 1986 between conservative historians such as Ernst Nolte who wanted to write a positive history of Germany's past, and others of the liberal and left such as Jürgen Habermas who were in favour of a critical self-reflection. See LaCapra, D. (1996) *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p.43.

<sup>33</sup> More broadly, Jeffrey Shandler notes a close congruence between the history of television itself and Holocaust histories, since television was a young medium in 1945 and played a major role in publicising an understanding of the genocide. Thus, the telecast of the Eichmann trials on the Capital Cities/ABC network in the USA in 1961 were the 'first international broadcasts of the actual proceedings of a major court case – played a strategic role in shaping public response to the case and its presentation of the Holocaust' (Shandler, 2000, p.xviii).

<sup>34</sup> For example, *Schindler's List* (1993, Steven Spielberg), *Life is Beautiful* (1997, Roberto Benigni), *The Pianist* (2002, Roman Polanski), *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008, Mark Herman), *Son of Saul* (2015, László Nemes), amongst many others.

<sup>35</sup> Huyssen asserts that the parable-form of post-Brechtian plays of the 1950s and 1960s (such as Max Frisch's *Firebugs* and *Andorra* or Peter Weiss' *Investigation*) failed because they each used a 'universalizing gesture of moral and political accusation' (Huyssen, 1980, p.134). Weiss' play is, in particular, highlighted as one that sees the Holocaust as a stage in the evolution of capitalism.

<sup>36</sup> The caveat that I would add to Huyssen's analysis is that there are a diversity of audiences who may have found the series less affective and even offensive at its conclusion, when the surviving son of the Weiss family, Rudi, is seen heading off to Palestine as a settler; the complexity of this situation may, we may suggest, be highly problematic for anti-Zionist Jews or Palestinians.

<sup>37</sup> The footage was recorded by Karlin at Buckland Abbey, Drake's home in Devon, which is now owned by the National Trust.

<sup>38</sup> The formation and consolidation of the British nation was undertaken in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Wales was incorporated into the Kingdom in the 1530s under Henry VIII; Ireland also came under increased rule during Elizabeth I's reign. See Chapter 3 of this thesis on further reflections on jingoism at the time of Falklands Crisis of 1982.

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<sup>39</sup> Mimetic learning is central to the use of gesture in the epic theatre and call-and-response in his *Lehrstücke* (learning plays). As Astrid Oesmann has argued in a recent analysis of Brecht's approach to history, for both Brecht and Benjamin, 'the unification of mimesis and comprehension is an essential precondition for any structural change that might culminate in revolution'. See: Oesmann, A. (2005) *Staging History: Brecht's Social Concepts of Ideology*. Albany: State University of New York Press. p.39.

<sup>40</sup> Karlin's notes reveal that he also considered interviewing Hobsbawm for his film, although there is no record of such an interview having taken place.

<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the development of a space for independent work on television in the 1980s, in particular on Channel 4, provided an opportunity for a more critical reflection on patriotism and jingoism: notably in the ironic use of footage of returning troops from the Falklands used in *The People's Flag* (see my discussion of this work in Chapter 3, as well as the wider response to the conflict with the programming of the 'Eleventh Hour'). Another example of independent film's engagement with these issues is *First Time Tragedy* (James Swinson, Cumming John and Jane Madsen, 1989), which depicts British maritime pride in the 'bicentennial' of Australia with a large naval flotilla and flag-waving procession, which is opposed by Aboriginal and other groups who see the ceremony as ignoring issues of indigenous land rights and histories of violence against indigenous peoples.

<sup>42</sup> Especially in the writing of Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry. As I have noted in previous chapters, these notions have been disputed within film studies since the 1980s, and more recently in terms of artists' moving image within the gallery (Balsom, 2013, p.50; Bordwell and Carroll, 1996; Carroll, 1988).

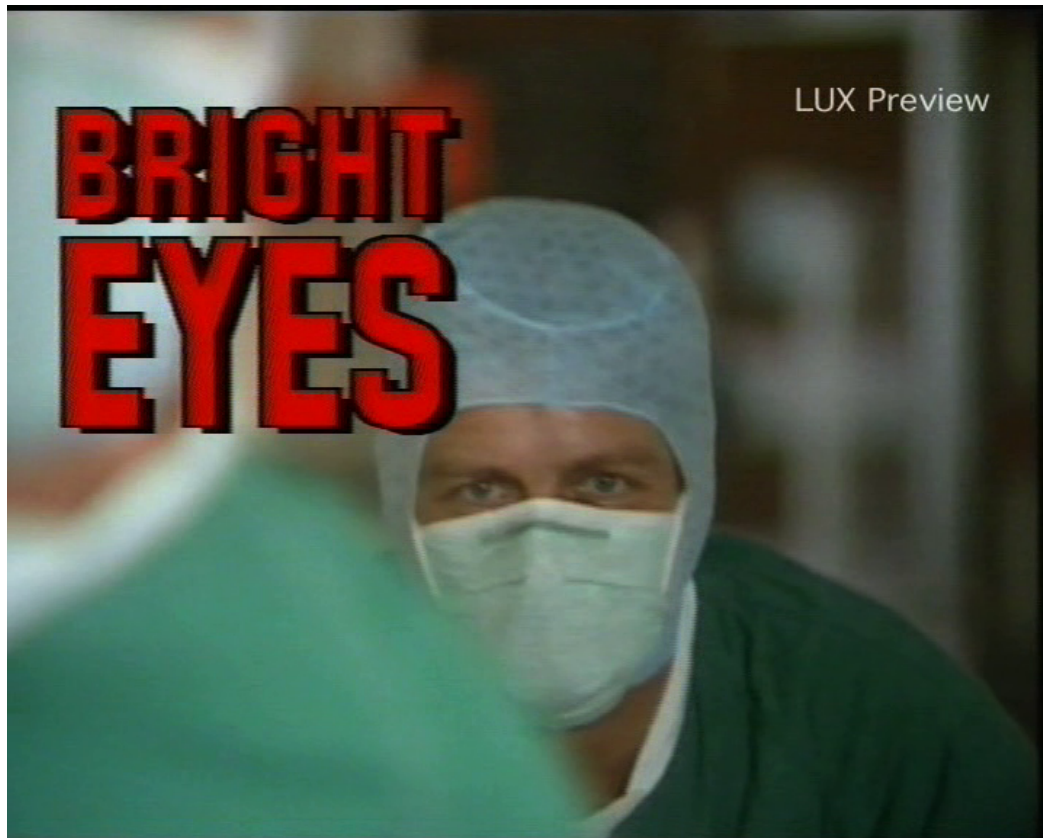
<sup>43</sup> Karlin was fascinated by the iconoclasm of the English Revolution, and was particularly interested in the church at Blythburgh in Suffolk, England, which was stripped of its icons and paintings during this period.

<sup>44</sup> The Nicaragua films are: *Voyages* (tx Channel 4, 14 October 1985), *The Making of a Nation* (tx Channel 4, 21 October 1985), *In their Time* (tx Channel 4, 28 October 1985), *Changes* (tx Channel 4, 4 November 1985), and *Scenes for a Revolution* (tx Channel 4, 13 May 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Or, rather, *For Memory* can be described as an attempt to activate these rituals of remembrance through film and television – for it cannot be claimed that the work itself gained the symbolic value of other *lieux de mémoires* described by Nora.

<sup>46</sup> Analysis of the impacts of these technologies on society in the 1980s and 1990s can be found in the writing of Marc Augé and Paul Virillo, among others. See: Augé, M. (1995) *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London: Verso Books.; Virillo, P. (1991) *The Lost Dimension*. New York, N.Y.: Semiotext[e].





Screen shots of *Bright Eyes* (1984, Stuart Marshall). Top: introductory sequence mimics the style of television medical dramas. Bottom: A direct-to-camera address by AIDS activist Michael Callen. Courtesy of LUX.



## Chapter 5. *Bright Eyes*: Bodies, Voices and Counterpublics

In the opening sequence of Stuart Marshall's *Bright Eyes*, an ambulance veers down a road, across a junction, and halts abruptly in front of a hospital. Inside the building, a male doctor is in mid-dialogue with a female colleague. Their speech, a theoretical debate on the efficacy of medical diagnostics that references Hippocrates, the ancient Greek 'father of medicine', is oddly anachronistic. Moreover, their stilted delivery and deliberative pace contrasts with the hyperactive televisual melodrama format that the rest of the scene mimics. The scene's parodic slant is made clear as it cuts back to a shot of the ambulance and the outside of the hospital, over which appears a title in shouting red capital letters: 'MORAL PANIC PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS'. A pair of paramedics snap open the van doors and rush a man on a wheeled stretcher into the building, pushing aside staff and patients, and shouting out as they go, 'Stand back, stand back, this man has AIDS and is highly infectious! Stand back, stand back!'. The soundtrack, an insistent electronic musical score redolent of daytime hospital melodramas, increases in tempo to a frenzied peak. The video image freeze-frames on a medic's face, his mouth covered in a surgical mask as if to avoid airborne infections (suggesting a basic lack of understanding of the means of transmission of HIV). The title 'BRIGHT EYES' is overlaid on the paramedic's visage, completing the opening sequence.

Commissioned by Channel 4 and broadcast at 11pm as part of the Independent Film and Video Department's 'Eleventh Hour' slot on 17 December 1984, Marshall's first documentary work for television begins with a body and a set of discourses. The body is that of the man with AIDS, who in this brief introductory

scene remains voiceless and prone: an object rather than a subject with agency.<sup>1</sup> The video's principal discourses are summed up rapidly in the opening scene: medical science (pronounced in the doctors' musing on Hippocratic efficacy), hyperbolic televisual language (medical melodrama), and panic (the shouting paramedic, the masked face), and the disempowered, silenced, body of the AIDS patient. *Bright Eyes* is a forceful and very early critical assessment of the media reception and panic about AIDS, from the homophobic newspaper headlines of *the Sun* to news reports and current affairs programmes on television (I shall give specific examples of these later in this chapter). The opening sequence deploys neo-Brechtian techniques of stilted acting and jarring anachronisms, and the repeated use of the same actors in different roles, which had developed within independent film and video during this period. Towards the end of the video, there are a number of talking-head interviews with gay activists, a technique that had emerged out of activist documentary in the 1970s (see my discussion of this in Chapter 4). By its conclusion, the voiceless body of the AIDS patient established in these opening shots gives way to that of the embodied voice of activists and of the documentary witness. As not only a video, but also as a television programme, *Bright Eyes* both provides a space for embodied queer voices, and is itself a voicing of counterpublic subjectivities, staged within the mainstream broadcast media of Channel 4.

This chapter examines Marshall's work as a contribution to counterpublic discourses in the 1980s in relation to television. Marshall's work is a forceful, urgent, response to the AIDS crisis and the media's rampant homophobia at this time, which was apparent in both newspapers and television. *Bright Eyes* is a work of what I have called counter-television, being both on and about the dominant discourses of the medium. Like Karlin's *For Memory*, *Bright Eyes* also seeks to articulate ideas of

history, memory and oppositional struggle in relationship to the televisual mainstream. Both works can be considered to be counterpublic arguments about history and memory, which share a political modernist idea of the politics of film form, and used the site of television as an agora for the discussion of urgent contemporary social and political concerns. Both works also reflect on specific topics in order to explore problems of representation: in *For Memory*, the Holocaust becomes a limit-point of representability in film; while (as I shall explore in this chapter), for Marshall and others, the AIDS crisis invoked a crisis of signification. The counter-memories that each film explores are strikingly different: where Karlin's film explores the politics of memory in relationship to socialism and capitalism, Marshall's work centres on the counter-histories of gay activism, sexuality, and the media representation of AIDS. Nevertheless, Marshall's work clearly relates to a broader culture of memorialisation and memory politics that emerged throughout the 1980s (Nora's *lieux de mémoire*), and the burgeoning number of films and television programmes concerned with the Holocaust made in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (see my previous chapter on Marc Karlin's *For Memory*). The growth of discourse on collective memory and the working through of collective trauma in the late 1970s and 1980s that I have previously analysed in terms of the Holocaust, is also clearly applicable to the negotiation of death in the AIDS pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

This Chapter also seeks to bring together studies of Marshall's work that have frequently been atomised, divided into either accounts of his contribution to video art in Britain, sound art, or to queer art or media activism. Histories of video art in Britain by Catherine Elwes and Chris Meigh-Andrews, for example, situate Marshall's importance in terms of the development of video art, as well as his role

as a writer who contributed to the critical literature of video art.<sup>3</sup> David Toop and Alvin Lucier have attested to Marshall's importance for sound art and experimental music in the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Douglas Crimp and Martha Gever have asserted Marshall's importance to activist AIDS media (the U.S. reception of Marshall often eliding the context of public broadcasting television in favour of an analysis of non-broadcast videotape).<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, I draw from these, as well as more recent work on Marshall's practice undertaken by queer academics such as Roger Hallas, and younger researchers such as Conal McStravick.<sup>6</sup> Of particular importance for me here is Roger Hallas's examination of *Bright Eyes* as part of the 'queer AIDS media' tactics of the 1980s and 1990s (Hallas, 2009, p.3), which he argues, sought to carve out a space for the embodied gay 'witness', who has inside experience of the violence, trauma and community of the AIDS pandemic. Although Hallas does not mention it, a central influence on Marshall is the notion of the speaking subject developed by Julia Kristeva in her 1975 essay 'The System and the Speaking Subject' (Kristeva, 1986a), and I shall in this chapter trace the influence of this idea through Marshall's early work, culminating in *Bright Eyes*. For Marshall, an interest in sound art, in embodied vocalisation, in a political modernist critique of realism, all culminated in the critique in *Bright Eyes* of homophobic media discourses, as well as opened up the possibility of a return of that speaking subject through video art and activist documentary.

I argue here that *Bright Eyes* can help to understand the changing nature of broadcasting in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the uses of independent film and video to produce a counterpublic rethinking of television. As a non-queer writer contributing a chapter on *Bright Eyes*, my position is that of an outsider (rather than Hallas's insider-witness), but one with a deep engagement with what Nancy Fraser

calls ‘subaltern’ counterpublic discourse (Fraser, 1993, p.110).<sup>7</sup> Queer activism aims to both unite a politicized group and to break apart a heteronormative public sphere;<sup>8</sup> it must therefore also impact upon everyone, in the same way that a discourse against sexism or racism must affect all in creating a wider recognition of difference. My interest here, as in the rest of this thesis, is in how counterpublic discourses expand, take on, and change more mainstream publics. These can take place at a number of levels: using rhetorics of persuasion, critical insights into injustices, embodied representations that foreground experience, and the promulgation of a socialist worldview that promotes solidarity and recognition.

As with the previous chapter, this one draws on a number of primary and secondary sources: interviews with people who knew Marshall well; time spent examining documents at the Stuart Marshall Archives at the British Artists’ Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins, London; extensive viewing of Marshall’s earlier video work and his subsequent documentary work for television such as *Desire* (1990), *Comrades in Arms* (1990), *Over Our Dead Bodies* (1991) and *Blue Boys* (1992); as well as the diverse writing on Marshall by other writers, commentators and researchers. In this chapter, I draw on this research to undertake a close analysis of *Bright Eyes* as a contribution to a counterpublic discourse of television in Britain in the 1980s that I have explored throughout this thesis. *Bright Eyes* can be roughly divided into two sections, with the first approximately forty minutes using imagined dramatic re-enactments to give an historical overview of the way the media, medical science, and legislative powers have both brought visibility to the ‘deviant’ body while also rendering subjects voiceless. The second part of *Bright Eyes* (approximately 20 minutes) features testimonial accounts in a more conventional talking head style, which give voice to that once-silenced subject. In the first

segment of this chapter ('Part 1: Bodies and Discourses'), I undertake a close analysis of the video's reflections on the genealogy of discourses in the construction of homophobia and gay identities, from the nineteenth-century biomedical use of photography, to the signifying practices of newspapers and television in the 1980s. In the second part of the chapter ('Part 2: The Witness as Campaigner') I look at the space that Marshall clears for the speaking subject, rooting this in his own artistic and intellectual developments in the 1970s, from his early work as a sound artist, to his video art and documentary practices in the 1980s and early 1990s. Here, I consider the influences that inform Marshall's work, from video art to discourses of sexuality, gender, as well as psychoanalytic and semiological theory.<sup>9</sup>

### **Part 1: Bodies and Discourses of Photography**

The first approximately forty minutes of *Bright Eyes* uses imagined dramatic re-enactments to give an historical overview of the way the media, medical science, and legislative powers have brought visibility to the 'homosexual' body, but also rendered him or her silent and without voice. As *Bright Eyes* unfolds, the widespread fear-mongering about AIDS in the popular press and television in the 1980s is related to a longer history of social anxieties about queer bodies and identities. *Bright Eyes* asserts that contemporary fears can be traced back to the writing of late nineteenth-century sexologists and criminologist, and to the theoretical and cultural assumptions of phrenology and eugenics that reached their most monstrous expression in the Nazis' brutal programme of exterminating those whom Heinrich Himmler referred to as 'degenerates'.<sup>10</sup> *Bright Eyes* takes the viewer on a dizzying tour through contemporary and historical ways in which both science and the media

have pathologised the queer body in a drive to regulate what were seen as deviant forms of sexuality.

