

# How can structural film expand the language of experimental ethnography?

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Instructions:

Read yourself into a position of crisis

Start your film from there

## ABSTRACT

This research question *How can structural film expand the language of experimental ethnography?* considers the potential cross-fertilisation of a structural film practice with experimental ethnography to challenge dominant assumptions about cultural representation in anthropology and to suggest ways in which anthropology can actively interrogate visual systems as a means of renewing the avant-gardism of structural film. Thus this study asks what a structural–materialist project mostly connected with the 1960s and 1970s could contribute to contemporary ethnography if issues of anthropological representation were allowed to penetrate field of vision and what new forms of representation occur where the textual embodiment of authority in fieldwork studies becomes the subject of a structural film. This includes the crossover of these terms with minimal and conceptual art, experimental aesthetic systems and/or artworks that blur fact and fiction. These theoretical parameters are then explored through practice in an installation proposal *The Autonomous Object?* and a single screen work *The Exception and the Rule*. *The Autonomous Object?* takes as its subject the boundary between documentary and performance, the raw realism of the photographic image and the sculptural qualities of the monochrome. *The Exception and the Rule* proposes that the viewer *experience* representational issues at stake in anthropology and structural film, a transfer of emphasis from what a film’s subject ‘is’ to how a film’s subject is seen. Both works gather geo/political urgency due to the current civil unrest in Pakistan and India, where they were primarily filmed. The resulting question as to how one makes a political film foregrounds the multi-layered and complex relationship between art, politics and language that has led to *The Museum of non Participation*, the future body of work that concludes this thesis.

[http://www.artangel.org.uk/projects/2008/the\\_museum\\_of\\_non\\_participation](http://www.artangel.org.uk/projects/2008/the_museum_of_non_participation)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	p 6
<b>Research methodology</b> .....	p 6
<i>Chapter 1 outline</i> .....	p 7
<i>Chapter 2 outline</i> .....	p 8
<i>Chapter 3 outline</i> .....	p 9
<i>INTERMISSION outline</i> .....	p 9
<i>Chapter 4 outline</i> .....	p 10
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<i>The historical development of visual anthropology</i> .....	p 11
<i>Collier on photography and visual anthropology</i> .....	p 12
<i>Early anthropological vision</i> .....	p 18
<i>Cinéma vérité</i> .....	p 21
<i>The sustained influence of Dziga Vertov</i> .....	p 21
<i>Power, control and authority</i> .....	p 24
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<i>The Ethnographer's Eye</i> .....	p 28
<i>The cinematic metaphor of montage</i> .....	p 31
<i>Problematizing the spatial and the temporal:</i> .....	p 32
<i>Problematizing perspective / voice and the dialogic appropriation of concepts and narrative devices</i> .....	p 34
<i>Bifocality and critical juxtapositions and contemplation of alternative possibilities</i> .....	p 38
<i>The war of dreams</i> .....	p 38
<i>The psychology of cinema</i> .....	p 39
<i>Structural film</i> .....	p 41
<i>Structure/apparatus/spectator: Linking visual anthropology and structural film</i> .....	P 45
<i>Making evident the conditions of production and defining the forms of structuration</i> .....	p 46
<i>Initiating the desire in the spectator to release their perceived role of passivity and the authority of the historical determinants acting on both filmmaker and spectator</i> .....	P 47
<i>Duration and temporal sequentiality</i> .....	p 48
<i>Practice as theory</i> .....	p 49

<b>Chapter 3: The Autonomous Object?</b> .....	<i>p 54</i>
<i>Mirror Film</i> .....	<i>p 56</i>
<i>Power, control and authority: in practice</i> .....	<i>p 58</i>
<i>Colour Aid</i> .....	<i>p 61</i>
<i>Open Systems</i> .....	<i>p 63</i>
<b>INTERMISSION</b> .....	<i>p 67</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES A</i> .....	<i>p 68</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES B</i> .....	<i>p 70</i>
<i>Self-critique:</i> .....	<i>P 71</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES A</i> .....	<i>p 71</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES B</i> .....	<i>p 72</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES A</i> .....	<i>p 74</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES B</i> .....	<i>p 75</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES A</i> .....	<i>p 76</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES B</i> .....	<i>p 77</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES A</i> .....	<i>p 79</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES B</i> .....	<i>p 80</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES B</i> .....	<i>p 82</i>
<i>FIELD NOTES C</i> .....	<i>p 84</i>
<b>Chapter 4</b> .....	<i>p 89</i>
<i>Practice-based submission 2: The Exception and the Rule</i> .....	<i>p 89</i>
<i>Script breakdown scene-by-scene</i> .....	<i>p 89</i>
<b>Conclusion: The Museum of Non Participation</b> .....	<i>p 107</i>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<i>P 120</i>

## **PREFACE**

### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisors, William Raban and Elizabeth Edwards, for their patience, support and invaluable insights. I thank the VASL Artists collective and Afrin Sopariwala for their help in filming *The Exception and the Rule* and Karen Mirza for her total support throughout this process. I gratefully acknowledge the AHRC for their financial assistance and LCC for the opportunity to undertake this dissertation.

### **Research methodology**

This thesis was written over a four year period during which I visited India three times and Pakistan twice. This included a ten-week stay in Mumbai, followed six months later by a visit of similar duration in Karachi. These two visits are referred to in the following Chapters as fieldwork visits. Throughout this time my research question remained the same, but I did pursue many different strategies, approaches and experiments in order to evaluate what this question meant for my practice and what my practice meant for this question. It was always in my mind that this question was a point of departure and not a question posed in order to substantiate a definitive answer. Instead it has been my method to attempt to document the process of my ideas evolving in time in order to assess and profile the potential in this cross fertilisation. It is a developing argument within this thesis that this approach is in keeping with the multi-layered and reflexive philosophical arguments evident in both structural film and experimental ethnography.

Over this period this exploration of process led to a number of different textual experiments that were finally manifested in a Chapter structure that begins with a historical overview of the evolution of the terms of my research question, followed by contemporary representational debates within structural film and visual anthropology. These debates are then reanalysed through my two practice-based artworks *The Autonomous Object?* and *The Exception and the Rule*. These Chapters are analysed in greater detail below, but the sequence of these ideas is significant: it is my argument that *The Exception and the Rule* developed out of *The Autonomous Object?* influenced by my ongoing reading that was also challenging my practice. This is recognised in a text entitled INTERMISSION, which occurs between Chapters 3 and 4 as a self-critique of my ideas drafted before, during and after my two main field trips. This personal subjective diary documentation of cul de sacs and ideas caught in time stands in contrast to the academic authoritative tone of the other Chapters in this thesis. An INTERMISSION intertitle also appears in the film *The Exception and the Rule* calling attention to the constant questioning throughout this thesis as to the dialogue between practice and theory.

It is also important to acknowledge how conversations and collaborations helped inform this work. In particular these include conversations with my supervisors and with my long-term collaborative partner Karen Mirza. Filmmaking is inherently a collaborative process but from the beginning it was impressed on

me that I must be clear to differentiate my own work from that of Karen Mirza within this thesis context. It has therefore been my method to write this thesis text solely in consultation with my supervisors. Where collaboration has been a structuring principle of a work, as with *The Autonomous Object?* I have clearly indicated this. I would like to clearly state that *The Exception and the Rule* is a film that as far as possible I authored on my own. First, this work was primarily shot and conceived during a fieldtrip to India in which Karen was present for only two days<sup>1</sup> and the film was edited without her assistance on my return. Nevertheless, I have credited Karen Mirza as a co-director in this work in deference to the funding commitments from Artangel [www.artangel.org.uk](http://www.artangel.org.uk) for the wider context in which this film was finally exhibited: *The Museum of Non Participation*. This museum came out of experiences in Karachi and Islamabad shared, witnessed and discussed with Karen Mirza whilst I was simultaneously completing *The Exception and the Rule*. It has since become important not to publicly separate this film from *The Museum of Non Participation* because I have come to recognise that these works are in dialogue with one another. Thus *The Museum of Non Participation* not only forms the conclusion of this thesis but also raises the question of whether I can claim sole authorship of this film given the participatory and collaborative nature of the film medium itself.

This thesis is presented over 4 Chapters and an INTERMISSION.

### **Outline Chapter 1**

Chapter 1 raises historical issues at stake in visual anthropology as a way of introducing the potential for a contemporary anthropological structural film practice. It is emphasised that structural film is not connected with structuralism as established in anthropological discourse by Levi Strauss (Levi-Strauss, 1968) and Leach (Leach, 1966) amongst others (Sperber, 1973, Hugh-Jones, 1979, Dumont, 1981). Structural Film is an art practice in keeping with the complexities of voice, discourse, representation and authority that contemporary authors acknowledge are at the heart of the development of visual anthropology (Pink, 2005, Alfonso, 2004, Banks, 2001). Nor is the visual as a category taken for granted in anthropology. Instead this Chapter begins with the *1973 International Conference on Visual Anthropology* – a key moment in the consolidation of visual anthropology as a sub-discipline of anthropology. The conference papers cited in this Chapter by Collier, Young, Asch, MacDougall and Rouch have been chosen to exemplify the breadth of the representational claims of the period, to constitute an integrated literature review and to provide key context to representational issues of my research argued later in the practice-based Chapters of this thesis.

Through these claims it becomes evident that the history of visual anthropology is a multi layered collection of micro-histories, a process of rapid expansion and consolidation of terms and conditions across history, each adding to the growing sophistication of the claims of what visual anthropology is. Thus this Chapter also considers the modernist roots of the visual in anthropology and how the consolidation of anthropology as an academic discipline impacted its use of photography and film as research tools.

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<sup>1</sup> I asked Karen Mirza to take colour photographic stills of children in Mumbai slums whilst I filmed this interaction on 16mm black and white. This sequence is in *The Exception and the Rule*. I also asked her to provide a female voiceover for one scene in the film.

## Chapter 2

Following on from this recognition of key historical developments in visual anthropology, Chapter 2 considers three authors that propose different future studies for anthropology and film. Each of these authors interrogates the developing status of the image in anthropology. Anna Grimshaw repositions vision at the centre of the development of anthropology (Grimshaw, 2001); George Marcus proposes six cinematic strategies to be used to expand the language of anthropological text making (Marcus, 1994); and Marc Augé warns of a global crisis predicated by a present day confusion over reality and image (Augé, 1999).

Because these texts propose future potential for the image in anthropology, they are used here as a first opportunity to evaluate different claims made on behalf of structural film in this contemporary anthropological context. Thus Grimshaw, Marcus and Augé are intertwined discursively with structural film theorists, Le Grice, Conrad and Sitney (Le Grice, 2001, Conrad, 2004, Sitney, 1979, Sitney, 1974), amongst others. This initial contemporary cross fertilisation introduces a fuller overview of the historical definitions of structural film. These include structural film in relationship to Warhol (Peterson, 1994, Rees, 1979, Maciunas, 1969) Greenbergian materialism (Cornwell, 1979a, Cornwell, 1972); perceptual systems (Le Grice, 1997, Le Grice, 2001, Stoller, 1997); and the unconscious (Sitney, 1974). Thus ideas are presented in Chapter 2 as developing out of anthropology and into dialogue with structural film in keeping with this research question that asks how structural film can expand the language of experimental ethnography?

Because the contemporary edge of current visual anthropological discourse now no longer privileges vision alone as the primary source of anthropological knowledge, Chapter 2 concludes by paralleling the work of structural filmmaker Peter Gidal and anthropologist Jean Rouch as films that are sensory immersive experiences. This reflects the recent sensory turn in anthropology where sensory knowledge is discussed on a level with vision and textual representation (Howes, 2003, Stoller, 1997, Tilley, 1994). This is articulated in this Chapter in the proposition that, in different ways, Gidal and Rouch share the desire that the viewer *experience* the problems of representation. This is where the viewer makes theory rather than consuming it. The title of this subsection is 'practice as theory', a concept that is also the fullest ambition for this practice-based thesis. Thus first contact with the fieldwork sites of Mumbai and Karachi are also introduced in Chapter 2 through newspaper quotes and personal reflection.