The initial focus of the video is a critique of what Michel Foucault called the ‘medical gaze’ (Foucault, 2003), the notion of science as a bringer-of-light to the dark corners of human behaviour, and the manner in which images of AIDS victims in the newspapers and tabloids in the 1980s appear to repeat nineteenth-century notions of ‘the homosexual’ as an congenital aberration from social norms.

Following the opening hospital sequence described above, there is a rapid montage of headlines from British newspapers scaremongering about AIDS (‘Alarm as lethal plague spreads to non-homosexuals’; ‘Fear over sex bug “killer”’; ‘Gay bug kills gran’; ‘Pictures that reveal disturbing truth about AIDS’; and sensationalist images from newspapers of Kenny Ramsauer, a New Yorker dying of an AIDS related-illness). The same two actors (Grazyna Monvid and Bruce Bayley) who appeared in the opening sequence also feature in a number of scenes that follow. Bayley, dressed in Victorian garb, delivers a monologue based on a text by an unnamed nineteenth-century contributor to the authoritative medical journal *The Lancet*, arguing in favour of photography as an objective medium: ‘the camera, has no preconceived notions, and invariably presents things to us as they are’ (*Bright Eyes*, 1984). Following this is a montage sequence of still photographs taken from Havelock Ellis’s study *The Criminal* (1890), a book that sets out to describe and depict, using etchings and photographic plates, types of criminals and pathologised figures (‘A Mad Woman’; ‘An Hysteric’; ‘An Intermediate Type’; ‘A Moral Imbecile’).<sup>11</sup> After this is a sequence centred on a static shot of the sentimental Victorian painting *The Doctor* (1891, Sir Luke Fildes), in which a doctor sits in a darkened interior staring intently at a child lying sick in a bed and illuminated by lamplight. In voice-over, a woman describes

how the scene can be understood in terms of the ‘medical gaze’ of the doctor, who brings the light of scientific knowledge and, in doing so, transfigures the sick patient into an image to be analysed.

*Bright Eyes* cuts between these diverse histories in order to assert that the majority of contemporaneous newspaper and television reports about AIDS evinced deep-rooted heteronormative and homophobic tendencies that were first developed in nineteenth-century biomedical discourses. *Bright Eyes* develops a critique of the media representation of AIDS through a semiological analysis of the hidden signs within supposedly neutral photographic evidence. While the nineteenth-century writer in the *Lancet* asserts that photographs offer science an objective and neutral tool, free of the subjectivity of the human hand, this supposition was demolished in the critical discourses on photography in the 1970s and 1980, particularly in Roland Barthes’s writings, starting with *Mythologies* (1957, translated 1972) and *Image–Music–Text* (1977).<sup>12</sup> Marshall’s work should be situated in these contemporaneous debates, particularly as they unfolded in journals such as *Screen*, *Camerawork*, *Ten-8* and *October*, as well as in projects such as Sunil Gupta and Simon Watney’s ‘The Rhetoric of AIDS’ project (1986), the AIDS and Photography Group (1988), the exhibition and publication *Ecstatic Antibodies* (1990), and Marshall’s essay ‘Picturing Deviancy’ (Marshall, 1990) which was based on his earlier research for *Bright Eyes*.<sup>13</sup> In *Bright Eyes* and his later ‘Picturing Deviancy’ essay, Marshall asserts that early medical and criminological uses of photography produced essentialist notions of identity, where criminal behaviour, gender and sexuality were seen to be inscribed in identifiable body types (‘the criminal’, ‘the hysteric’ or ‘the pervert’), and where the quest for scientific knowledge comes at the price of casting its subject mute, as an image to be examined.



Having established, in terse outline, the genealogy and semiology of the medical gaze, Marshall then returns to images from tabloid newspapers of Kenny Ramsauer in both fine health and with his face disfigured from the effects of a (rare) AIDS-related illness. A voice-over explains that:

The *Sunday People* published two pictures of Kenny Ramsauer, a gay man who was dying of AIDS. According to this newspaper, these pictures revealed the 'Disturbing truth about AIDS sickness'. It seems that the *Sunday People* has taken up a question which has troubled the medical profession since the last century. How does one form a true picture of an illness? The media's answer to this question is similar to the solution which was first suggested by medical science. Identify and isolate certain social groups, and then describe them as being inherently ill. Yet again, the media is painting menacing pictures of homosexuals. It should therefore come as no surprise that when a reporter is sent in search of a homosexual in his heartland, he is only sighted at a distance, in dark corners like an exotic creature that shies away from the light. [...] When he is identified as a homosexual, then he becomes a member of an exotic species and a case history of a sickness. Kenny Ramsauer decided to become visible to show us the human misery of AIDS, but instead, he became a picture of the sick homosexual. (*Bright Eyes*, 1984)

This biting analysis asserts that the mainstream media's treatment of people living with AIDS is founded on a pathologizing logic of fear and control. Having established this argument, Marshall rapidly moves on to examine other links between homophobia, scientific discourse and forces of social regulation of difference. An actor sits in a semi-darkened room, backlit and cast in shadows: a technique echoing TV conventions in which the interviewee is lent a degree of anonymity but also cast as a social other (one who lives in 'dark corners like an exotic creature that shies away from the light'). Thomas Waugh has argued that the media's use of the silhouette device in depicting gay men '[...] evokes all the shame

and fear that society has wanted us to feel and that we have had to struggle against' (Waugh, 2011a, p.213). As the actor speaks, the lighting shifts to reveal his face more fully. This technique builds upon the earlier emphasis on the 'light' brought by the medical gaze in the sequence on Fildes' painting *The Doctor*. The man, literally emerging from the shadows, recounts his experience coming out in the 1950s, and his narrow escape from subjection to electric shock aversion therapy.<sup>14</sup> Following this is a scene shot in the Orientalist interior hallway of the nineteenth-century mansion, Leighton House, London, in which an actor reads a text describing the task of scientific classification as akin to travelling in unknown lands and conquering the 'darkness'. Again, the scene is shot in penumbral half-light, but this time the actor is a black American man. Here, Marshall generates meaning through a dynamic array of contrapuntal relations: from Enlightenment search for knowledge (the use of lighting in a darkened space, of medical discourse 'bringing light') to imperialism and colonialism (Leighton House's Orientalism and the body and voice of the black actor).

Marshall would later lucidly explain his understanding of the connections between the medical gaze, racism and colonialism in his essay 'The Contemporary Political Use of Gay History: The Third Reich' (1992):

There is a complex and self-validating interrelationship between attempts to categorize, control, and regulate the colonized subjects of imperialism 'abroad' and the potentially rebellious, politically seditious subjects of the social underclass 'at home' [...] The process of civilizing the primitive world outside the seat of empire was part and parcel of the attempt to regulate and control the primitive society of the social underclass within the seat of empire. [...] Hence the physiology of social deviancy was profoundly inflected by a racial understanding of social groupings, behaviours, and demographic patterns. (Marshall, 1992, p.75)

For Marshall, the regulation of differences of both sexuality and ethnicity were clearly coextensive. This is made clear in *Bright Eyes* with meditations on the regulation of sexuality and ethnicity carried through to its most destructive ends in Nazi Germany. The scene shot at Leighton House is followed by a scrolling text that fills the screen: a lengthy quote from 1936 in which Heinrich Himmler identifies ‘homosexuals’ as ‘degenerates’ and then calls for the ‘EXTERMINATION OF DEGENERATES’ (this is spelt out in capitals onscreen). The next scene centres on the German-Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935), who campaigned for the equality of gay men and women from his base at the Institute for Sexual Research in Berlin, and who was persecuted by the Nazis until his death in exile in Paris. Played by an actor who has appeared in another guise earlier in *Bright Eyes*, ‘Hirschfeld’ explains:

Our popular press whipped up a campaign of anti-homosexual hysteria. For the first time, I the collector of the pictures, was to see myself become a picture, a trouble maker. A homosexual and a Jew. (*Bright Eyes*, 1984)

The Hirschfeld sequence also makes apparent that the sexologist was himself an avid believer in the usefulness of photographic images for a science of sexuality. Hirschfeld had built up a vast archive of photographic evidence at the Institute for Sexual Research, which was intended to contribute to a scientific knowledge of a ‘third sex’, and to claim legal rights based on that difference. This pathologizing was, however, too easily taken up by the Nazis as evidence of inherent degeneracy. Thus, Hirschfeld clearly held a number of views that were later contested within critical discussions in the 1970s and 1980s. His understanding of identity was seen as essentialist and his conception of photographic knowledge was seen as positivist (for Hirschfeld, photography can reveal the truth of sexuality). By contrast, for Marshall, photographs were always produced within social discourses that were

potentially coercive (as Foucault had asserted in his examination of the medical gaze). This position is strikingly different to the concerns with photographic record that Marc Karlin explored in *For Memory*, where the photograph-as-witness retains its authenticity, even if a society increasingly dominated by television loses its ability to read such images and must instead resort to the fiction form of Holocaust (See Chapter 4).

*Bright Eyes* emphasises that meaning in photography is constructed and socially produced through the use of neo-Brechtian techniques such as deliberate anachronisms and intertextuality. Marshall shows Hirschfeld sitting in a cinema, watching footage of the Institute for Sexual Research's library being burned by Nazis. Instead of archival black-and-white footage, what is shown on the cinema screen is new colour footage, shot in close-up, of books engulfed in yellow and red flames. A woman's voice, interjects every now and again, reporting on events in Berlin; however, her voice sounds filtered as if it has been recorded on tape and played back on an answerphone (a technology of the 1970s and 1980s). The use of anachronism and the ongoing reflection on the use of photography is also evident in the following scene, which is dramatized from the memoirs of Heinz Heger (the pen name of Josef Kohout, 1917–1994), one of the few gay men to have written about his experience of persecution under the Nazi regime. Heger (played by Bayley again) is shown being interrogated by an officer who introduces a piece of evidence against him in the form of a photograph of him and his male lover. This scene cuts to a dramatised dialogue between a survivor of the Flossenbürg concentration camp where Heger had been sent (played by Bayley, again) and a woman (played by Monvid) who recounts the story of a lesbian's experience of the war. However, while the actors speak as if they are in the immediate post-war period recounting

personal memories, they are shown in contemporary clothes of the 1980s, as they drive down a motorway in Germany. The scene deploys an anachronistic strategy that Ian White describes as ‘an extraordinary collapse of time’ (White, n/d), succinctly showing the pertinence of the past and its imbrication in the present. As Bayley’s character notes: ‘Each of the granite pillars that holds up the motorway bridges cost the lives of untold victims’ (*Bright Eyes*, 1984).

From this historical critique of essentialist ideas of identity and scientism, *Bright Eyes* shifts to an examination of television’s institutional homophobia, which can be found not only in what is represented on television, but also in conditions of production. The scene is a contemporary 1980s television studio. A television presenter (Bayley) and studio employee (Monvid) are preparing to interview a man with AIDS. Suddenly, a studio technician refuses to pin a microphone to the lapel of the man, fearing that he might contract AIDS. The situation escalates until the producer decides that the interviewee will have to be spoken with over a telephone link rather than in person in the studio. Here, the person with AIDS is allowed a voice, but not an embodied one. In fact, this scene is based on a real event: a newspaper clipping fills the screen detailing how a similar had taken place in San Francisco in the early 1980s.

Together, these scenes form an argument about the silencing of the embodied queer voice. This silencing was achieved historically, *Bright Eyes* argues, in the classification of ‘homosexuals’ as a type of illness or disorder by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexologists, and in the work of medical photographers in seeking proof for these notions. *Bright Eyes* thus outlines an argument that draws a line between nineteenth-century medicine’s biological essentialism and Nazi eugenics, and

onwards to treatment of homosexuality as something that may itself be sick and contagious (the logic of the Nazis' notion of infection is more metaphorical than literal: a congenital disorder is not generally contagious but inherited; nevertheless, the presence of 'degenerates' may 'infect' a society conceived of as racially pure.). In order to unpick how these ideas recur in the context of AIDS, it is worth turning away from a close analysis of *Bright Eyes* to reflect on the media representations in the press and in television in the 1980s. In the next section on 'AIDS and Sexuality in the Media', I pay particular attention to television's depictions of AIDS in the 1980s in the UK. This context is not directly discussed in *Bright Eyes*, and many accounts of Marshall's work have not addressed the context of British television in adequate depth. I argue here that it is important to register the contexts of television here in order to get a better understanding of *Bright Eyes* not as a singular work of art, but rather as one node in a wider counterpublic intervention into the discourses of television, which I have called 'counter-television' in the previous chapter. This intervention was, I argue, part of a movement that drew in the embodied queer voice into the public discursive arena of television.