## Chapter 3

Chapter 3 revisits representational issues discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 through the practice-based work *The Autonomous Object?* This analysis combines the major influences on this work in retrospect alongside issues already raised in this thesis. In this analysis particular significance is placed upon the structural films *Mirror Film* (Morris, 1969) and *Colour Aid* (Serra, 1970-71) the exhibition: *Open Systems - rethinking art c.1970* at Tate Modern (Godfrey, 2005) and the dialogue between the participants and the filmmakers that occurred during the filming of this work.



*The Autonomous Object?* is also a collaborative work, made with passers-by and in constant discussion with my long-standing collaborative partner, Karen Mirza. The ideas and references developed in this Chapter reflect conversations that Karen and I were having about representation, though the weight of this thesis reflects my disposition towards structural film and anthropology rather than Karen's background in art theory. This collaboration is cited constantly through this Chapter, as personal experiences around the camera belong to both of us as filmmakers.

### **Submitted with Chapter 3:**

*The Autonomous Object?* – Installation with variable dimensions submitted as DVD documentation of camera rolls with schematic diagrams of potential configurations

### **INTERMISSION**

It is a developing argument in Chapters 1 to 3 that structural film and visual anthropology both describe processes whilst openly acknowledging that they are part of the processes that they are describing. This includes the politics of the relations of the production of these processes from inception through to presentation. Also apparent is a genre of academic writing - the thesis as an authoritative text. A thesis typically is a context that comes with an author attached, a factual analysis with a starting point that is frequently presented as a question [implying answers] and a final output that is assessed by other academics. Yet a thesis is no more a "scientific object" than is "culture". Both are sites of contest "where no whole picture can be filled in, since the perception and filling of a gap leads to the awareness of other gaps" (Marcus and Clifford, 1986 p18) The same can be said of films - which are equally temporal, contested and emergent.

The INTERMISSION is an experiment in grasping the temporal emergence of film as a process of thinking in time. Using *The Exception and the Rule* as a case study, this Chapter proposes to travel through the emergence of this film capturing knowledge as it opened up through the reading. What this reveals is that tangents, interruptions, failures and gaps in knowledge are as relevant to *The Exception and the Rule* as the claims on behalf of the completed film analysed in Chapter 4. This is a process usually hidden in rewrites, the appendices, narrative, the authoritative position of the author or the illusion of continuity.

In order to evaluate this emergence of knowledge this INTERMISSION takes the textual analysis written before my first trip to India [FIELD NOTES A] and interweaves it with a critique of these ideas written over the following months before travelling to Pakistan [FIELD NOTES B]. The perspectives and positions are quite different and the result is a series of cul de sacs, lateral connections, developing comfort zones and gaps in reading in time. This is followed by a series of texts intended for experiments in voiceover and intertitles collected throughout this period [FIELD NOTES C]. Within these evolving ideas it is possible to see the emergence of *The Exception and the Rule* and this Chapter leaves uncorrected the naïveté of this writing as these gaps are also the substance of these works. The intention is that people who come in contact with the written thesis and/or the film can experience feeling lost in ideas, confluences and

unfinished thoughts, as well as feeling narrative agency. This idea is also emphasised in the final film which ends with a resonant reworking of the sentence *Images I wish I had filmed but couldn't*.

The two time periods being observed in this Chapter are indicated by whether they are passages of text from FIELD NOTES A (written 1<sup>st</sup> September 2007 to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008) or FIELD NOTES B (22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008 to 19 January 2009). The tentative status of an intermission within a conventional academic thesis is acknowledged in the use of a different coloured font. This thesis is still valid without experiencing the intermission and the bypassing of this text will not upset the narrative continuity or argument of the other Chapters. For this reason the INTERMISSION is also not included in the overall word count of this thesis. Nevertheless the possibility of reading the INTERMISSION is an important juxtaposition to Chapter 4 where *The Exception and the Rule* is analysed in retrospect as a fixed film in time.

#### **Chapter 4**

Chapter 4 takes issues raised in the preceding Chapters and situates them within a film *The Exception and the Rule* that argues through these complex politics of knowledge while still reflecting local and global issues in Pakistan. *The Exception and the Rule* is a film that proposes that the viewer experience its problems of representation and Chapter 4 develops this proposition scene by scene in order to argue the developing theoretical and social issues at stake in this work. *The Exception and the Rule* was launched in film festivals in October 2009, and this Chapter cites recent discussions the film has ignited. These include a split in the audience at the London Film Festival reflecting the audiences opposing predisposition to what constitutes the subject of a film. *The Exception and the Rule* was also shown in the context of *The Museum of non Participation* which launched in October 2009. The relationship between the film and this context is addressed in the conclusion of this thesis. It is advised that *The Exception and the Rule* be viewed before reading Chapter 4. As suggested in Chapter 2, certain arguments are more easily articulated in a cinematic medium than in a written one because these characteristics are essentially cinematic narrative techniques.

#### **Submitted with Chapter 4:**

*The Exception and the Rule* – 37 minute film submitted as DVD

*The Museum of Non Participation* – Newspaper

*The Museum of Non Participation* – Programme of events and talks

*The Museum of Non Participation* – Documentation of exhibition submitted as DVD

## Chapter 1: The historical development of Visual Anthropology

“Department after department and research project after research project fail to include filming and insist on continuing the hopelessly inadequate note-taking of an earlier age, while the behaviour that film could have caught and preserved for centuries disappears – disappears right in front of everybody’s eyes. Why? What has gone wrong?” (Mead 1975 p4)

In 1973, on the twenty-first anniversary of the formation of the International Committee on Ethnographic and Sociological Film, the International Conference on Visual Anthropology was held in Chicago. Participants included many of the key practitioners of the period, among them Margaret Mead, Jean Rouch, David MacDougall, Colin Young, John Marshall, John Collier Jr and Timothy & Patsy Asch. The agenda addressed the future of visual anthropology, its contribution to the history of cinema and its drive for academic acceptance as a sub-discipline of anthropology. Two years later Hockings published *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (Hockings, 1975), making more widely available the collected proceedings of the conference. The first collection of essays devoted to visual anthropology, this publication is a landmark as visual anthropology was indeed at the cusp of a dramatic rise in profile. Visual anthropology is now a significant critical perspective amidst the wider contemporary textual critique of anthropology’s politics of representation, including (for example) its power-relations, truth claims, and representational strategies.