### **AIDS and Sexuality in the Media**

Marshall's video was made quickly, over a number of weeks in the summer of 1984, as a direct and urgent response to the unfolding events of the AIDS epidemic and their representation in the media.<sup>15</sup> The immediate backdrop for *Bright Eyes* is the rapid emergence of AIDS, its terrible social impact on gay communities, but also the press portrayal of AIDS as a specifically 'gay cancer' or 'gay plague', and the fears and social marginalisation that these reports generated. This pernicious linkage of sexuality and disease was first made within a number of early medical reports on

AIDS, and was quickly spread and sensationalised in the press. AIDS was first officially described by the medical establishment in a report, published in June 1981, by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in the USA, which detailed five cases of the rare pneumonia *Pneumocystis carinii* in sexually active gay men. Two months later, the CDC reported a further one-hundred cases including *Pneumocystis carinii*, as well as of the rare cancer Kaposi's sarcoma, also among gay men (Engel, 2006, p.5). Early CDC research found that a connecting factor for those succumbing to these rare diseases were both their sexuality and the number of sexual partners. Adding to this conception of AIDS as a disease exclusively spread among gay men, this mysterious new condition was first termed 'Gay Related Immune Deficiency' (GRID) – until campaigners successfully lobbied for the name to be changed to 'acquired immune deficiency syndrome' (AIDS) in 1982.<sup>16</sup> The press reported on these cases, connecting sexual activity and disease, often in salacious detail.<sup>17</sup>

Dennis Altman asserts that within the press, AIDS quickly became linked to perceptions of gay identities (Altman, 1987). This was despite increased reports of the prevalence of the syndrome in other marginalised groups (what became known as the four 'H's: homosexuals, Haitians, heroin addicts and haemophiliacs), and subsequent reports of its prevalence among heterosexuals, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>18</sup> Dennis Altman, Simon Watney, Jeffrey Weeks and others have noted that press reports had a moralizing tone, implying that gay individuals and communities were inherently dissolute, depraved and outside of socially accepted norms. At the same time, figures of the New Right in both the USA and the UK could be heard claiming that AIDS was God's divine punishment for the 'sin' of homosexuality.<sup>19</sup> *Bright Eyes* was thus made amidst what has been called an atmosphere of pervasive 'moral panic' or 'sex panic' (Weeks, 1991a, p.118; Rubin,

2011, p.26), caused by the news that AIDS might become prevalent in the wider heterosexual population. As Altman notes:

In its early days the media tended to shy away from AIDS, seeing it as a gay story they shouldn't touch. [But] once the illness appeared among infants and those who had received blood transfusions, this attitude changed dramatically, and from early 1983 on, AIDS has been a continuing preoccupation in the media. (Altman, 1987, p.16)

*Bright Eyes* should also be situated as a very direct response to the media responses during 1983-1984. Following only intermittent reports in its first year or so, Altman observes a particular 'media blitz' in the spring and summer of 1983 (Altman, 1987, p.17), which in both the USA and the UK had a distinctly homophobic slant:

At the end of 1984 the London *Sun* [sic] was still referring to "the gay plague," despite the fact that the National Union of Journalists Equality Council had publicly disavowed the term and the News of the World referred to "the gay killer bug" (Altman, 1987, p.19)

While *Bright Eyes* is a measured and intellectually acute work, it is nevertheless clearly a quick and impassioned response to this glut of negative media output. It also offers a significant alternative to what Simon Watney describes as the mainstream media's recurrent lack of identification with the viewpoint, arguments and voices of people with AIDS. Watney asserts that:

What is at stake here is a fundamental issue of identification. In Britain, Aids [sic] is viewed almost exclusively from the heterosexual viewpoint, which offers speaking roles to other heterosexual PWAs [People with AIDS] but never to the constituency most devastated by the disease. Our newspapers and television reports consistently refuse any identification with gay men under any circumstances. (Watney, 1997, p.12)

This lack of identification, this total avoidance of the perspective of people living with AIDS, can be clearly seen in the first two British television documentaries



addressing AIDS, which were both broadcast in 1983. The first of these was an edition of BBC's current affairs series *Panorama* shown on BBC-1 on 7 March, which examined AIDS as an 'alarming by-product of the swinging sixties' (a reference to sexual liberation) that was happening in the USA ('*Panorama*', 1983), thus directly linking disease with a certain social formation that broke with accepted norms of monogamous, married heterosexuality. The second programme, *Killer in the Village*, broadcast on BBC2 on 25 April as part of the *Horizon* documentary series, was billed as a 'medical detective story' ('*Horizon: Killer in the Village*', 1983) that examined the spread of AIDS in New York and attempts to try to find a cure for it.<sup>20</sup> While not overtly unsympathetic to people with AIDS, *Killer in the Village* features a voice-over that addresses itself to a specifically heterosexual audience, while the individuals and communities it examines are rendered exotic and other.<sup>21</sup> Both programmes were made before the discovery of the AIDS retrovirus, and *Killer in the Village* speculates widely on possibly causes: promiscuity itself, or the spread of other venereal diseases leading to 'immune overload', or perhaps some side effects of the use of amyl nitrate. The fact that these notions had themselves been postulated by the medical community is also important here (Engel, 2006, p.7), for it suggests the slippage between scientific enquiry and documentary reportage that were developed within the heteronormative biomedical discourses of the time (Treichler, 1988, p.38). *Killer in the Village* assumes a rationalist tone, reasoning that sex between men is unlikely to be the unique mode of transmission, since many apparently heterosexual Haitians sufferers were also recorded at this time. However, while *Killer in the Village* may attempt a neutral or objective stance borrowed from scientific discourse, overall it adopts a patriarchal tone, particularly in its prurient focus on what it calls 'promiscuity'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, by addressing an assumed heterosexual audience without any acknowledgement of actual social diversity, the

programme is guilty of both heteronormativity (Warner, 1993), and the tendency to 'bracket out' difference noted by Nancy Fraser in her analysis of the apparent rationalism of bourgeois public discourse (Fraser, 1993). Both of these BBC programmes conclude with an alarmist message, designed to send shockwaves into the homes of British television audience: would Britain be next?

Within the context, many gay men felt a growing distrust and hostility to the medical establishment – 'a widespread skepticism of mainstream medicine in general' (Mass, 2011). This discourse echoes the earlier one within the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s on the role of patriarchy within medicine and welfare, which I have examined previously in relation to *Song of the Shirt* (see Chapter 2). Reflecting on representations of AIDS in the media in the 1980s, Susan Treichler argues that many gay men were faced with the question of taking control of their lifestyles or acceding to a biomedical discourse that had traditionally classified homosexuality as an illness:

Does one prefer an illness [that is] perhaps preventable, curable, or containable through "self-control" – or an illness caused by some external "disease" which has a respectable medical name and can be addressed strictly as a medical problem, beyond individual control? (Treichler, 1988, p.47)

One political position to assume in these circumstances was to contest the scientific establishment's discovery of the retrovirus that causes AIDS, which was established between 1983 and 1984.<sup>23</sup> There were at this time a spectrum of positions that opposed the biomedical takeover of the fate of people with AIDS, ranging from those who sought self-empowerment through alternative holistic treatments, through to an outright denial of HIV as a cause of AIDS, as well as a refusal to take the drug AZT once its toxic effects became apparent.<sup>24</sup> There was a rich

counterpublic discourse on the causes of AIDS and the challenges it presented within gay and lesbian discourse, writing, and activism at this time. Most notoriously, scepticism about biomedical discourse on AIDS came to a head in one of the gay press's most vocal chroniclers of the pandemic, the *New York Native*. Writing in the important special issue of the journal *October* on AIDS and its representations, Douglas Crimp notes that, while the *New York Native* had initially offered much-needed news about AIDS, it exploited '[...] the conflation of sex, fear, disease, and death in order to sell millions of newspapers' (Crimp, 1987b, p.237). By 1987 the theories propounded in the *New York Native* had become increasingly extravagant: Deborah B. Gould notes that the height of this was a 1987 cover, 'showing a picture of a jumping dolphin, the headline connected mysterious deaths of dolphins to AIDS and warned people to stay out of the ocean' (Gould, 2010, p.446). The effect of these headlines, Gould notes, was the collapse of readers' trust in the publication. While the *New York Native* example is an extreme one, the general suspicion of the medical establishment is clearly founded on good reason and bitter experience: the medical use of electric shock aversion therapy to 'cure' homosexuality had been not uncommon only a decade earlier.<sup>25</sup>

*Bright Eyes* develops a critical counterpublic discourse on the origins and cause of HIV, introducing it into the mainstream of television in Britain. The video closes with an interview with Michael Callen, an American activist who championed the empowering term 'person with AIDS' (subsequently 'person living with AIDS') as opposed to the disempowering 'AIDS victim' label, and who called for further research into the complex causes of AIDS.<sup>26</sup> In his interview, Callen inveighs against the 'Federal Government's premature endorsement of the view that [gay men, haemophiliacs and Haitians] may be carrying and spreading a new *Andromeda Strain*

virus'.<sup>27</sup> Callen's claim, as recounted in *Bright Eyes*, is that he is just one of many '[...] human beings suffering from an illness whose cause remains unknown [...]' (Callen in *Bright Eyes*, 1984). (I shall look more in depth at Callen's interview in the next section of this Chapter on the figure of the 'Witness as Campaigner'). Importantly, *Bright Eyes* was only one of a number of programmes on British television in the 1980s and early 1990s that gave voice to this argument. Channel 4's 'Dispatches' series broadcast two documentaries that outlined the case in a much more strident tone, arguing that the medical establishment had misled the public: *The Unheard Voices* (13 November 1987), which argued that HIV was not the cause of AIDS but rather an opportunistic virus; and *The Aids Catch* (13 June 1990), which argued that AIDS might not actually be infectious.<sup>28</sup>

Marshall himself was committed to expanding a counter-public discourse on alternative treatments for people with HIV/AIDS, and to providing an information resource in opposition to the mainstream narrative of the medical establishment. In 1988, Marshall became a trustee of the UK-based group Positively Healthy (PH), an organisation run by and for people with HIV/AIDS that favoured a holistic approach to treating HIV/AIDS rather than drugs such as AZT. Against the media and medical establishment's message that AIDS would inexorably lead to death, Positively Healthy was noteworthy in building a message of hope, asserting that people with AIDS could do much to bolster their health and lead a fulfilling life without the use of drugs such as AZT.<sup>29</sup> Marshall's critical position in relation to the medical establishment is further clarified by his own appearance in another Dispatches documentary for Channel 4: *AZT: Cause for Concern* (12 February 1992), which directly accused the drug company Burroughs-Wellcome (which produced and marketed AZT) of 'making false and misleading claims about the drug'.<sup>30</sup> In

*AZT: Cause for Concern*, Marshall is interviewed in his home in West London, revealing that he had refused to take AZT and searched instead for alternatives that might boost his immune system. A voice-over states that he had known he has been HIV positive for eight-and-a-half years, putting the date of the diagnosis as the summer of 1984 – precisely the time in which he was making *Bright Eyes*. Marshall would also explore the subject in his gallery and festival-based art works: notably in *Journal of the Plague Year* (1984), a five-monitor video installation that used some of the same footage in *Bright Eyes*. *Robert Marshall* (1991) is a single-channel video work that is titled after his recently deceased father, and which tackles issues of memory, mourning and remembrance, as Marshall faces also his own mortality through his daily routines of alternative medicine.

*Bright Eyes* was part of an important counterpublic reaction to the biomedical establishment's pathologizing of gay men and women. As a television programme, it also constitutes a significant moment in the expansion of counterpublic discourses into the mainstream. Indeed, while *Bright Eyes* was an early example of the appearance of this counterpublic debate on British television, it was certainly not the only example during the 1980s and 1990s. As I have already mentioned, Channel 4 broadcast a number of other programmes criticising the biomedical mainstream: *The Unheard Voices*, *The Aids Catch* and *AZT: Cause for Concern*.

Moreover, at this time, Channel 4 offered a space for an array of voices, including films and videos offering gay, lesbian and then queer perspectives. This observation should be taken into account in modifying Simon Watney's assertion of the lack of 'identification' with gay, lesbian or queer perspectives (Watney, 1997, p.12) (which was true broadly, but with exceptions). As part of the Eleventh Hour series, for example, Channel 4 screened a range of programmes including *Veronica 4 Rose*,

(1982, Melanie Chait), and *Breaking the Silence* (1984, Melanie Chait), *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1984, Robert Epstein), *Before Stonewall* (1984, Greta Schiller, Robert Rosenberg); in 1987, Channel 4 broadcast a series titled 'In the Pink', with films such as *Parting Glances* (1986, Bill Sherwood) and *Lianna* (1983, John Sayles); and by 1989, the strand Out on Tuesday opened a significant space for queer counterpublic discourse in broadcasting.<sup>31</sup> The BBC also responded to this pressure, with Cas Lester's film *A Plague On You*, which features a debate by the Lesbian and Gay Media Group, broadcast on BBC-2's Open Space slot on 4 November 1985. In her in-depth article on *Bright Eyes* published in the special AIDS-themed issue of *October* journal in 1987, Martha Gever notes that: 'Each news story, investigative report, panel discussion, talk show, or "realistic" drama about AIDS circulated by the mass media contributes to the shape of the narrative by which the epidemic is made comprehensible to "the public"' (Gever, 1987, p.110). *Bright Eyes* was, I have argued, a node in this public televisual debate. *Bright Eyes* was thus part of an expansion of counterpublic discourses about bodies and voices, an expansion from the gay press and activist work into the complex space of television in Britain in the mid-to-late 1980s.

### **Constructing Sexuality and Counter-Histories**

Another significant counterpublic discourse that *Bright Eyes* brings into television in Britain in the 1980s is the notion of the social construction of sexuality. During the 1970s and 1980s, a number of sociological and historical accounts had asserted that sexuality was not biologically determined, but was socially constructed. In *Bright Eyes*, Marshall draws from these arguments to unpick how the media had

essentialised the gay subject as deviant, and in the process reveals how medical and media discourses have been central to the construction of sexual identities and the sensationalism and homophobia in reports about AIDS. While early path-breaking nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexologists including Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Richard von Kraft-Ebing had done much to open discussions about sexuality, they had based their research on an understanding of sex and gender as fixed taxonomical types. A conception of sexuality as a natural force also underpins much of the work of mid-twentieth-century Marxist-Freudian writers such as Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, whose writing advocated social revolution and the dismantling of bourgeois culture and capitalism through the expression of innate sexual desires.<sup>32</sup> By contrast, the new constructivist theories that emerged in the 1970s in the fields of sociology, history and critical theory argued that sexuality and gender are culturally, socially and historically contingent. These discourses are evident particularly in texts by Mary McIntosh, John Gagnon, Jeffrey Weeks, Michel Foucault, Kenneth Plumber, Gayle Rubin, amongst others.<sup>33</sup>

In the UK, Jeffrey Weeks, a social historian and theorist, drew on the sociological work of John Gagnon and Mary McIntosh in the late 1960s to popularize and expand a counterpublic discourse of the historical construction of sexuality. In the 1970s, Weeks was instrumental in developing and popularising a constructivist notion of sexuality in Britain and internationally. In particular, his historical work on sexuality had appeared in *The History Workshop Journal*, which he edited in the 1970s (see Chapter 2 for more on the influence of social historians on independent film and video). These themes were also developed in his 1977 books *Socialism and the New Life: the Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (co-authored with Sheila Rowbotham), and *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from*

*the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Weeks, 1977), as well as in numerous books since then.<sup>34</sup> Weeks was also an early member of the Gay Liberation Front in the UK (1970–73), and a regular contributor to the *Gay Left*, a publication founded in 1975 by the Gay Left Collective, a socialist-Marxist group that developed following the collapse of the GLF in 1973. Where the GLF had developed direct-action strategies (street performances, interrupting right-wing cultural events such as the Festival of Light), the Gay Left Collective was concerned with developing a wider counterpublic analysis of society as a whole, examining ‘[...] links between the family, the oppression of women and gay people, and the class structure of society’ (Gay Left Collective, 1975, p.1). The *Gay Left* would also reflect on histories of sexuality, with Week’s article in the first issue of the journal, wittily titled ‘Where Engels Feared to Tread’, giving a broad overview of the historical struggle for gay rights within socialist politics (Weeks, 1975).<sup>35</sup>

This constructivist argument was also powerfully articulated in Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (1976, translated into English in 1978). Linking together historically grounded and changeable relations of power and resistance with a stridently anti-psychoanalytic stance, Foucault argued that:

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power. (Foucault, 1998, pp.105–106)

Foucault’s blistering prose asserts that by the late nineteenth century, a deeply problematic understanding of sexuality prevailed: ‘the homosexual was now a



species' (Foucault, 1998, p.43). Both Weeks and Gayle Rubin have noted that Foucault's analysis, while owing a great deal to earlier developments in the sociology and history of sexuality, was highly significant in widening the constructivist debate on sexuality in the late 1970s (Rubin, 2011, p.34). Notably, Foucault's genealogical model of a 'history of the present' (Foucault, 1980), suggests that this longer history of sexual essentialism permeates present cultural attitudes. Thus, by the late 1970s, critical thinking about gay and lesbian identities was increasingly positioned in relation to a counterpublic discourse of the historical and social construction of sexuality.