But the significance of this conference was not only in its participants, but also its timing. Anthropology, just as other disciplines, was becoming immersed in a radical period of shifting boundaries of disciplinary practice. A cultural critique in anthropology known as the crisis of representation was beginning in the 1970s and would gain further momentum in the 1980s. Both film and photography played their part. As Edwards argues, “Photography and its signifying practices were the focus of an analysis of increasing theoretical sophistication and complexity in the context of a ferment of cultural and identity politics which challenged the western hegemony. Following Foucault’s work on the framings of power, discipline, surveillance, and the complex politics of knowledge, it was integral to discursive regimes of truth which defined, appropriated, constructed and objectified the subject of anthropology. While the arguments and their theoretical tools were strongly informed by literary theory, post-colonial theory and cultural studies, theory of photography provided the specific critical tools. Anthropologists engaged with not only Foucault, but a range of post-structuralist and Marxist-inspired debates. Especially influential were Tagg’s constructivist approaches to photography (1988), Burgin’s semiotic and psychoanalytical account (1986), photographic applications of the semiotics of Charles Peirce and the linguistic models of Saussure most notably in the work of Roland Barthes (1977), Sekula’s Foucauldian analysis of the archive and taxonomic desire (1989), and new readings of Benjamin. It was the very nature of the photograph, as the mechanical and chemical trace of the body of the subject, which made it so powerful a metaphor and rhetorical force” (Edwards, forthcoming).

In the context of the conference these disparate reflexive and collaborative micro-histories were debated through wide ranging and often-contradictory representational claims. Though it is important to emphasise

that the object of this conference was to put visual anthropology into its proper perspective within anthropology, one of the most exciting things that has sustained visual anthropology is that there is no consensus on how to make anthropological films. As Young stated at that time: “There is no need to argue exclusively for one method. Conferences about method are arguments about power; representatives of one approach are racist about all others. This is obviously a waste of time. If different languages are being used, we just have to learn their rules to avoid confusion” (Young, 1975 p4). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to cite every position debated at this time, the latitude of these debates are exemplified, as I shall discuss, by Collier who debates the use of photography as a field research tool, Young who critiques structured selective processes that claim to be objective, Asch who focuses on the cultural bias embedded in both the film apparatus and film production, MacDougall who argues the significance of the limits of the photographic frame and Rouch who cites the lasting legacy of Vertov and Flaherty for anthropology. These debates have been chosen because their arguments also provide key context for representational issues argued later in the practice-based Chapters of this thesis. They also form the basis for the developing analysis of representational claims for structural film, itself a contested term.

### **Collier on *Photography and visual anthropology***

“The potential of still image research was recognised before the development of the cine-camera. Archaeologists were using photography even when recordings had to be made with cumbersome 11-by14-inch view cameras. They dealt with photographs as ARTIFACTS which integrated the camera record into their research. They worked with the fine detail of photographs as studiously as they analyzed spearpoints or architectural detail. The cultural anthropologists of the period simply recognised the illustrative value of the camera record. Archaeologists, in their need for definitive detail and accurate association of materials, genuinely established the three basic ways that photographs can be used scientifically, “To MEASURE, to COUNT and to COMPARE. Eighty years later these three dimensions remain our basic research opportunities even in the most complex film analysis. There really are no other ways to use photographic records scientifically, except to use photographs as stimuli in interviewing” (Collier, 1975 p237)

Collier’s emphasis in his paper on *Ethnographic photography in anthropology* (Collier, 1975) is that the anthropological value of the camera lies in its ability to evoke raw reality. A research tool from which to later recover data, to map societal relationships and to bridge communication. Thus for Collier the photographic image provided context and evidential support for the anthropologist in the field. This is not to say that Collier was not aware of the complex representational issues that come with the photograph’s ability to evoke reality. Indeed he cites at the end of his paper his future ambition to work at the frontier of film research in “the emotional and psychological preponderances of cine-film” (Collier, 1975 p249). But his fundamental concept is that the photographic record is a scientific research tool available to anthropologists striving for scientific significance, reliability and for valid comparability. Thus for Collier the scientific relevance of the photograph resides in the ethnographic detail caught *within* a photographic frame and not the politic of the frame itself. This is exemplified in his methodological publication *Visual Anthropology: photography as a research method* (Collier, 1967) and in his personal investigation as to what happens when the still image begins to move. In these experiments Collier uses photographs to map

ethnographic information contained within individual frames of super 8 cine-film. He thus approaches film itself as if it were a field site from which knowledge can be extracted. He also suggests that his original super 8 film was filmed “objectively”, reinforcing his consideration of film as both an artefact and raw witness of an event:

“*Objectively*, I made a family study on film and had a colleague pace the footage, scene for scene, with well-made still photographs. Every bit of ethnographic information is contained in these stills. Students can critically define the life style of the family and all the domestic and craft technology. Then I screen the film for them. What can now be added to the record? Very little of content, but what is added is vital. After students have viewed the film the general comment is: “now we can define love, we can describe HOW the family relates emotionally.” (Collier, 1975 p249)

In his conference paper on *Observational Cinema* Young describes this faith that social scientists have in film as an objective record as “touching and almost sentimental” (Young, 1975 p100). In contrast to Collier’s interest in valid comparability Young approaches the camera as a tool that proposes a lie that the audience tends to believe: “Film has a tendency to appear plausible, and thus to diminish the importance of what it ignores” (Young, 1975 p100). This critique of film as a translation of reality applies to all structured selective processes that claim to represent an original event or situation directly - including field notes. Thus we can compare the different ideas that Collier and Young have of anthropology. While Collier argues: “As observers and conceptualizers of the human circumstance we wish to present the most objective rational account of culture that we possibly can. We use every scientific opportunity possible and then we WRITE” (Collier, 1975 p248). Young argues that what must finally be understood is that all observational structures are a conceit “that normal behaviour being filmed is the behaviour that is normal for the subject under the circumstances, including, but not exclusively, the fact that they are being filmed” (Young, 1975 p102). Thus for Young the camera is not a surveyor’s instrument<sup>2</sup> but an invitation to interact and to observe and record this interaction. In this approach film acts as a ‘representative’ of reality, and these films are most successful when the camera is intimate with its subject-matter and the anthropological teacher learns how to look and read film. As Young concludes “The microphone takes away a man’s words, but the camera takes away his soul, Clearly such an important procedure should not be concealed” (Young, 1975 p112)

Timothy and Patsy Asch in their paper on *Film in Ethnographic Research* (Asch and Asch, 1975) situate their argument between Collier and Young. On the one hand (like Young), they contend that people use technology as they experience or know it culturally, but on the other hand (like Collier), they suggest that the camera as a mechanical instrument of observation operates differently from human perception:

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<sup>2</sup> “When an anthropologist guided by his training and his informants, observes behaviour in a village, takes notes, transcribes these notes, and draws inferences from them, he is following a method suggested to him by precedent and refined by experience. He publishes the results of this note-taking method – not the notes themselves. But his descriptive as well as observational powers will have been severely stretched by this process. He can write down only so much and remember only so much more, and he is forced to apply a system of cognitive priorities in deciding what will be noted” (Young 1975 p101)

“Recording instruments, cameras and tape-recorders, differ from human perception on many dimensions. One is particularly significant: the capacity of human beings to ignore most stimuli and to pay attention to specific things of immediate interest, a capacity that recording instruments do not have. Unlike human beings audiovisual tools are not themselves selective; they record whatever light rays or sound waves are received within their range” (Asch and Asch, 1975 p337)

For Timothy and Patsy Asch this subtlety confirms *both* the unalterable realist connection between the image and the event it represents and that the filmmaker and the sound person introduce selectivity into this process by “angling the camera, choosing the frame, focus, time, placement of microphone and so on ... Bear in mind though that that the same process of selection occurs when we look at film images. We read these signs through our individual and cultural biases” (Asch and Asch, 1975 p338). This notion of cultural bias led the authors to cite the work of Sol Worth and John Adair as particularly significant contributions to visual anthropology. These filmmakers gave cameras and film to Navajo people who had no cinema training in order to include their contribution to the development of a semiotic of visual communication. The resulting work *Through Navajo Eyes* (Worth and Adair, 1972) is argued as a classic in visual anthropology (Dublin, 1997) that now appears even more perceptive as more and more people use videotape to record events in their own lives.

This politic of collaboration between participants and technology also featured in the paper *The Camera and Man* (Rouch, 1975). In this Rouch states that ethnology (in 1973) has never been so disputed or so extensively questioned. He then traces a brief history of the development of visual anthropology in which he emphasises its debt to Robert Flaherty and Dziga Vertov, neither of whom were anthropologists, but who (significantly for my argument) Rouch cites as pioneers of the essential questions that all anthropologists must ask themselves “should we put reality on film (the real life setting) as Flaherty did, or should we film it as Vertov did, without planning a particular setting (life caught unawares)” (Rouch, 1975 p84). This revisiting of film history would become a feature of visual anthropology as disciplinary boundaries continued to blur. In 2002 Nichols looked back over the history of visual anthropology and, like many other authors (Morphy, 1997, Gardner and Lewis, 2003, Arnheim, 1997, Nichols, 2002) would valorise anthropology as a subset of documentary film by identifying major documentary methods with distinctive formal and ideological anthropological qualities. Thus the history of visual anthropology is in itself a complex process of arguing mutually dependent histories whereby influences, sometimes unarticulated at the time and sometimes recognised, are now claimed to have shaped its historical canon.

Nichols suggests these to be the Griersonian documentary narration, *cinéma vérité*, observational documentary and reflexive cinema (Nichols, 2002). Indeed broadly speaking these are already methodologies discussed in this Chapter. If one connects the direct-address narration style of Grierson with the qualities of photographic evidence argued by Collier, then Rouch was the author of *cinéma vérité*, Young’s argument for representative film comes out of observational documentary and the Navajo films are one kind of reflexive cinema. These categories will be revisited later in this Chapter. The point here is that visual anthropology is both a process of rapid expansion and consolidation of its terms and conditions

across history. In particular, Rouch was a key figure in this process as he frequently cited his influences. Thus in his paper in which he discussed his preferred approach to anthropological film language Rouch clearly states his own advances in participatory narration were directly influenced by Vertov, who used to discuss first rushes from beginning to end with the people who were filmed. Furthermore Rouch's desire to free the camera from the rigidity of the tripod "to improvise a ballet in which the camera itself becomes just as much alive as the people it is filming" (Rouch, 1975 p90) was also inspired by Flaherty and Vertov: "This would be a further synthesis between the theories of Vertov about the cine-eye<sup>3</sup> and those of Flaherty about the participant camera. I often compare this dynamic improvisation with that of the bullfighter before the bull" (Rouch, 1975 p90). Even Rouch's paper *The Camera and Man* is a reversal of the title of Vertov's most famous film *Man with a movie camera* (Vertov, 1929) Thus Rouch proposes his own approach to visual anthropology where the camera is a physical extension of the body (the bullfighter before the bull) and an extension of human perception (the cine-eye). This *Kino Eye* will be discussed later in this Chapter but it is significant here to emphasise that Rouch is not rejecting the preponderance of anthropology towards truth (vérité) even though he makes filmic truth (cinéma vérité) a visible site of contestation.