*Bright Eyes* must be understood as part of this developing understanding of sexuality, as well as a part of the development of historical gay counterpublics in the 1970s and 1980s. In his essay 'Discourse, Desire and Sexual Deviance' (1981), Weeks has asserted that the discourse on gay rights in the late 1960s and 1970s often focussed on either empowering examples of notable historical figures, or on analysing the historical roots of the oppression of gay men and lesbians (Weeks, 1991b). Part of this historical work centred on the historical persecution of gay men and women, especially with the significant traumatic event of the Holocaust and National Socialism. In the earlier description of *Bright Eyes*, I have noted that the documentary dramatizes a scene from Heinz Heger's memoir *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, which was published in German in 1972 and English in 1980, and which documents the experience of a gay man sent to Flossenbürg, the site designated by the Nazis as the main concentration camp for gay men. In another scene in *Bright Eyes*, Marshall visits the remains of Flossenbürg, the camera roaming the broken stones and crumbling edifices of the site.<sup>36</sup> This exploration of Nazi oppression was also evident in the American gay press and in a number of activist documentaries

produced during the 1970s (Jensen, 2002).<sup>37</sup> Histories of National Socialism were also central to Marshall's work in the 1980s and 1990s: *Desire: Sexuality in Germany 1910-1945* (1989, Channel 4) traces the complex sexual freedoms, as well as body and fitness cults, in pre World War II Germany; and *Comrades in Arms* (1990, Channel 4) is concerned with the experiences of gay and lesbian service men and women in World War II.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Marshall's work can be considered as part of a wider culture of memorialisation and memory politics at this time (Nora's *lieux de mémoire*), which were particularly evident then in terms of histories of the Holocaust. While the working through of trauma may seem mournful, Thomas Waugh asserts, in a 1984 essay on gay and lesbian documentary, this historical work was also part of the 'self-analysis, self-criticism, self-evaluation necessary to any healthy community' (Waugh, 2011b, p.203). Vitally for Marshall, an analysis of these histories had direct application to contemporary problems. In his 1992 essay 'The Contemporary Political Use of Gay History: The Third Reich', Marshall notes that: 'My intention in [*Bright Eyes*] was to draw out the historical continuity of homosexual persecution' (Marshall, 1992, p.67). Marshall notes parallels between the Third Reich and the mid-1980s in persistence of biopolitical state violence against certain marginalised groups, notably in calls in the popular US and UK press for the quarantine of people with AIDS (*ibid*, p.67). In the same essay, Marshall is also keenly aware of the limits of the analogy between the present and the past, and he expresses discomfort with the use of the pink triangle by the activist group ACT UP (*ibid*, p.68).<sup>38</sup> For Marshall, 'No real parallel can be drawn between the extermination of Jews in the Final Solution and the extermination of homosexuals' (*ibid*, p.77), because the Nazis' viewed Jews in terms of race, while homosexuals were viewed as

problematic precisely because they did not propagate their race (*ibid*, p.78). Marshall notes that the use of the pink triangle by gay men in the 1970s was therefore an ambiguous force, creating a sense of identification between a community of peers based on a reading of history that emphasised '[...] our commonality as victims' (*ibid*, p.85). The problem of this identification is, for Marshall, that a morbid identification with victimhood blocks narratives of survival (*ibid*, pp.88-89), creating a 'disempowering' narrative for people living with AIDS (*ibid*, p.96). By contrast, as I shall argue in the next section, *Bright Eyes* sets out precisely to offer this positive subject through the figure of the active witness.

## **Part 2: The Witness as Campaigner**

The second part of *Bright Eyes* consists of a series of talking head interviews with gay men (and one lesbian) who have been subjected to institutionalised homophobia in the UK and the USA, and who have fought to defend their rights, sexuality and the management of their own health. These figures are all witnesses, with direct and often traumatic experiences of mistreatment by the police, by systems of censorship, by the medical establishment, and by the corporate pharmaceutical industry. *Bright Eyes* is thus a part of the development of direct-to-camera testimonials in independent film and video in the 1970s and 1980s that I have already noted in Chapter 4, with a wide variety of committed documentaries giving voice to those routinely excluded from the mainstream media including militant workers, women, and groups marginalised in terms of sexuality, gender and ethnicity. Bill Nichols has asserted that the interview or monologue form was a notable aspect of feminist documentary (Nichols, 1983), while both Thomas Waugh

and Roger Hallas have argued that the interview form was also essential to the development of gay, lesbian and queer documentaries from the 1970s to 1990s (Waugh, 2011a, pp.207–208; Hallas, 2009). The use of a ‘testimonial’ address is also central to documentaries concerned with trauma and memory, particularly those related to the Holocaust, from *For Memory*’s opening sequences with the two men from the Army Film and Photography Unit (see Chapter 4), to Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985). As Hallas has asserted (Hallas, 2009), the development of media responses to issues of collective memory and trauma in the late 1970s and 1980s in relationship to the Holocaust is also clearly applicable to the negotiation of death in the wake of the AIDS pandemic.

In this section, I wish to emphasise how *Bright Eyes* contributes towards this trajectory of testimony and remembrance through the development of a form of witnessing that is active, activist and committed. The vocal and physical presence of the active witness, delivering testimonials directly to camera, is set up by Marshall in deliberate contrast to the analysis in the first half of *Bright Eyes* of the scientific and journalistic photograph and the ‘medical gaze’ that objectifies the deviant, the sick, and the person with AIDS as a ‘victim’. By contrast, the people that Marshall interviews are professionals and campaigners – eloquent speakers who systematically rebuff the homophobia and heteronormative assumptions of the police, the legislature, the medical establishment and the press. As Hallas asserts, the queer activist witness speaking of AIDS must sustain a ‘dialectical tension between directly *attesting*’ to their experiences, as well as ‘contesting the enunciative position of people with HIV/AIDS’ (Hallas, 2009, p.3), giving space to those whose voices are routinely silenced. Hallas also usefully draws on Giorgio Agamben’s writing on Auschwitz to describe two different forms of witnesses: those who have

encountered an event from the outside as an observer, and those who speak from direct personal experience of it from the inside.<sup>39</sup> For Hallas, it is the latter form of witness that came to prominence in activist video and film about AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s.

I wish to further emphasise here that the witness in Marshall's work is an active subject. The figure of the activist insider witness helps to bring together the two halves of *Bright Eyes* – the dramatised scenes in the first part and the testimonials in the second part – as a single argument. In *Bright Eyes*, the two representational strategies work together, with the neo-Brechtian techniques dismantling discourses of power centred on figures of authority (doctors, medical writers, sexologists), in order to make room for the embodied voice of the campaigner and the AIDS witness. As with Marc Karlin's interviews in *For Memory*, Marshall tends to preserve the integrity of the shot, allowing the witness to speak with minimal editing, and no voice-overs or significant narrative disruptions. Thus, like *For Memory*, *Bright Eyes* builds a counter-televisual form that establishes a space for the embodied witness to state his or her case. As with *For Memory*, Marshall's work critiques television not to reject it, but rather as a commitment to opening it up to counterpublic debate.

Marshall's interviews reveal careful, calm and considered reflections on the embodied experiences of people with AIDS, which together help to rebuff some of the sensationalist media coverage presented in the news-clippings and media accounts discussed in the first half of the video. Each interviewee speaks and responds to questions put forward by the interviewer (Paul Cooke, who can occasionally be heard asking questions off-screen). The first of these is John Weber, an AIDS research fellow at St Mary's Hospital in London, who describes how,

following the sensationalist media coverage of the epidemic, a number of patients at the hospital had become convinced that they had AIDS, and how several had felt suicidal. Following this, we hear from Richard Wells, an advisor for the Royal College of Nursing, who reports that media sensationalism has led to ‘overreaction’ among those caring for AIDS patients, as well as a general fear among patients themselves. Next is an interview with Anthony Whitehead, the Chairperson of the Terrence Higgins Trust, who describes how the organisation was founded in 1982 as a community response in the face of a lack of adequate medical and governmental action on the AIDS pandemic.

Whitehead concludes his interview by observing that gay men in the 1980s were discriminated against in law.<sup>40</sup> This leads to a change in focus in *Bright Eyes* from a reflection on media representation to legislature, censorship and police persecution. The interview with Whitehead is followed by the final dramatised scene of the documentary, which depicts a police entrapment operation, in which an undercover policeman approaches a man on the street; the man responds to these advances and is promptly arrested. The scene also includes shots of another man chatting up a woman in a more aggressive way, suggesting that the legal structures, social norms, and police tactics of dealing with sexual attraction in public spaces (the high street) are deeply homophobic. This scene is quickly followed by an interview with Nick Billingham, a spokesperson for the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, who explains the lack of legal and police parity in the treatment of gay men and lesbians, and the routine nature of police persecution. This reflects a fundamental aspect of the legal inscription of gay rights in the UK that had been established in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act (SOA), which had decriminalised homosexual acts in nominally private space (primarily, the home), but not in supposedly ‘public’ spaces

(such as streets or shops). Anne Robinson has noted that the SOA, in defining these spatialized terms of public/private space, actually operated as a powerful tool of control: 'Following the SOA it actually became easier to bring about prosecutions for soliciting and gross indecency and the penalties given were increased' (Robinson, 2011, p.45). The SOA's arbitrary distinctions enabled police entrapment actions, which acted on the understanding that the street is public and anything deemed immoral that occurred on it (however discrete, consensual and unnoticed to other passers-by) could be subject to police enforcement.<sup>41</sup> These reflections are thus vital to a sense that public space and visibility are essential to queer political activism. As I have noted previously, counterpublic activism must be understood in terms of discursive 'reading publics' as well as in terms of the spatial notions of contesting voices and visibility in the agora of the street or other 'public' spaces (see Chapter 3).

Billingham also argues that the police's entrapment operations are underpinned by an obsession with enforcing what it perceived to be moral norms:

There was a time – still is a time – when the police thought that part of their function was to enforce a certain standard of morality in society. I think only three years ago, in 1981, the Police Federation issued a statement saying they deplored the way in which groups were seeking to persuade the public that homosexuality was normal. (*Bright Eyes*, 1984)

Marshall follows this interview with another one that details the overtly homophobic activities of the British police authorities. Linda Semple, the manager of Gay's the Word Bookshop in London, recounts raids on the shop by customs police, and the arbitrary confiscation of all books thought to be American imports, which amounted to about a third of the shop's stock. Semple also describes how customs officers went to the homes of the bookshop's directors and took away

books they thought were ‘rude’ (absurdly, these included a 1920s copy of Kraft-Ebbing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1886). The interviewer asks ‘Do you know what will happen to the books’, and Semple replies: ‘They will be burned’ (echoes of the past are suggested here, with contemporary censorship repeating the Nazis’ burning of Hirschfeld’s library). Text fills the screen as an addendum to the interview with Semple:

On 8th October 1984 Customs & Excise informed the bookshop that a further 2,260 imported books had been intercepted at Mount Pleasant Post Office over a period of several months. Among the confiscated titles were medical health books about the prevention & treatment of AIDS. (*Bright Eyes*, 1984)

U.S. titles censored by the British Customs and Excise included *New York Native* and *The Advocate*, publications that had employed writers ‘with the specific task of keeping abreast of the voluminous literature on AIDS’ (Altman, 1987, p.45). The police and Customs and Excise are thus revealed to be not merely homophobic, but also contributing towards the deadliness of AIDS itself by censoring information that may assist in the treatment of people with HIV/AIDS.

The closing twelve minutes of *Bright Eyes* consists of a single direct-to-camera address by Michael Callen, who offers a first-hand account of his experiences as a person with AIDS. I have previously mentioned Callen’s prominence in the context of ‘HIV denialism’, the argument, justified in light of the homophobia of the medical establishment, that the HIV retrovirus was the primary cause of AIDS. What I wish to emphasise here, however, is the first-person testimonial quality of Callen’s account. Callen reads out loud a speech he made to New York State Senate Committee on Investigation and Taxation in June 1983, a committee charged with looking into the establishment of an AIDS research council in the USA. He argues



that 1983 is '[...] a bad year to be a gay man, a Haitian entrant, an intravenous drug user, or a child living in poverty' (groups identified by the Center for Disease Control as high risk of HIV). Callen states, however, that he remains 'optimistic not only that I will beat this disease, but also that most of you want to help'; and that the passing of the proposed legislation for raising research funds, will be an important sign that 'democracy can work' (Callen in *Bright Eyes*, 1984). In concluding with Callen's speech, *Bright Eyes* offers its closing words to the embodied voice of a witness who has directly experienced the AIDS pandemic, who uses that space to open an appeal addressed at a number of publics, both subaltern and mainstream.

As Callen speaks, the camera zooms in, moving from a three-quarter to a quarter shot then to a close up on Callen's face in the last few minutes, for full emotive impact. Much of the force of Callen's argument is empathetic, relaying to us the basic human fears ('we are human beings suffering') that he and others experience on a day-to-day basis due to disease, but also due to media sensationalism and the fear it generates within the wider public. Callen asserts, in a delivery that is calm and composed, yet forceful, that:

I live with the fear that every sore throat or skin rash may be a sign of something more serious. At the age of 28, I wake up each morning to face the very real possibility of my own death.

Callen's address certainly relates to that of Hallas's 'inside witness'. However, Callen is also concerned with appealing to various publics, to make the shared, collective and embodied experiences of people with AIDS communicable to wider audiences. He talks about being part of a support group for PWA that meets regularly to share their everyday experiences (how to buy food, and how to pay the rent when savings

run out). The group speaks, too, of broader experiences of social isolation: how to cope with being fired because of fears of contagion, and of separation from family, friends and even doctors who fear catching AIDS. ‘Mostly’, he says, ‘what we talk about is what it feels like to be treated like lepers who are considered morally if not literally contagious’. Callen also appeals for consideration and understanding: ‘The best antidote to fear is always information. The public needs to know the facts.’ The closing argument of *Bright Eyes* is thus one that balances the affective force of the AIDS witness – his voice, his face filmed in close-up – against the possibilities of a pragmatic response that his words might provoke: to increase funding and promote understanding.

The figure of the witness thus helps to reveal the movement of *Bright Eyes*: from the disembodied AIDS victim in the melodramatic parody of the opening shots, to the careful, considered speech of the embodied witness in the video’s concluding moments. If the first part of *Bright Eyes* asserts that the scientific lens objectifies and creates essentialised conceptions of sexuality, the second half deploys a relatively straightforward form of documentary presentation to give voice to individuals excluded from these mainstream medical discourses. These two halves seem contradictory: while the first half critiques the scientific ideal of closely observing reality to obtain medical facts; the second half offers footage of individuals professing to offer direct testimony of their experience. *Bright Eyes* is thus seemingly torn between body and discourse, between semiological critique and the obdurate reality of the human body. I shall argue in the next section that this apparent contradiction is consistent if considered as part of a trajectory of thought rooted in the discourse of *écriture féminine* and the embodied voice as developed by Julia Kristeva. In the next section, I shall look deeper into the development Marshall’s

practice to examine how a semiology of media images can be part of a strategy that also deploys the power of the embodied voice.

### **Signifying Practice and the Embodied Voice**

In this section, I argue that it is vital to locate *Bright Eyes* within Marshall's research into the semiology of the embodied voice. Of particular importance to *Bright Eyes* is a politics of the speaking subject, of the active and vocal witness as opposed to the representation of the gay man or person with AIDS as a voiceless and objectified image. Here, I will outline how the notion of the speaking subject developed in Marshall's practice: beginning with his first engagements with sound art in the early 1970s, his single-channel video works and multi-monitor installations from the mid-1970s onwards, his longer-form video works centred on televisual melodrama in the late 1970s, and culminating in his documentary work for television in the 1980s and 1990s. The reason for undertaking this analysis is to suggest that the notion of the speaking subject, as it emerged in video art and independent film and video, was a factor that enabled a fundamentally expanded space for counterpublic discourse in the 1980s. My argument here is that the embodied voice has a fundamentally public aspect, one that challenges the prevailing normative (or heteronormative) assumptions of public service television (see Chapter 3 for an analysis of the Reithian heritage of television).

Marshall's use of disruptive speech in these works also points to the ethics of speech within poststructuralist-influenced independent film and video practices – the 'moral gesture' of a fragmented, anti-authoritative speech noted by Kristeva

(Kristeva, 1986, p.33). In an article published in *Millennium Film Journal* in 1980, Noël Carroll (Carroll, 1980b) notes an ethics of language in films such as *Riddles of the Sphinx, Argument* (1978, Anthony McCall and Andrew Tyndall), *Journeys From Berlin/1971* (1980, Yvonne Rainer), and *Sigmund Freud's Dora* (1979, Anthony McCall, Claire Pajaczkowska, Andrew Tyndall, Jane Weinstock).<sup>42</sup> For Carroll, such works suggest an ethics guided by the fracturing of rational language, drawing the viewer into the film to complete its meaning in a participatory activity in a rough approximation of democratic inclusivity (Carroll, 1980a, p.40).<sup>43</sup> Carroll's insight points towards the ethics of the active reader in poststructuralism. D.N. Rodowick has also clarified in his account of 'political modernism' that there is a fundamental ethical base to the argument for a radical form of *écriture* in the influential writing of Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers and Jean-Louis Baudry (Rodowick, 1994, p.15). Barthes, for example, asserted that a difficult text, what he called a 'writerly' text, forced readers into an active role in interpreting a text; it was therefore ethically superior to the 'readerly' text, in which the reader is supposedly relatively passive.<sup>44</sup> These conceptions of the ethics of participatory speech reverberate in Marshall's work. In a discussion in 1991, Marshall asserted that *Bright Eyes* was structured as a series of 'temporal juxtapositions of textual units' because:

[this form] allowed me to collide different historical episodes in such a way that the viewer would be presented with the problem of assembling mutual relationships. The viewer would participate in the construction of meaning by juxtaposing large, seemingly self-contained units of discourse. (Marshall, 1992, p.67)

These reflections suggest ways in which the fragmentation of voices of authority (medical, political) and foregrounding of embodied witnesses in *Bright Eyes* is fundamentally ethical in orientation. In *Bright Eyes*, Marshall deploys fragmentary

intertextuality to draw the viewer into the construction of meaning in the signifying codes of television, newspapers and medical discourse. At the same time, *Bright Eyes* deploys the embodied voice of the activist witness, as a counterpublic expression erupting within the mainstream of television. This embodied force may be related to the revolutionary voice of *écriture féminine*. In her essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (Cixous, 1976), Hélène Cixous releases the liberatory potential of the embodied female voice, valorising a non-rationalist and embodied female voice. In Marshall’s work, the queer, embodied voice pieces itself together from textual fragments, from desires and quotations. What it disrupts, insistently, is the public address of television as a heteronormative, pathologizing, and exclusory space. Marshall’s work is thus rooted in an ethics of the speaking body as a disruptive vehicle for intervening in and rethinking public discourse.

*Bright Eyes* anticipated a counterpublic AIDS discourse that situated the media response to the pandemic in terms of issues of representation, semiotics and language. This is apparent in an essay by Paula A. Treichler published in *October* in 1987, which asserted that the health crisis of AIDS was accompanied by not only a media frenzy, but also what she called an ‘epidemic of signification’ (Treichler, 1987). For Treichler, this crisis goes to the heart of apparently objective forms of representation, particularly those of biomedical discourse, but also in the more general attempts to make sense of AIDS within the media, leading to a chaos of signification in which the truth becomes impossible to discern. In the same issue of *October*, Douglas Crimp concurs, adding to and extending the critique: ‘AIDS intersects with and requires a critical rethinking of all of culture: of language and representation, of science and medicine, of health and illness, of sex and death, of the public and private realms’ (Crimp, 1987a, p.15). Similarly, Simon Watney asserts

in a 1987 introduction to his book *Policing Desire* that: 'AIDS is not only a medical crisis on an unparalleled scale, it involves a crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure' (Watney, 1997, p.9). Implied in these critical accounts, especially in that put forward by Crimp, is a critique of realism as a form. For Susan Sontag, similarly, AIDS was not merely a complex public health issue, but also a linguistic event – a metaphor that had widespread ramifications and manifestations in public discourses. In this context 'disease is regularly described as invading the society' (Sontag, 1989, p.10), and is accompanied by the 'language of political paranoia' (*ibid*, p.18), and militaristic words such as invasion, attack and war. These critiques echo earlier discourses of political modernism (for example, in Crimp's rebuttal of realism), as well as a wider debate on the problems of signification that were most famously articulated by Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virillo (Baudrillard, 1994; Virillo, 1991). Postmodern theories of signification were thus an important current in the critical discourse on AIDS at this time, and are particularly evident in the ways in which *Bright Eyes* was received in journals such as *October*.

The postmodern discourses applied to AIDS as a critique of signs and processes of signification, do not, however, fully account for Marshall's work. As noted above, the critique of photographic and media signification is only one part of *Bright Eyes*; the other significant presence in the video is that of the embodied witness, a figure who is somehow able to break through processes of signification and directly attest to personal experience. Marshall's work is, I wish to argue, better explored in terms of the complex currents of poststructuralist semiology that emerged in France in the 1960s and 1970s, notably in the writing of Julia Kristeva. For Kristeva, the utopian potential of language lies in the irrepressible fact of semiological excess – that

eruption of that which lies beyond language systems, such as the Freudian drives and embodied desire within speech. For Kristeva, in her influential 1973 essay 'The System and the Speaking Subject', this excess has the power to disrupt the 'transcendental ego' of rationalist linguistic discourse (Kristeva, 1986, p.27).<sup>45</sup> Such a disruption of the 'transcendental ego' of rationalism, is also vital to Nancy Fraser's rethinking of the public sphere. For Fraser, the plurality of voices in public discourse should not be limited to those with the knowledge and power of rationalist discourse (for example, the educated bourgeoisie), but must also enable a wider participation for diverse patterns of speech and enunciation (Fraser, 1993). As Fraser argues, rationalist discourse tends to mask its own ideological claims, for example, to promote the self-interest of the bourgeoisie, or white heterosexual men, as the interests of society as a whole. I would therefore argue that Kristeva's conception of the speaking subject dovetails with Fraser's notion of a non-rationalist counterpublic discourse.

For Marshall, the human voice was precisely this embodied and disruptive force. The vital influence on Marshall's early artistic practice was the composer Alvin Lucier; and it is through a reflection on Lucier's work that Marshall first engaged with Kristeva's theories in depth. Marshall had been a student of Lucier at Wesleyan College, Georgia, in the early 1970s, and had created environmental sound works in numerous sites and venues, including a church in New York in 1972, Newcastle's Ayton Basement in the mid-1970s, and London's 2B Butler's Wharf in 1976.<sup>46</sup> Marshall would pay tribute to Lucier in his 1976 essay 'Alvin Lucier's Music of Signs in Space'. In this text, Marshall connected Lucier's sound work with the replacement of 'musical codes' with 'communication codes' (Marshall, 1976a, p.284), situating these in relationship to Kristeva's 'The System and the Speaking

Subject'. In his essay, Marshall cites works such as Lucier's *Vespers* (1968), which consists of an electronic echolocation device inspired by dolphins or bats, in which an electronic system emits sounds into a space that rebound off surfaces creating distinct alterations of the original sounds. While these sounds are non-linguistic, for Marshall they nevertheless relate to communicative systems. Marshall also discusses Lucier's *The Only Talking Machine of Its Kind in the World* (1969), a piece partly based on the composer's own stammer. Although Marshall does not mention it, I would also add to this list the influential work *I am Sitting in a Room* (1969), in which Lucier records himself narrating a text, plays the tape back into the room and re-records it a number of times; as this action is repeated, the sonic resonance of the room slowly comes to dominate until his words become unintelligible – a slow entropic subversion of technological systems.

In his essay, Marshall argues that Lucier's performance of the limits and excess of speech has a subversive potential: 'Lucier's concern is with the transgression of the linguistic code and the appearance of extra-linguistic signifiers within speech' (Marshall, 1976a, p.286). Marshall asserts that Lucier's work, with its emphasis on embodied and spatial communication, can be understood in terms of Kristeva's notion of the '[...] presence of the genotext within the phenotext – that moment of transgression which challenges the illusory wholeness of the transcendent subject' (Marshall, 1976a). For Kristeva the 'speaking subject' (Kristeva, 1986, p.27) held a revolutionary potential in disrupting conceptions of speech that had traditionally been allied to the ideology of the bourgeois individual subject as a rational interlocutor. Her essay concludes with a stirring, utopian vision of a semiology (which she calls 'semanalysis') centred on Marxist materialism and a psychoanalytical conception of the divided subject. For Kristeva, a materialist semiology would treat



language itself as a basis for revolution – ‘[...] a moral gesture, inspired by a concern to make intelligible, and therefore socializable, what rocks the foundations of sociality’ (*ibid*, p.33). Here, clearly, is an ethics of speech that has a significant potential for rethinking society, the very nature of public discourse, beyond the normativity of rationalist speech.

This ethics was more latent than explicit in Marshall’s own work at this time. Like Lucier, Marshall was deeply engaged in spatial understanding of sounds, in ‘mapping’ out spaces through the use of sonic reverberations and echoes produced by performers and electronic sound systems. Lucier’s sound works, as described above, often use strict rule-based systems that are then subverted through their performance, with the live situation itself functioning as a rupture or moment of freedom beyond that system. In his own performance sound works, Marshall was similarly interested in subverting rigid systems, which he sought through the articulation of social and spatial relations between performer and audience.

Marshall’s early piece *A Sagging and Reading Room* (1972), for example, consisted of a performance by Marshall, Nicolas Collins, Mary Lucier and Alvin Lucier, with each holding tape recorders on which a pre-recorded tape played stating the performer’s own relative position to one another and within the space, and to anticipated future positions that the performer will occupy (Johnson, 1972). Marshall’s notes for the performance highlight the fact that the taped instructions were too complex for the performers to follow exactly, or for the audience to fully comprehend, causing ‘the listener to be pulled back from the acoustic surface to the verbal/semantic surface’ (Marshall, 1972). Made before the publication of Kristeva’s text, the piece nevertheless clearly outlines performative limits in the structure of a language-based system of instructions. Also of interest here is Marshall’s *Idiophonics* (alternatively

called *Heterophonics*) (1976), which was performed by Nicholas Collins, Jane Harrison (who was married to Marshall at this time), and Marshall, at 2B Butler's Wharf on the night of 18 December 1976. The performers radiated out from a centre point, beating wooden blocks together, before the doors of the warehouse facing the Thames were thrown open and the performers took air-pressured klaxons and blasted them across the river. Musician David Toop reported in *Readings* magazine that the 'sound bounced back and forth in a most spectacular way for quite some time' (Toop, 1977, p.3). The sonic broadcast suggests multiple meanings: perhaps, a tribute to the lost industrial heritage of the river and its noisy foghorns; a liberatory release of pent-up performance energies, or a territorial claiming of the nocturnal Thames for the artistic community of Butlers' Wharf.

Marshall's first video works in the mid-1970s similarly demonstrate a concern with foregrounding the 'verbal/semantic surface' first explored in the sound pieces. *Just a Glimpse* (1975) explores relations between sound and image through footage of a glass object smashing onto the floor, a momentary glimpse of the artist, and the titular phrase repeated on the soundtrack.<sup>47</sup> The tapes *Go through the Motions* (1975), *Arcanum* (1976) and *Mouth Room* (1976) all feature a close-up shot of Marshall's mouth and his moustachioed top lip. In *Go through the Motions*, the mouth repeats the words 'go through the motions of saying one thing and meaning another', a phrase that suggests forms of non-rationalist speech such as lying, irony, metaphor or parable. In *Arcanum* the phrase 'under the table make no sign' slowly mixes with the equally cryptic sentence 'wrapped in clouds, nobody's the wiser'. *Mouth Room* centres on an open mouth that appears to act as an echo chamber for incidental chatter in the room, suggesting a folding-together of public discourse and private, bodily movement. These works seem to reveal an interest in the encoded, embodied and

the hidden within sound and speech. David Toop has even suggested that they may express a perhaps unconscious vocalising of a hidden gay or queer identity (Marshall had not yet come out in 1976).<sup>48</sup> It may thus be the case that Marshall's use of sound and voice, drawing from Kristeva and Lucier, is concerned with a positive, empowering, articulation of a hidden speaking subject.

However, these works may also suggest a more direct critical attack on the prevalence of rationalist speech in television itself. Video art, as numerous commentators have pointed out, has a long history of attacking and subverting television, from the early assaults on television sets by Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell onwards (Paik asserted in 1965 that 'Television has been attacking us all our lives. Now we can attack it back').<sup>49</sup> Part of this subversive resonance of video art was the consonance and divergence between the domestic television set and the non-broadcast video monitors used to display videos in exhibitions and community screenings, and the independence from the industry suggested by technologies such as the Sony Portapak.<sup>50</sup> These technologies were, then, both akin to television, but circumvented its modes of distribution (broadcast) through the use of low gauge videotape. In an essay on Marshall, Ian White has asserted that Marshall's early video works are attacks on the authoritative power of television, revealing 'the televisual construction of authority through the otherwise direct, synchronised relationship between what we hear and the lips that we assume speak it' (White, n/d). This interpretation is certainly relevant in the context of contemporaneous video practices that were concerned with subverting the message of the authoritative television voice: for example, in David Hall's *This is a Television Receiver* (1976), where the BBC newsreader Richard Baker reads out a self-reflexive text on the medium of television as his image is subjected to video distortions. Marshall was

clearly thinking along these lines in the late 1970s. In an essay on Tamara Krikorian's work, Marshall notes that her single-screen video work *Vanitas* (1977) operates as a critique of television news, which is 'a privileged fixed point around which an evening's production and viewing is organised' (Marshall, 1979a).<sup>51</sup> Marshall's own video installation *Excesses* (1977), meanwhile, sought to break the 'spectator's identification with the camera', in order to rupture the process of 'binding together the viewing and viewed' (Hall and Partridge, 1978, p.27).

Marshall's work at this time thus clearly also engages with how television's ideological operations was articulated in terms of the discourses of perspectival space and the gaze that had first emerged in the film theory of *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Screen*, particularly in the writing of Barthes, Baudry, Metz and Mulvey (Mulvey, 1975; Metz, 1975; Barthes, 1974; Baudry, 1974). In this conception, ideology remained a problem in television, as in cinema, in that it continued to place the spectator as the privileged site of meaning, as a whole and unified subject who remained master of all he or she viewed. To paraphrase Barthes' essay 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein' (Barthes, 1974), the ideology of the cinema was guaranteed by the logic of perspective, by the situating of the subject at the apex of a triangle that converges on the onlooker's eye. Marshall's installations worked against this logic by invoking a mobile spectator: *Orientation Studies* (1976) featured eight monitors each on their backs and facing the ceiling showing footage of flowing water (thus resembling a stream or brook), in an arrangement that is designed to prompt the viewer to walk along a series of viewing platforms.<sup>52</sup> The theoretical assumption of ideology and agency in these works is open to the same critiques that I have explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis (i.e. the possibility of physical movement does not equate with critical thinking).<sup>53</sup> While these reference points were important in

Marshall's practice, they were, however, increasingly to give way to his engagement with 'signifying practices' (a widely used term in film discourses in the late 1970s, alluding to Althusserian notions of theoretical practice).

Marshall's exploration of video through the methodologies of poststructuralism and Lacanian theory is developed in his 1976 essay 'Video Art, The Imaginary and the Parole Vide', published in *Studio International* in a special video art issue (Marshall, 1976b). In this essay Marshall outlines a theoretical account of the situation of video art at that moment, which he sees as reduced to an inward-looking 'solipsistic' and formalist practice concerned primarily with an engagement with the technology of the medium. Like Rosalind Krauss's essay 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism' (Krauss, 1976), published later in the same year, Marshall's essay notes the tendency for video artists to record themselves in 'narcissistic' terms. For Krauss, video art was trapped in a 'collapsed present', in which the use of instant feedback cuts the subject off from her own history – 'the presentation of a self understood to have no past, and as well, no objects external to it' (Krauss, 1976, p.55). Against this narcissism, Marshall's own thoughts were pointing outwards, beyond the enclosed system of what Lacan termed the Imaginary (the field of the ego that is formed in the mirror stage through identification with the reflected image) towards the Symbolic (the linguistic field of sociality). As he notes in the concluding paragraph of 'Video Art, The Imaginary and the Parole Vide':

My intention is not to dismiss video as an unavoidably Imaginary medium, but rather to point to some of the nets it can cast. It has been suggested by both artists and psycho-therapists [sic] the use of video can lead to an 'authentic' awareness of self, but its potential strengths lie in its narrative core (in the sense of the subject's position in respect to the Word rather than in the diegetic). (Marshall, 1976b, p.247)

For Marshall, video's potential thus lay in its capacity to examine the Symbolic field as a realm of language and culture. In the essay 'Video: Technology and Practice', published in *Screen* in 1979, Marshall asserts that video artists have too often avoided critical issues of representation, and reiterates the claim that much video art has been locked in a regressive problem of Lacanian narcissism (Marshall, 1979b, p.114). Like Krauss, Marshall detects a means beyond this solipsistic tendency in the political force in feminist video practices that examine the self as an ideological construct (he names U.S. artists Lynda Benglis, Joan Jonas and Hermine Freed) (*ibid*, p.115). Marshall argues that a strand of video practice in Europe and the UK has emerged that is concerned with 'conventions of televisual representation' (*ibid*, p.116), and he cites Hall's *This is a Television Receiver*, Krikorian's *Vanitas* and Marceline Mori's *La Belle et la Bete* (1977) as examples of this development. For Marshall, 'It is this category of work which explicitly takes up a critical position in relation to dominant televisual practice and seems to offer the greatest potential as a critical avant-garde' (*ibid*, p.117).