The Rouchian approach to filmmaking was, of course, not the only one being put forward at the conference. It was one position within a wider debate about how anthropologists should go about making their films. For example David MacDougall in *Beyond Observational Cinema* (MacDougall, 1975) also argued that scientific objectives have placed the severest strictures on ethnographic film. "With data-gathering as the objective, there is of course no real need for the making of films, but merely for the collection of footage upon which a variety of studies can later be based" (MacDougall, 1975 p122). Thus, like Rouch, MacDougall argues for film as a medium of ideas in its own right.

Meanwhile the conference itself also set out to give anthropologists practical skills to pursue their theoretical ideas. For example, Sorenson and Jablonko in their paper *Research filming of naturally occurring phenomena* (Sorenson and Jablonko, 1975) suggest different ways of recording an event. These include "when something interesting happens pick up the camera and shoot ... decide in advance what, where and when to film ... digress inquisitively into areas and situations peripheral to attention" (Sorenson and Jablonko, 1975 p150-153). Thus while discussions were continuing on where and what to film, authors like MacDougall were also opposing any uncritical faith in the camera's power to capture events themselves. Indeed parts of MacDougall's analysis are particularly perceptive to the practice based work submitted in this thesis. This particularly occurs in his critique of the tendency in viewing films to define what has been photographed by what one is seeing:

"The film image impresses us with its completeness, partly because of its precise rendering of detail, but even more because it represents a continuum of reality which extends beyond the edges of the frame and which paradoxically, seems not to be excluded. A few images create a world. We ignore the images that could have been, but weren't. In most cases we have no conception of what they might be" (MacDougall, 1975 p122).

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<sup>3</sup> Discussed later in this Chapter

This is a significant politic raised in my own film *The Exception and the Rule* and its wider philosophical context *The Museum of Non Participation*. These works which directly address *images that could have been, but weren't* are analysed in detail in Chapter 4 but MacDougall draws a different trajectory out of these ideas by framing the potential for a participatory cinema<sup>4</sup>

“Beyond observational cinema lies the possibility of a participatory cinema, bearing witness to the “event” of the film and making strengths of what most films are at pains to conceal. Here the filmmaker acknowledges his entry upon the world of his subjects and yet asks them to imprint directly upon the film their own culture. This should not imply a relaxation of the filmmaker’s purposefulness, nor should it cause him to abandon the perspective that an outsider can bring to another culture. By revealing his role, the filmmaker enhances the value of his material as evidence. By entering actively into the world of his subjects, he can provoke a greater flow of information about them. By giving them access to the film, he makes possible the corrections, additions and illuminations that only their response to the material can elicit. Through such an exchange a film can begin to reflect the ways in which its subjects perceive the world” (MacDougall, 1975 p125)

Taken together, these authors exemplify the increasing momentum in visual anthropology to advance the theoretical parameters of visual anthropology and to consolidate its practical teaching. To question “how best to train ethnologists to understand filmmaking and film analysis, how best to train those who start as filmmakers and wish to learn ethnographic filming?” (Mead, 1975 p6). This desire for a fusion of theory and practice still resonates today as there is still no agreement as to the applicable guidelines for research filming, how visual anthropology reconciles itself with written anthropology or what makes a photographic record specifically anthropological. Indeed these questions run throughout this contemporary practice based thesis as they did back in 1973. Hockings in his 1995 reprint of *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (Hockings, 1995) writes on the sustained systemic exclusion of visual anthropology:

“It is now exactly a century since the first anthropological film – on Berber pottery-making, one of the very first films of any sort – was shot by Felix Regnault at a Colonial Exposition in Paris. Since that time ‘the natives’ have modernised themselves, the filming technology has improved beyond recognition, and the discipline of anthropology has built up a complex of theoretical constructs and empirical observations that were simply undreamt of a hundred years ago. And yet...? And yet visual anthropology, hardly a distinct discipline even today, has by no means benefited from these developments. It is still not widely taught in Anthropology Departments, and I relate that to the fact that it is not yet firmly embedded in the theoretical history of the discipline; for as Margaret Mead observed two decades ago (1975), we still find ourselves “in a discipline of words”. It goes without saying that a great majority of anthropologists in 1995 can still achieve all of their professional goals without the use of photography and generally feel no need for a sub discipline called Visual Anthropology” (Hockings, 1995 p507)

As Mead states in the opening quote of this thesis: How did it come to this?

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<sup>4</sup> In a 1994 postscript to the original edition, MacDougall rephrases this as intertextual cinema: “Today I am more inclined to see this as leading to a confusion of perspectives and a restraint on each party’s declaring its true interests. I would instead prefer a principle of multiple authorship leading to a form of intertextual cinema. Through such an approach ethnographic film may be in a better position to address conflicting views of reality, in a world in which observers and observed are less clearly separated and in which reciprocal observation and exchange increasingly matter” (MacDougall 1975 p130)



In answer it is the developing argument of this thesis that a tension exists at the heart of anthropology between the visual conceits of anthropology's textual paradigm and the inherent illusory qualities of film as a medium. Two perspectives on the potential of the photograph as a research record exemplify this. First, there is Collier's 1967 statement in his *Visual Anthropology: photography as a research method* (Collier, 1967) that: "It seems to me, the basic visual inhibitions of anthropology have discouraged the use of photography as a research tool. One anthropologist expressed to me his frustrations about photographs: 'Its not that photographs are not good. They're too good. Photographs are just more raw realism. They contain everything. We have worked out techniques for digesting verbal data, but what can we do with photographs?'" (Collier, 1967 p5) Second, there is Edwards question as to "how anthropology makes its evidence, how it arrives at its truths, how it positions its objectivity and handles its subjectivities and understands its intersubjectivities" (Edwards, forthcoming). For Edwards this is a labyrinthine and far-reaching set of interconnecting arguments. However within textual anthropology she notes that a textual over-determined, reductionist, ahistorical and reifying interpretation of vision often obscures these intricate confluences. This partially explains why given the possibilities of the medium itself anthropology still clings to written evidence over and above other possibilities "It might be expected that each branch of practitioners of anthropology would eagerly avail itself of new methods which could simplify or improve its fieldwork ... instead we are faced with the wretched picture of lost opportunities" (Hockings, 1975 p4).