I would argue that Marshall's engagement with issues of representation was ultimately hopeful about not only the possibilities of a critical video art, but also of a counterpublic form of television. In his 1980 essay 'Television/Video: Technology/Form', Marshall looked to the history of television in order to locate it as the product of specific social, political and economic conditions. Marshall argues here that the institutional form of television, broadcasting from one centre to a vast number of receivers, is in no ways inherent to the technology but rather the result of specific historical and ideological forces. Thus, television is not inherently coercive, and video is not inherently liberatory. Here, Marshall draws on Raymond Williams's *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974), in which Williams attacks

the idea of ‘technological determinism’ as it had developed in the writing of Marshall McLuhan (Williams, 2003, p.5). Against McLuhan, Williams’s own model of the media was one that suggested an active public that is itself the agent of technological change, with satellite and cable television as ‘[...] the contemporary tools of the long revolution towards an educated and participatory democracy’ (*ibid*, p156). In his essay, Marshall also critiques the influence of formalist modernist discourse over early video art, arguing that early video art’s obsessions with qualities of the medium (such as ‘liveness’) failed to address the real ideological operations of the technology at the level of representation. Marshall equally attacks the alternative cybernetic video tradition, writing that U.S. ‘guerrilla television’ and ‘alterative television’ (such as TVTV, and the *Radical Software* publication, for example), used technology as if it were inherently liberatory, without reflecting on the production of ideology in processes of representation. Marshall argues that such practices ‘[...] deny a more subtle and useful analysis of television as the site of production of representations – as both an industry and a signifying practice’ (*ibid*, p.110).

Marshall’s analysis thus opened a route towards a counterpublic critique of television as a signifying practice. By 1985, Marshall had developed his arguments further, arguing in his essay ‘Video: From Art to Independence’ that early video art’s commitment to medium specificity ultimately embroiled it in problems not of art, but of television, and that video practice was thus more akin to the culture of independent cinema than of fine art. For Marshall, the modernist painter who explores the inherent properties of the medium is up against art history: the legacy of painting itself. On the other hand, for the modernist video artist, reflections on the medium inexorably bring about an engagement with the technological base of a

medium that was designed as a means of popular entertainment. As such: 'Video's attempt to produce a modernist practice therefore produced a second unexpected consequence, the establishment of a critical relation to dominant technology and its representational practices' (Marshall, 1985, p.69). For Marshall, this would ultimately mean an investigation of narrative and realism in television. Writing in *Afterimage* in 1980, Marshall traces the development of realism from the theatre to the cinema and television, asserting that: 'The social world is constantly, theatrically produced in the sitting room, and the ideology of representation guarantees a match between the representation of the world and the space of its representation (Marshall, 1980, p.72). Echoing earlier critiques of realism in political modernist film theory, Marshall asserts that its '[...] ideological effect depends upon a masking of the means and conditions of production and their history' (*ibid*, p.72).

Marshall first undertook these examinations of the signification in television in his quasi-narrative videos of 1979 and 1980, including *Distinct* (1979), *The Streets of...* (1979) and *The Love Show* (1980).<sup>54</sup> I would argue that these videos emphasise the notion of intertextuality as developed by Kristeva in her 1966 essay 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', wherein a text's meaning is always composed of the multiple fragments of other texts. As developed by Roland Barthes, this idea suggested that identity (of the author, or of the reader) itself is produced at the intersection of texts.<sup>55</sup> Marshall made *The Streets of...* on a trip to San Francisco, at around the time that he was first asserting his own gay identity, and the work seems to negotiate subjectivities within the confluence of texts and of embodied experiences. The tape's title references the TV series *The Streets of San Francisco* (1972–1977) a cop show featuring Karl Malden and Michael Douglas that was broadcast on the ABC network. The video also features anecdotes recounted by the Marshall's friends, extracts from radio news



broadcasts and quotes from a range of literary essays. *Distinct* is a black-and-white video that examines conventions of televisual melodrama in terms of domestic space and language. *Distinct* opens with saccharine orchestral melodrama soundtrack and a dramatised scene in which an artist/director and a television producer discuss the institutional limits of television (for example, issues with broadcast quality). This scene cuts to a shot of living room: a very obvious stage set, occupied by a man and a woman played by the same two actors who appear in *Bright Eyes* (Grazyna Monvid and Bruce Bayley). The woman gives a meta-commentary on the limitations of dialogue offered by the melodrama format: 'What worries me is what we cannot say, perhaps what we cannot think'. Instead of responding to her concern, the man responds by reading, verbatim, lines from Louis Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy* (1968, translated 1971): an almost-impenetrable disquisition on the inescapability of ideology. The understated humour here emerges from the disjunction between speech and performance: as he delivers his highbrow lines, she talks of the meaning of 'arseholes' and provokes him with insinuations that his taciturn behaviour hides a hidden desire for a male friend. Towards the end of the video, the screen fills with a scrolling text, accompanied by soaring melodrama music, detailing a series of film scenes (love stories, adventures) that blur and intermingle. Finally, the video closes with the actors barrelling around the studio-cum-sitting-room as the camera rolls on its axis from side to side: a cheap television trick perhaps best known from *Star Trek*, when the bridge is hit by incoming missiles. These works suggest Marshall was aware of television's capacity to construct identities, as well as the unstable qualities of these systems. For Marshall, if ideologies were constructed through intertextual media, they could also be reformed through it.

As I have mentioned, this notion of intertextuality also has an ethical assumption: since the text is fragmented, the reader is said to be free to construct meaning from its shards. If the textuality of Marshall's videos from the late 1970s and early 1980s is fragmented, so too is sexuality. *The Love Show* is a tape that sets out to expose and unmoor the regulation of sociality in various signifying practices, including television, policing and speech. The video is split into three parts, the first of which features a single actor playing multiple roles from the television industry: a writer, actor, director, set designer, make-up artist and vision mixer. In each scene he relates his duties in a matter-of-fact delivery, but the content of his speech often slews inexplicably into quotes from an esoteric nineteenth-century tract on the properties of magic.<sup>56</sup> The effect of this is to emphasise the excess of language and the subject's lack of control in processes of signification. In the second part, two actors (Bayley and Monvid) appear in a number of scenes that reflect on the regulation of sexuality in law and language: a policeman accuses a middle-aged woman who has had an affair with an eighteen-year-old man of 'shameless indecency'; a woman is interviewed by a journalist about a man who was apparently a victim of police entrapment (a theme repeated in *Bright Eyes*); the woman and then the man read children stories as a 'moral tale' warning of the dangers of homosexuality. The third part of *The Love Show* further explores the sexual politics of speech. A man recalls being chatted up by another man, and not realising the nature of the situation. A woman lies on her back, as if in a therapy session, and a male voice-over reads misogynist lines from Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), in which he reflects on the sexual content of parapraxis: '[...] falling, stumbling and slipping need not always be interpreted as purely accidental miscarriages of motor actions [...] when a girl falls, she falls on her back'. The tape ends with a woman being accosted on the street by a man, with the female voice-

over reflecting that his actions were tantamount to rape: 'Being spoken to on the street would not be a problem if the relations between the sexes were different'. *The Love Show* thus reveals ideological contradictions within society as rooted in problems of language and signification, setting the stage for the development of these ideas in *Bright Eyes*.

## Conclusion

Who does *Bright Eyes* present its ethical arguments to? Evidently, it gives a space to marginalised figures and voices. However, as a video that was made for and broadcast on television, *Bright Eyes* must also be understood in relation to other, wider, publics. Following Michael Warner, I assert that it is essential to counterpublic forms of address that they set out to speak to both a known audience, but also to communicate to and win over an audience from a sea of unknown 'strangers' (Warner, 2002, p.417). Like other works of independent film and video discussed in this thesis, *Bright Eyes* appeals to existing members of a counterpublic organised around radical, avant-garde art, counter-cinema, as well as critiques based on ethnicity, gender and sexuality. It sets out to engage with audiences in two principal ways. On the one hand, it appeals to existing countercultural groups using visual modes developed within counter-cinema, artistic discourse and the Left intelligentsia. On the other hand, as a documentary made specifically for television, it roots itself in the urgent reality of the moment: the emergence of AIDS in the early 1980s and the re-emergence of historically rooted homophobia within the media. *Bright Eyes* was also covered in *City Limits*, *Time Out* and *OUT* – making it a work that significantly expanded the discourse on AIDS within what Kant would

call the 'reading public'.<sup>57</sup> Marshall was clearly aware of the need for the message to communicate, and is quoted in the *Time Out* article: 'I don't want it to be seen as avant-garde or arty. It's designed for those who are completely unfamiliar with video art' (Marshall in Lipman, 1984).

*Bright Eyes* can thus be seen as a critique of, and intervention in, the bourgeois public sphere of public-service television, as well as a manifestation of Channel 4's remit to cater for diverse audiences.<sup>58</sup> *Bright Eyes* is only one of a number of films and videos produced at this time that opened television in Britain to the embodied voices of counterpublic spheres: of gay activism and identity (*Bright Eyes*, *Veronica 4 Rose*, *Breaking the Silence*), of socialist history and memory (*For Memory*), and of black struggle and migratory experiences (*Handsworth Songs*). There are, of course, other significant ways in which to analyse these works. For example, *Bright Eyes* is also a significant work in the non-broadcast public sphere of video art and queer media activism. It was extensively covered by Martha Gever's article in the important 1987 issue of *October* on the representation of AIDS (Gever, 1987), helping it become a canonical work of queer media (Hallas, 2009). It was shown in film festivals including the San Francisco Film Festival (1987) and the Chicago Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (1988). Marshall's installation *The Journal of the Plague Years*, which used footage also shown in *Bright Eyes*, was also shown on the art circuit, at Video '84 in Montreal, and the Royal College of Art, London in 1984. In 1985 *Bright Eyes* was shown at The Tate Gallery (London), the Film Theatre Desmet (Amsterdam), at Berlin's first gay bookshop (Prinz Eisenherz Buchhan), at V-Tapes in Canada; in 1987 at The New Museum and The Kitchen (NYC), Documenta (Germany) and was broadcast on Channel 25 cable TV (San Francisco). *Bright Eyes* thus reached broad audiences, contributing not only to the national counterpublic discourse on

AIDS in Britain, but also to the overlapping transnational queer and video art counterpublics.

These transnational counterpublics ensured the expansion and continuation of debates on *Bright Eyes* and on the issues that it raises. More widely, it can be seen that these transnational debates themselves have important ramifications at a national level. Importantly, for example, AIDS was a global issue that was manifest in different places in different ways.<sup>59</sup> As I have sought to demonstrate in this chapter, the situation of television in Britain in the early 1980s must be considered as a vital discourse within the video. Like Marc Karlin's *For Memory*, which directly responded to the televisual representations and elisions of cultural memories of socialist history in the UK, *Bright Eyes* was a direct response to the patronising tones of earlier BBC programmes on AIDS, and to the widespread homophobia evident in tabloid newspapers. *Bright Eyes* must therefore also be considered as an urgent intervention into this national public discourse, at a moment in which British television itself was opening up to the embodied voices of diverse counterpublics. It was, in this sense, a work of counter-television, rethinking and negotiating the terms of representation from within the public sphere of broadcasting in Britain at this time.

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<sup>1</sup> At no point is the viewer informed whether this prone figure is gay, but subsequent scenes within *Bright Eyes* argue powerfully that the media scare-mongering around AIDS in the

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1980s was rooted in deep-rooted homophobic outlooks, with the body with AIDS equated with the gay man's body.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Hallas offers a powerful analysis of AIDS in terms of collective memory and trauma (Hallas, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See: Elwes, C. (2005) *Video Art: A Guided Tour*. London: I.B.Tauris.; Meigh-Andrews, C. (2013) *A History of Video Art*. 2nd edition. Berg Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> See: Toop, D. (2013) Sound Thinking: Stuart Marshall's Idiophonics. davidtoop [online]. Available from: <http://davidtoopblog.com/2013/07/10/sound-thinking-stuart-marshalls-idiophonics/> (Accessed 21 February 2015). Lucier, A. (2001) On Stuart Marshall: Composer, Video Artist and Filmmaker, 1949–1993. *Leonardo Music Journal*. 51–52.

<sup>5</sup> The critical reception of Marshall's work in North America seems partly determined by seeing the tape as a video work, rather than in the context of television. See: Gever, M. (1987) Pictures of Sickness: Stuart Marshall's 'Bright Eyes'. *October*. [Online] 43 (Winter), 108.; Crimp, D. (2004) *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*. Reprint edition. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.; Juhasz, A. & Gund, C. (1995) *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

<sup>6</sup> See: Hallas, R. (2009) *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Conal McStravick has argued that Marshall's early work has a significant queer politics, and has undertaken an extensive research project on Marshall as part of his MA in Aesthetics & Art Theory at CRMEP, Kingston University. See: McStravick, C. (2015) 'Learning in a Public Medium', Lux Blog. Online:

<http://www.lux.org.uk/blog/conal-mcstravick-1-learning-public-medium-stuart-marshalls-sound-works-part-1-hornsey-newport>. Another researcher looking into Marshall is Aimar Arriola, who has examined the embodied and affective qualities of Marshall's later work by drawing on the affect theory of Laura U. Marks, and studying for a doctorate at Goldsmiths, London. See: Arriola, A. (2016) 'Touching What Does Not Yet Exist: Stuart Marshall and the HIV/AIDS Archive', *Afterall*, 41, Spring/Summer. pp.55-64.

<sup>7</sup> As an outsider, I have not directly experienced persecution for my sexuality, nor felt the trauma or rage of those personally affected by the pandemic. This, perhaps, puts my account in danger of itself repeating or silencing those voices that *Bright Eyes* seeks to foreground. However, it seems clear that the political vitality of any film, video, or television programme that seeks to move outwards to change the mainstream must be, by definition, also of interest to those on the outside – to those that Michael Warner calls 'strangers' (Warner, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> The term 'heteronormative' is used by Michael Warner, who has also written significant texts on the public sphere. See: Warner, M. (ed.) (1993) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>9</sup> I use the term 'semiology' here as opposed to 'semiotics' in reference to the heritage of Ferdinand de Saussure, and to the semiological traditions of writers such as Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva.

<sup>10</sup> See: Steakley, J. (1974) Homosexuals and the Third Reich. *The Body Politic*. (11). [online]. Available from: <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/steakley-nazis.asp>. (Accessed 15 September 2015)

<sup>11</sup> Ellis was an early sexologist who had produced a theory of homosexuality as 'inversion'. See: Havelock, E (1901). *Studies in the Psychology of Sex Volume I: Sexual Inversion*; Havelock, E (1890). *The Criminal*.

<sup>12</sup> See: See also: Barthes, R. (1973) *Mythologies*. New York: Hill & Wang.; Barthes, R. (1977) *Image–Music–Text*. London: Harper Collins.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall read the photography journal *Ten-8*, copies of which are held in his archive in the Artists' Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martin's, University of the Arts, London.

<sup>14</sup> The brutal system of electric shock aversion therapy was practiced in Britain by the medical establishment from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. See the accounts in: Dickinson, T. (2015) *'Curing Queers': Mental Nurses and their Patients*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

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<sup>15</sup> Anne Cottringer, the cinematographer on *Bright Eyes*, explained the speed with which the video was made to me in a conversation on 31 October 2014.

<sup>16</sup> For an informative early history of AIDS, see: Engel, J. (2006) *The Epidemic*. New York: Smithsonian.

<sup>17</sup> One of the first press reports on AIDS, published in the New York Times, on 3 July 1981, noted that: '[...] most cases had involved homosexual men who have had multiple and frequent sexual encounters with different partners, as many as 10 sexual encounters each night up to four times a week.' See: Altman, L. K. (1981) Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals. *The New York Times*. 3 July. [online]. Available from:

<http://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/03/us/rare-cancer-seen-in-41-homosexuals.html> (Accessed 12 March 2015). For more on the homophobic press reactions to the AIDS epidemic, see Altman, D. (1987) *AIDS and the New Puritanism*. London: Pluto Press.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Engel writes: 'In November 1982, the CDC grouped GRID victims into four major risk groups: homosexual or bisexual males (75 percent); intravenous drug users (13 percent); hemophiliacs (.3 percent); and, inexplicably, non-gay or non-intravenous drug-using Haitians (6 percent). An additional 5 percent of victims fell into no known risk group.' See: Engel, J. (2006) *The Epidemic*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, p.6.

<sup>19</sup> For an examination of the religious responses to AIDS, see: Long, T. L. (2005) *AIDS and American Apocalypticism: The Cultural Semiotics of an Epidemic*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

<sup>20</sup> See: Nisbett, A. (1983) Horizon: Killer In The Village. *Horizon: Killer In The Village*. 25 April. *Killer in the Village* is available online here:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p01z2lbp/horizon-19821983-killer-in-the-village>.

Accessed 23 February 2015. Also see the detailed synopsis of the programme here:

<http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceFilmWorks/150107858>

<sup>21</sup> This address to the heterosexual audience is evident throughout *Killer in the Village*. The narrator (Paul Vaughan) introduces viewers to Greenwich Village, New York, describing it as 'a world full of signals, such as which side a bunch of keys is worn to signal a preference for the active or the passive sexual role. Some bars or bathhouses cater for extremes of promiscuity [...]'. Nisbett, A. (1983) Horizon: Killer In The Village. *Horizon: Killer In The Village*. 25 April.

<sup>22</sup> As Jeffrey Weeks notes: 'By the 1980s in the wake of several decades of so-called permissiveness, minority forms of sexuality, especially homosexuality, were being blamed for the decline of the family and gave new energy to a revival of right wing political forces.' (Weeks, 2009, p.29).

<sup>23</sup> The retrovirus that was eventually to be called HIV had been isolated in France in May 1983, and later backed up by US research in a well-publicised announcement made in April 1984

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 6, 'Drugs' in Engel, J. (2006) *The Epidemic*. New York: Smithsonian.

<sup>25</sup> See: Dickinson, T. (2015) *Curing Queers?: Mental Nurses and their Patients, 1935–74*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

<sup>26</sup> Diagnosed as immune deficient in December 1981, Callen was a prominent American AIDS activist and co-author (with Richard Berkowitz and Dr Joseph Sonnabend) of *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach* (1983), which Simon Watney describes as one of the key documents leading to contemporary notions of safe sex (Watney, 2006). Callen's HIV denialist position was also held by the two other co-authors of *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic*, Richard Berkowitz and Dr Joseph Sonnabend, although they would much later accept that HIV was at least partly causal of AIDS.

<sup>27</sup> The reference to *The Andromeda Strain* here is to the fictional virus of the eponymous novel by Michael Crichton (1969) and the film directed by Robert Wise (1971).

See: <http://www.virusmyth.com/aids/frames/frgroup.htm>. For more on this context see.

<http://gmhc.org/news-and-events/press-releases/hiv-denialism-and-african-genocide>

Accessed 9 March 2015.

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<sup>28</sup> See: Anon (1987) *AIDS: The Unheard Voices*. 13 November. The video *AIDS The Unheard Voices* is online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNWKPrYDabc>. Accessed 17 March 2015. See also: Shenton, J. (1990) *The AIDS Catch*. 13 June.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall was also a co-editor of the organisation's newsletter, *Positively Healthy News*. The publication tackled the collusion between the British Medical Association and Burroughs Wellcome (the producers of AZT), and also featured articles by critics of the medical establishment such as Peter Duesberg, Joseph Schwartz and Joseph Sonnabend. For an insightful account of Positively Healthy and Marshall's important role in the organization, see: Walker, M. J. (1993) *Dirty Medicine: Science, Big Business and the Assault on Natural Health Care*. London: Slingshot Publications.

<sup>30</sup> See: Shenton, J. (1992) *AZT: Cause for Concern*. 12 February. The video of *AZT: Cause for Concern* is available online here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXyUf\\_cqHQ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXyUf_cqHQ0). Accessed 17 March 2015

<sup>31</sup> Marshall would later reflect that this exposure also posed challenges: the desires of lesbians may become subject to prurience looks of straight men, while the creation of a specialist strand may also create a ghetto within the mainstream (Marshall et al., 1993).

<sup>32</sup> For example, Wilhelm Reich's *The Sexual Revolution* (1936; first English translation, 1945), and Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955). See: Reich, W. (1974) *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Regulating Character Structure*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Marcuse, H. (1955) *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press.

<sup>33</sup> Mary McIntosh presented a foundational argument for the social variability of sexuality as early as 1968. See: 'McIntosh, M. (1968) The Homosexual Role. *Social Problems*. 16 (2), 182–192. For the sociologists John Gagnon and William Simon, in their pioneering study *Sexual Conduct* (1973), individuals were involved in the creation of their own sexual 'scripts', defining themselves according to variable social codes. These approaches offered a fundamental break from earlier theories of sexuality as a natural human essence. See, for example: Foucault, M. (1998) *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. 3rd edition. Vol. 1, 3 vols. London: Penguin.; Gagnon, J. (2004) *An Interpretation of Desire: Essays In The Study Of Sexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.; Watney, S. & Gupta, S. (1986) The Rhetoric of AIDS. *Screen*. 27 (1), 72–85.; Weeks, J. (1991) *Against Nature: Essays on History, Sexuality and Identity*. London; Concord, MA: Rivers Oram Press. Gayle Rubin has been vital in extending these constructivist ideas of sexuality into discourses of gender. See her essay 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex' (1974) in Rubin, G. (2011) *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. pp33–65.

<sup>34</sup> See Jeffrey Weeks' articles for *History Workshop Journal* such as: Weeks, J. (1976) 'Sins and Diseases': Some Notes on Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century. *History Workshop Journal*. (1), 211–219. Weeks, J. (1982) Foucault for Historians. *History Workshop Journal*. 14 (1), 106–119. See also: Rowbotham, S. & Weeks, J. (1977) *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis*. London: Pluto Press.

<sup>35</sup> Stuart Marshall certainly knew of this discourse, since his archives contain a number of copies of *Gay Left*.

<sup>36</sup> Heger's account is credited with bringing a new historical awareness in Germany in the 1970s, and that the pink triangle was adopted as a logo for the activist group ACT UP in 1987. See: Jensen, E. N. (2002) The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbians, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. [Online] 11 (1), 319–349. Also see: Heger, H. (1980) *The Men with the Pink Triangle: The True Life-and-death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps*. Boston, MA: Alyson Publications Inc.

<sup>37</sup> For example: *Pink Triangles* (Cambridge Documentary Films, 1982), and *Race d'ep: Un Siècle d'homosexualité* (*The Homosexual Century*, Lionel Soukaz and Guy Hocquenghem, 1979)

<sup>38</sup> In particular, he criticises ACT UP's use of the pink triangle coupled with the slogan SILENCE = DEATH. Marshall argues that for gay men in the Third Reich, survival was predicated precisely on silence; for them, the motto would have been SILENCE = SURVIVAL (Marshall, 1992, p.70)



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<sup>39</sup> See: Agamben, G. (2002) *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York: MIT Press.

<sup>40</sup> Gay sex was partially decriminalised by the Sexual Offences Act 1967. However, inequalities between age of consent and other factors continued for decades. The age of consent was lowered from 18 to 16 in 2001, and consensual group sex for gay men and lesbians was also decriminalised.

<sup>41</sup> The CHE had organised itself in the early 1970s in response to such limitations of the 1967 Act, and campaigned for legal reforms as the basis for gay equality (this is in contrast with the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Left, who sought, in quite different ways, a revolutionary upturning of bourgeois culture and capitalism).

<sup>42</sup> The citation of *Journeys From Berlin/1971* is also interesting, since Anne Cottringer, the cinematographer on *Bright Eyes* also worked on this film, and it was funded with the aid of a British Film Institute grant. Cixous's celebration of the figure of Dora would also be echoed in *Bright Eyes*, notably in Marshall's use of nineteenth-century photographic images of a female 'hysteric', alongside other supposedly deviant types. Many of the images Marshall uses are those taken by Albert Londe at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. For a fascinating history of the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, see: Didi-Huberman, G. (2003) *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

<sup>43</sup> Carroll asserts that: '[...] participatory style itself operates as a metaphor of value, proposing the spectator as a "free" agent'. (Carroll, 1980a, p.42).

<sup>44</sup> See: Kristeva, J. (1986) 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', in T. Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. pp. 35–61.; Barthes, R. (1991) *S/Z*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc.

<sup>45</sup> The 'System and the Speaking Subject' was first published in the *Times Literary Supplement* (12 October 1973). A copy of this is held in Marshall's archive, and he cites it directly in a number of his own articles. The essay is available in: Kristeva, J. (1986) 'The System and the Speaking Subject', in T. Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. pp. 25–33.

<sup>46</sup> See: Johnson, T. (1972) Concerts in Slow Motion. *Village Voice*; Tarback, J. & Hearn, M. (eds.) (2007) *This Will Not Happen without You: From the Collective Archive of The Basement Group*, Tyne and Wear: Locus +.; Toop, D. (1977) Heterophonics. *Readings*. 1.; Toop, D. (2013) Sound Thinking: Stuart Marshall's Idiophonics. davidtoop [online]. Available from: <http://davidtoopblog.com/2013/07/10/sound-thinking-stuart-marshalls-idiophonics/> (Accessed 21 February 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Other early works include: *Animation* (1975) and *Still Life Animation* (1977), which both examine the construction of the video image through a frame-by-frame movement in a process akin to Joan Jonas's *Vertical Roll* (1972).

<sup>48</sup> See: David Toop in-conversation with Conal McStravick and Irene Revell, 25 July 2015. Also available online at:

[http://www.wysingartscentre.org/archive/events/electra\\_residency\\_event/2015](http://www.wysingartscentre.org/archive/events/electra_residency_event/2015) (Accessed 12 May 2016)

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Joselit, D. (2010) *Feedback*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. Paik's quote appears in a number of volumes on video art without citation of the original source. See: Elwes, C. (2005) *Video Art: A Guided Tour*. London: I.B.Tauris, p.5; Meigh-Andrews, C. (2013) *A History of Video Art*. 2nd Revised edition. Berg Publishers, p18.

<sup>50</sup> Paik's and Vostell's attacks on television took place before video technology was developed and available to artists around 1965 with the release of the Portapak; their attacks television sets were thus made at a time when the alternative media possibilities of video tape were not fully available.

<sup>51</sup> An important work here is Tamara Krikorian's tape *Vanitas* (1977), in which Krikorian uses a mirror to redouble her own image as well as capture a reflection of a TV screen behind her. This use of mirrors and an interest in the process of viewing is central to other video works by women artists working in the UK in the late 1970s, including Marcelline Mori (*La Belle et la Bete*, 1977).

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<sup>52</sup> Marshall's *Orientation Studies* was exhibited at *The Video Show* at the Tate in 1976, alongside Tamara Krikorian's *Disintegrating Forms* (1976), an array of black-and-white monitors placed at different heights with imagery of clouds slowly disappearing from the sky. Such landscape video work may be seen as a parallel to the landscape film that developed in film at the London Filmmakers' Co-op, notably in works by Jenny Okun, Chris Welsby and William Raban.

<sup>53</sup> There is an implicit idea here of spatial agency, a conception that has been critiqued in recent film studies for equating movement with freedom (Balsom, 2013; Bordwell and Carroll, 1996; Carroll, 1988), although it may also be examined in a more positive sense as a counterpublic discourse of the agora (see this discussion in Chapter 3 of this thesis).

<sup>54</sup> Marshall's quasi-narrative works coincide with a new generation of video artists in the late 1970s and 1980s whose works engaged in narrative, melodrama, camp and irony. These include including works by Ian Bourn (*Lenny's Documentary*, 1978), Steve Hawley (*We Have Fun Drawing Conclusions*, 1981), John Adams (*Sensible Shoes*, 1983), Graham Young (*Accidents in the Home*, 1984) and Mark Wilcox's (*Calling the Shots*, 1984). Marshall was involved in promoting the work of younger artists, and he curated the exhibition *Recent British Video* at the Kitchen in New York in 1983, and *British Canadian Video Exchange '84* (1984). Writing in the exhibition catalogue, Jeremy (Jez) Welsh notes that 'new narrative' video has been established for some time in Canada, and only more recently in the UK. For Welsh and for Catherine Elwes, 'new narrative' video 'developed [...] techniques for telling stories whilst making the mode of storytelling visible, the artifice of narrative laid bare as it weaves its spell' (Elwes, 2005, pp.81–82). Also see my review of the exhibition *Polytechnic: Early British Video Art*. Raven Row, London, UK, 9 Sept–7 Nov 2010.

<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/reviews/polytechnic-raven-row.php>

<sup>55</sup> See: Kristeva, J. (1986) 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', in T. Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. pp. 35–61.; Barthes, R. (1991) *S/Z*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc.

<sup>56</sup> The text is not credited in Marshall's video, but it is from Eliphaz Levi's *The History of Magic* (1860).

<sup>57</sup> See: Lipman, A. (1984) *Revolt in Style. City Limits*; Dow, M. (1984) *Bright Eyes. Out.*; Griffiths, M. (1984) *Bright Eyes. Time Out*.

<sup>58</sup> The term 'bourgeois public sphere' comes from Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge. In particular, see chapter 3, 'Public-Service Television: The Bourgeois Public Sphere Translated into Technology' in Negt, O. & Kluge, A. (1993) *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>59</sup> Jeffrey Weeks makes these points in his essay 'Postmodern AIDS'. See: Weeks, J. (1990) 'Post-modern AIDS?', in Tessa Boffin & Sunil Gupta (eds.) *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology*. London: Rivers Oram Press. pp. 133–141. See also: Patton, C. (2002) *Globalizing Aids*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press. This publication is particularly interesting in examining how activist groups such as ACT UP influenced transnational bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Programme on AIDS.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explored how independent film and video in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s sought to expand counterpublic discourse and influence widespread public opinions through the use of media including film and television. This research asks how, and why, independent film engaged with television as a forum for sociopolitical discourse. In order to understand the particular forces at play in this history, I situate independent film and video within the sociopolitical contexts of the period, examining the influences of political, media and intellectual currents on independent production, distribution and reception. The thesis thus examines how diverse counterpublics used strategies to effect social and political change, from gaining access to larger audiences and funds by lobbying governmental bodies such as the Annan Committee, to modernist interventions at the level of the text that sought to contest dominant ideology, as well as to the use of more direct forms of witnessing within innovatory forms of documentary.

In order to examine these contexts in depth, I have given close attention in chapter-length studies to one institution (the Independent Filmmakers' Association) and two film- or video-makers (Karlin and Marshall). The thesis draws from historical data from archives (including personal letters and policy documents), to close analysis of a range of films and videos, and interviews that I have conducted with makers and activists. It also uses the theoretical framework of public sphere theory to draw out the connections between individual films and videos, and wider sociopolitical causes and struggles. My analysis shows that counterpublic discourses of independent film and video were influenced by variants of Marxism and socialism, libertarianism, feminism, and other sociopolitical currents centred on

issues of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Filmmakers, theorists, artists and activists expanded debates at a number of levels, including through the production of films for distribution and discussion in cinemas and educational institutions, through the circulation of journals, magazines and newsletters, and through creating films and videos specifically for television. Independent makers contributed towards the development of television at an institutional level by self-organising into groups such as the Independent Filmmakers' Association, ensuring that the state's film funding and broadcasting policies supported works that were innovative in both form and content.