This also has an historical context.

## Early anthropological vision

It is no coincidence that there is a connection between the symbolic birth of cinema and modern anthropology (Moore, 1999, Grimshaw, 2001). Both were part of the same sweeping changes in technology and culture that took place from around 1880 until the outbreak of World War I. Technological innovations in this period radically changed people's everyday relationship to time and space. According to Grimshaw and Moore these included the telephone, x-ray, cinema, bicycle, the automobile, the airplane, the train, electricity, the stream of consciousness novel, psychoanalysis, cubism, the theory of relativity, urbanization and secularization. Grimshaw in particular focuses on the specific dates of the first Lumiere screenings in 1895 and the Torres Straits Expedition of 1897, which included cine equipment and which she argues marks the emergence of modern anthropology as a twentieth century project<sup>5</sup>. Grimshaw suggests that this was an expansive and experimental period in history with innovation occurring across disciplines in which cinema, according to Moore, was "modernity's most prominent fetish" (Moore, 1999 p13). Both authors agree that this optimism and cross disciplinary potential was destroyed by The Great War where modern innovation was turned to mass slaughter:

"The Russian Revolution of 1917 is the watershed. Within less than a decade the explosion of creative energy generated by the revolution had been brutally repressed by structures of totalitarianism; the dramatic shift in power away from people and toward enhanced and expanded state bureaucracies was a more general feature of the 1920's and 1930's" (Grimshaw, 2001 p30).

Thus the emergence of anthropology should be viewed within a postwar context that included an increase in state control and a move towards specialisation. Of course only part of this process included its relationship to the mechanical and indexical nature of photographic record (film and photography) and documentary cinema. Broadly speaking as anthropologists sought legitimacy the discipline of anthropology gravitated towards academia and the educational system, a system imbued with a certain kind of state power, and arguably, restrictions<sup>6</sup>. Still the speed with which film and particularly photography were dropped from ethnographic analytical practice was still dramatic. Grimshaw argues that this was because the complexity of the truth-value of photographic evidence exaggerated the representational tensions implicit within the wider academic consolidation of the author scientist. Looking back over this history, it is

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<sup>5</sup> As well as being an expedition that was extensively documented with photography and film, Grimshaw also argues that the expedition also marked a confluence between written anthropology and emerging art forms "I want to suggest that Rivers's kinship diagram (from the Torres Strait expedition) ... be understood as the fleeting modernist moment within anthropology. For Rivers' conception of social organisation involved a radical break with existing languages of representation. Following the art critic John Berger, we might say that Rivers, like the Cubist painters, reduced the visible world to a simple abstract form (the kinship diagram) in order to construct a more complex view of reality than had previously been attempted. We may consider this new abstract form as an expression of Paul Klee's observation: Art does not render the visible, it makes visible" (Grimshaw 2001 p36/37)

<sup>6</sup> In this light the crisis in representation of the 1960/70's was not so much a rethink as a radical return to possibilities from an earlier time. Thus when contemporary authors such as Catherine Russell or Schneider & Wright draw new historical confluences into contemporary debate they can be argued to be presenting connections that were restrained (Russell, 1999. Schneider & Wright 2006).

now possible to position the pivotal monograph<sup>7</sup> in this movement as *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski 1922), which argued for “ethnographic authority” (Clifford, 1988) through the delineation of expert knowledge acquired through durational scientific field practice. As already set out in this Chapter, the tensions of this claim to authority and specialisation would eventually surface as a substantial textual revision culminating in the crisis of representation of the 1970s.

Meanwhile in visual anthropology the gradual academicising and specialisation of photographic evidence also separated the evolving discipline from documentary films even while these documentaries were often staking their own claims to truth in anthropological terms. Thus Flaherty, when asked about the ethics of cutting an igloo in half so that he might have enough light to film inside, replied that this re-enactment was a form of scientific demonstration. He refers to the subtle mediation between the camera as a witness of events and events staged for the camera that would not have existed had the camera not been present. A third subtlety is how the camera transforms events that are underway by its presence<sup>8</sup>. For example, Edwards states how Bateson and Mead in *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (Bateson and Mead, 1942) attempted to reconcile intervention and re-enactment with anthropological truth:

*“In a great many instances, we created the context in which the notes and photographs were taken for example, by paying for the dance or asking the mother to delay bathing of her child until the sun was high”*

But they stress

*“This is very different from posing photographs”.*

This interventionist creation of contexts was justified as an extension of the accepted parameters of participation, and thus disciplinary truth, in that payment was indeed the economic basis for theatricality or that the delayed bath focused a natural attention on the baby, diminishing the problematic awareness of being photographed which might destabilise the key concept of disciplinary validation – the normal and spontaneous. But at the same time Bateson and Mead locate anthropological truth in the unmediated chemical inscription on the negative. Bateson is at pains to stress that any intervention in the photographs was within “*scrupulously respected... scientific conventions*” that nothing was added to the photographs, and that any darkroom manipulation of the negative/print translation was merely “*making it possible for the paper to give a more complete rendering of what is present in the negative*” (Edwards, forthcoming)

The tension between intervention and re-enactment also existed in the growing parallel canon of documentary film, a filmic genre that would later be claimed within a history of visual anthropology even

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<sup>7</sup> The work of Malinowski has since received contemporary scrutiny: “It is important to note that it is neither functionalism nor the method of participant observation that has gained centre stage in most contemporary readings of Malinowski. Rather, it is the publication of Malinowski’s Trobriand diary and the two volumes of letters to his wife.... Malinowski was not himself immune to racism and was often prone to make, albeit in the privacy of a diary or a letter, remarks that to our own sensibilities seem exceedingly offensive” (Desai 2001 p104)