The necessity for this research is the lack of serious attention given, in recent studies and accounts of independent film and video in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, to forms of distribution, including television, as sites of counterpublic discourse. This lack of attention threatens to isolate independent film and video as a minor, or elite, cultural form with limited sociopolitical ambition. This would be to partly cut independent film and video off from the full extent of socialist, feminist and other political campaigns that were at this time engaged in changing sociality (such as everyday relations between men and women), and state policies and legislation (such as worker's rights, the legalisation of abortion, housing bills, broadcasting acts). The critical context of this thesis is a renewed interest in independent film and video in the 1970s and 1980s over the past decade-and-a-half within film studies, film festivals, and contemporary art exhibitions, curation and criticism. This interest has emerged in art exhibitions, notably in the 'documentary turn' of the late 1990s and early 2000s, with filmmakers such as John Akomfrah and Isaac Julien, who previously made works for Channel 4 or independent film festivals, increasingly working within the art gallery and biennial context (Nash, 2008). Another

development has been the widespread examination of canonical works of British independent film and video in terms of the 'essay film', with numerous publications and film festivals devoted to the form.<sup>1</sup> While these developments have often asserted the political meaning of work, they remain relatively rarefied fields, and do not develop a sense of how political change can be integrated into wider social and political currents.

While there has been an increased attention to independent film and video,<sup>2</sup> a major gap in the field of study has remained the lack of theoretical accounts of independent film and video's widespread activities, from filmmaking to publishing and institutional work in campaigning for changes to broadcasting policies and legislation. This potentially leaves independent film and video histories marooned without a theoretical framework, a succession of details and facts rather than a synthetic conception of the dynamics of the era. For example, recent factual, biographical and anecdotal accounts offer numerous insights and valuable first-hand accounts, but do not synthesise these into a theoretical or structural overview (Aylett, 2015; Knight and Thomas, 2011; Dickinson, 1999). The recent 'documentary turn' in the gallery describes independent film and video in terms of art history or contemporary moving image installations, but it has not situated specific independent works within their original social and historical moment. The 'essay film' describes independent works in terms of formal and literary qualities, but generally does not explore experiences of reception or social contexts; it is a retroactive description that gives insights into the textual richness of works, but not into their socio-historical specificity.

Another major gap in the field has been the relationship between independent film and video with television. While television, with its lowbrow associations, its flows and interruptions, may be a challenge to studies of film and art more comfortable with the examination of the aesthetics of singular objects, this should clearly not bar it from serious academic analysis. If television is sometimes conceived as a manifestation of the ‘culture industry’ (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002) or the ‘public sphere of production’ (Negt and Kluge, 1993), it is also a space that is open to intervention, critique and change (Enzensberger, 1970). Moreover, television has been the subject of academic research for decades, and it is clear that audiences have diverse and rich experiences of it, are able to decode its messages without the total loss of agency. For example, television has given audiences affective and informative understandings of history, including that of the Holocaust, even where that has involved the use of melodrama (Huysen, 1980). My research sets out to fill this gap by using close case studies, historical contextualisation, and public sphere theory (Warner, 2002; Fraser, 2014, 1993; Negt and Kluge, 1993; Habermas, 1992). This provides a framework for thinking of independent film and video as an interconnected cultural form, including specific moving image works, as well as publications, institutions, sociopolitical contexts and television.

Throughout this thesis, I have developed this notion of counterpublics in relation to a range of discourses circulating in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, including those of political modernism (Rodowick, 1994; Harvey, 1982), and wider socialist, feminist, libertarian and sociopolitical debates of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. In Chapter 1, I explored the idea of independent films and videos as rhetorical arguments about sociopolitical realities, specifically examining films and videos as counterpublic forms of persuasion (including ideas of documentary rhetoric and

Brechtian pedagogies). Chapter 2 examines the influence of cultural historians on independent film and video, and the production of independent films, videos, and television programmes as contributions to these counter-historical discourses.

Chapter 3 looked at the Independent Filmmakers' Association, and other institutional engagements of independent film- and video-makers as they sought to expand access to diverse publics. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 offer close analyses of the work of two independent makers, Marc Karlin and Stuart Marshall, outlining how they created films and videos for television that were both critical of mainstream media and engaged with it as a platform for public discourse.

The theoretical implication of this research is that future analyses of independent film and video in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain should, it is hoped, take into account the complex nature of counterpublic discourses. While in the 1970s independent film and video was often opposed to television due to the mainstream media's exclusion of radical and socialist voices, these same makers and activists also wanted to change television itself, opening it up to diversity in both form and content. This aim of representing social diversity was also an aim of some figures involved in drafting new broadcasting legislature, enabling the establishment of a television channel (Channel 4) that in its early years regularly gave voice to radical opinions. The capacity for counterpublics to expand and seek out new members, or strangers (Warner, 2002, p.55), should thus be recognised as both a utopian and realisable goal of independent film and video. This engagement with publics is, of course, not utopian in the sense of a teleological end-point, but of a continuous struggle of revolt and resistance, contestation and dissensus.

The contextual methodology used in this thesis is also extendable into other areas of research in terms of film studies, documentary studies, histories of artists' moving image and art history. The close attention that I pay in this thesis to specific histories and networks of discourses has roots in a number of disciplines. In looking at the interrelation of discourses, this thesis is particularly indebted to the genealogical work and methods of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1980, 1972). In examining historical resources – published pamphlets, polemics, reviews, viewing contexts, and sociopolitical debates – this thesis is related to developments in film studies since the 1990s that emphasise cinema in its social and historical specificity.<sup>3</sup> The use in this thesis of a combined empirical and theoretical research approach enables a detailed comparison between theoretical claims of the era and the archival and contextual data, as well as the positing of a new theoretical model that is backed up by this research. This thesis also suggests that research into films and videos of the past must be undertaken at least partly through historical analyses of the interrelation of discourses themselves. These discourses are to be treated not as truths, but as historical expressions of the desires and ambitions of particular groups in a specific time. This approach is useful methodologically for future research, examining historical or contemporary circuits of distribution and discourse and asking: what claims are made of works, and how, if at all, do they realise them?

This has implications for the discussion of independent film and video today. As outlined earlier, since the 1990s, there has been a migration of independent films and videos in Britain from television to the circuits of art galleries, alternative film festivals, and academic screenings and conferences. This should not, however, lead to a return to a vision of political effective action as taking place at the level of the film text, as was the programme of poststructuralist-influenced political modernist



film discourse in the 1970s. Thus, while it may be useful to think of independent films in terms of the 'essay film', such research should also seek to account for the networked possibilities of social influence, learning and counterpublic discourse. This thesis makes the case that independent film and video as a counterpublic discourse can make significant inroads into mainstream public discourses only if understood as a form engaged in diverse modes of distribution and reception.

### **Limitations**

For reasons of space and in order to look at the case studies in depth, I have not looked in depth at transnationalism or embodied theories of affect, although both notions permeate this thesis. This study is also limited by the specific nature of the main case studies, which do not capture the full diversity of independent film and video at this time. The strength of these case studies (*For Memory* and *Bright Eyes*) is that I have been able to look in depth at specific histories, to challenge existing accounts of film and video works, and to give detailed accounts of the context in which individual works were produced. I have sought to indicate the diversity of independent film and video throughout the thesis, by referencing a wide range of films, influences and discourses. Areas not covered in adequate depth include: lesbian documentary films and videos (such as Melanie Chait's *Veronica 4 Rose*); films and videos influenced by movements such as the intersection between the Women's Liberation Movement and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (such as Beban Kidron's *Carry Greenham Home*, 1983, or Tina Keene's *In Our Hands Greenham*, 1984); and independent documentary practice emerging from the politics of ethnic and racial difference including Asian experiences (such as Pratibha Parmar's *Sari Red*, 1988, Gurinder Chadha's *I'm British But*, 1990, or Alnoor Dewshi's, *Latifah And*

*Himli's Nomadic Uncle*, 1992). However, I have examined some of these influences through attention to the influence of socialist feminist historians and critiques of ethnicity and discourses of race in Chapter 2, as well as elsewhere throughout this thesis.

The framework for this study has developed during the course of this thesis.

Initially, I wanted to frame the thesis in terms of rhetorics of persuasion and desire, looking at how independent films and videos act as forms of argument about the sociopolitical world. This argument is present in Chapter 1 of this thesis. The framework of rhetorics was useful, since it could be used whether or not a film was documentary or fiction, or a mixture of these modes. As I continued to research other areas of my thesis, particularly looking at the institution of the Independent Filmmakers' Association, it became clear that the framework of public sphere theory could enframe and expand these ideas of discourse and persuasion. The research that I have undertaken has therefore modified my initial methodological research ideas.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

This research is necessarily focussed on the specific case of independent film and video in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. Following the completion of this thesis, I intend to undertake future research that will enrich and develop the arguments developed here. The nature of this research is speculative and open, and it would initially involve further reading on affective situations of embodied spectatorship, drawing on film studies and critical theory influenced by Gilles Deleuze's two books on cinema, including the work of Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks (Marks,

2000; Sobchack, 1991; Deleuze, 1989). My initial intention would be to look at ways to continue to synthesise these theories of affect with those theories of publics and counterpublics discussed in this thesis; notably, in Negt and Kluge's examination of publics in terms of embodied and desiring experience (Negt and Kluge, 1993).

I also wish to further research theories of transnational counterpublics, in order to examine how independent film and video in Britain has been influenced by, and contributed towards, international and global discourses. The framework of public sphere theory as developed initially by Habermas and Fraser demands that a writing public, advocating for social or political reform, ultimately intends for its demands to be guaranteed in law, which has traditionally been effected at a national level. Problems of language are also involved, for a reading public is often contained within the national borders of its spoken language; this, at least, has been the traditional case within Europe, with its national-linguistic borders – a quite different situation is also evident if we think of Spanish-speaking Latin America, French-speaking North Africa, the Anglo-American world, or overlapping constituencies of multilingual speakers. A transnational public sphere looks beyond national borders, to multilingual reading publics, as well as those whose messages are conveyed through transnational organisations and campaigns. Progressive and revolutionary transnational movements were, indeed, common in the 1970s and 1980s. These included international socialist movements, Leninism, Third Worldism, campaigns for justice and equality for disenfranchised groups (such as the Women's Liberation Movement, anti-racism and queer activism), and the development of transnational bodies set up to guarantee rights (such as the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights). From at least the late nineteenth-century, organisations have emerged with global aims to put pressure on governments to change policies,

including early suffrage movements such as the International Alliance of Women. These organisations have exploited transnational distribution of media (including pamphlets and books) to disseminate ideas. Independent film movements in the 1970s were also transnational, tapping into wider movements: the international avant-garde, militant cinema and Third Cinema, among others. It would be fruitful to look at how these movements in film and video connect with transnational public sphere theories (Fraser, 2014), outlining their location within and influence on international efforts to promote sociopolitical change.

## **Conclusion**

Independent film and video in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s was part of a set of counterpublic discourses that set out to change sociality and politics at a discursive and institutional level. Studies of independent film and video should be aware that these ambitions go beyond the specific qualities of individual film and video works, and must be understood as aspects of wider culture-specific currents. Attention to historical, intellectual, and institutional contexts enables an understanding of the sociopolitical possibilities of film and video. Within the context of British independent film and video, one of the means of achieving these goals was to reach larger publics and create spaces for counterpublic debate through the use of media, including television. This process of influencing opinion would also, ideally and cumulatively, help to enable a wider recognition of the embodied voices of those previously excluded from mainstream public discourses. This may even help to change social attitudes and influence legislature and state policies.<sup>4</sup> Public service television, from the days of Lord Reith to the present, does not simply cater for existing tastes, but also sets out to create, develop and negotiate new social

horizons. Independent film and video, which had been marginal in the 1970s, became part of this process and legacy when it encountered television in the 1980s. To examine independent film and video in Britain during this period, then, is to look at the agency and limits of cultural forms in rethinking and rebuilding social ideals within a given context.

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, I have not found the ‘essay film’ a particularly useful term for the analysis of independent film and video, largely because it does not examine the broad social and political contexts of distribution and production.

<sup>2</sup> The last few years have also seen new academic research activities into independent film and video, with a number of PhD researchers, including myself, currently undertaking studies into areas of independent film and video: these include research into activist community video in the 1970s (Ed Webb-Ingall), into the writing and film work of Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey (Nicholas Helm-Grovas), and into feminist films and journals in the USA in the 1970s (Clarissa Kennedy Jacob). This work is as yet largely unpublished, although some of it will be collected in a forthcoming book titled *Other Cinemas* edited by Laura Mulvey and Susan Clayton and published by I.B.Taurus, a publication that I have also contributed towards (Perry, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> For example, studies of early cinema often use diverse historical resources. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll have argued that these specific, empirical, forms of research are a fundamental challenge to earlier conceptions of film in terms of psychoanalysis and ideology. See: Bordwell, D. & Carroll, N. (1996) *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

<sup>4</sup> This study is not limited to analysis of organisations that set out to change state policies. Even those frequently anti-statist movements (such as anarchism, syndicalism, libertarianism) developed campaigns that were rooted in the specific cultural, intellectual and political forces of Britain at this time.

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## Films, videos and television programmes

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*At the Fountainhead* (1980) Directed by Anthea Kennedy and Nick Burton. London: British Film Institute.

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'Bright Eyes' (1984) *Eleventh Hour*. Written by Stuart Marshall. tx. 17 December. London: Channel 4. Available from LUX, London. Refer to LUX for Marshall's early video works, and Maya Vision, London, for later television films.

'The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black Black Oil' (1974) *Play For Today*. Tx. 6 June. Directed by John McGrath. London: BBC-2.

'Commodities' (6-part series) (1986) *Eleventh Hour*. Directed by Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling. Tx 14, 21, 28 July; 4, 11, 18 August. London: Channel 4. Available from the British Film Institute, London.

*Days of Hope* (1975) Directed by Ken Loach. tx.11,18, 25 September; 2 October. London: BBC-1. Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u019DvYjY4> (Accessed 21 May 2014)

*The End of the Pier* (1986) directed by David Eadington. tx 15 June. Newcastle: Amber; London: Channel 4.

*For Memory* (1986) Directed by Marc Karlin. tx. 31 March. London: BBC-2. Available from Marc Karlin Archive, London.

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*Penthesilea* (1974) Directed by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen.

*Rapunzel Let Down Your Hair* (1978) Directed by London Women's Film Group. Available from the British Film Institute, London.

*Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) Directed by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. London: British Film Institute.

*So That You Can Live* (1982). *Eleventh Hour*. Directed by Cinema Action. tx. 8 November 1984. Channel 4. Available from Platform Films, London.

*Spirit of Albion* (1987) Directed by Richard Philpott. tx 8 June. London: Channel 4.

*Winstanley* (1975) Directed by Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo. London: British Film Institute.

## Informal interviews

Holly Aylett, 12 August 2013.  
 Neil Bartlett, 16 February 2014.  
 Simon Blanchard, 16 April 2013.  
 Jonathan Bloom (Collinson), 10 October 2013.  
 Anne Cottringer, 31 October 2014.  
 David Critchley, 1 April 2015.  
 Jill Daniels, 15 June 2014.  
 Rebecca Dobbs, 20 February 2014.  
 Barbara Evans, 8 April 2014.  
 Paul Marris, 20 April 2014.  
 Laura Mulvey, 2 October 2013; 28 March 2014.  
 Sheila Rowbotham, 21 March 2014.

James Swinson, 9 September 2013.  
Steve Sprung, 10 October 2015.  
Jeffrey Weeks, 11 February 2016.