<sup>8</sup> Recent released transcripts of mobile phone calls during the Mumbai attacks between the terrorists in Mumbai and their leaders in Pakistan show that the ringleaders were very aware of the importance of creating dramatic images for the news cameras. This attack was organised in terms of creating images. Thus the ringleaders repeatedly insisted a fire be started in the Taj Hotel “to give the news cameras something to look at” (Reed, 2009). They also asked the terrorists to dictate terms to the Mumbai police using a film metaphor. “Tell them this is only the first act of this film, the main feature is still to come” (Reed 2009 30 June)

though these works were not made by anthropologists (Macdonald and Cousins, 1998, Morphy, 1997, Nichols, 1983). Influential forms included the Grierson tradition that became known for films with a direct-address authoritative style in which a male narrator laid claim to specialist knowledge and access on behalf of the audience (Aitken, 1990, Corner, 1996, Barsam, 1992). A notable example in this tradition was *Industrial Britain* (Grierson 1933), initially directed by Robert Flaherty but in which Grierson took control, shot additional material, and added the authoritative voice-over that characterises this work. This voice of authority has been criticised since the 1940's (Morris, 1987, Bruzzi, 2000, Nichols, 2002). In anthropology, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, the argument became that such claims of objective knowledge are a denial of the filmmaker's position in the history that they are depicting. That these films offer a fake omniscience and objectivity.

Actually, Grierson's films can also be argued as anthropological documents of what audiences and the commissioning agents also wanted and expected from film narrative at that time<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, working within his context of mainstream narrative appeal Grierson's first principles of documentary are both radical and sympathetic with future anthropological claims for a new and vital art form depicting the living story of real people in real places with an intimacy of knowledge:

“Cinema has a sensational capacity for enhancing the movement which tradition has formed or time worn smooth. Its arbitrary rectangle specially reveals movement; it gives it maximum pattern in space and time. Add to this that documentary can achieve an intimacy of knowledge and effect impossible to the shim-sham mechanics of the studio, and the lily-fingered interpretations of the metropolitan actor”. (Macdonald and Cousins, 1998 p97).

Meanwhile the direct address of the authoritative voiceover also set significant precedents in the hands of other filmmakers. This was exemplified in 1933 by the disturbing documentary *Las Hurdes* (Buñuel, 1933). In this film Buñuel critiques the anthropological expedition through an exaggerated narration of human misery of people indigenous to the mountainous area of La Alberca in Spain. Using authoritative narration that lures the viewer into an expectation of honesty on its behalf, Buñuel gradually escalates the fiction with more and more persecution towards the people being filmed narrated in a disinterested tone of voice. Buñuel thus affects a parody of the genre of documentary filmmaking and the authority of anthropology before these genres had barely begun in film. Thirty years later, in 1961, Guy Debord in *Critique de la séparation* (Debord, 1961) combined appropriated and original text as a voiceover to critique his perception of the conflicting relationship between film and reality. This text was constructed in such a way that the viewer would experience being lost in narrative. His goal was to have the audience experience the politics set out within the film: “The cinematic spectacle has its rules, its reliable methods for producing

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<sup>9</sup> Nichols argues that in fact Grierson did adapt, for example *Housing Problems* (Grierson, 1935) was the first film that allowed the common man to speak to the camera from inside their own homes, while two GPO films *Coal Face* (Cavalcanti, 1935) and *Night Mail* (Watt, 1936) used the poetry of W. H. Auden and the music of Benjamin Britten to combine more formal aesthetic concerns with social commentary. Grierson's protégé Humphrey Jennings would make *Listen to Britain* (Jennings 1942) a film without commentary and *Fires Were Started* (Jennings 1943) that employed a fictional narrative shot in a documentary style. But the category has stuck to Grierson, though according to Nichols the issue of omniscience is no less relevant in other films of the period where the voice of the text and the politics of the filmmaker are simply hidden behind characters as in *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942) or *Thirty seconds over Tokyo* (Curtiz, 1942)

satisfactory products. But the reality that must be taken as a point of departure is dissatisfaction. The function of the cinema, whether dramatic or documentary, is to present a false and isolated coherence as a substitute for a communication and activity that are absent. To demystify documentary cinema it is necessary to dissolve its 'subject matter'" (Debord, 1961) Thus Debord knowingly critiques the simultaneous experiment *Chronique d'un été* (Rouch and Morin, 1961) also being made in Paris at that time. However it is Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's film that who would go on to win widespread critical and popular acclaim launching cinéma vérité and changing the history and language of both documentary and anthropology.

### **Cinéma vérité**

In the 1960s documentary, anthropology and the politics of truth in representational practice (vérité) were all influentially rephrased in both cinéma vérité (cinematic truth) and the simultaneous movement of direct cinema known as observational documentary or the "fly on the wall" film. The term cinéma vérité was taken from Dziga Vertov's *Kino Pravda* (also cinema of truth in Russian), where Vertov proposed film as a means of accessing hidden truth. Such is the influence of Vertov's early cinema and writings that his ideas are now credited in many different strategies of documentary forms despite dramatic changes in technology. Lev Manovich even uses *Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929) as a guide to new media including the internet (Manovich, 2001). Yet cinéma vérité would be vilified by celebrated documentarian Errol Morris years later when he stated that "I believe that cinéma vérité set back documentary filmmaking twenty or thirty years. It sees documentary as a sub-species of journalism ... there's no reason why documentaries can't be as personal as fiction filmmaking and bear the imprint of those who made them. Truth isn't guaranteed by style or expression. It isn't guaranteed by anything" (Arthur, 1993 p127). Clearly there are a number of issues arising here.

### **The sustained influence of Dziga Vertov**

According to Grimshaw, the potential of the modernist (anthropological) vision was perhaps most fully realised in Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov's film *Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929) This film is frequently cited as Vertov's masterpiece as both the fullest expression of his manifesto and as a response to his contemporary critics across both anthropology and film studies (Hicks, 2007, Taylor and Christie, 1994). "Here in the aftermath of the Russian revolution and before the brutal suppression of its creative spirit by Stalin, Vertov linked a new way of seeing with the possibilities of a new society... It embraces the movement and complexity of modern society, offering no single privileged vantage point upon fluid contemporary realities, only a series of overlapping perspectives, shifting view-points in which seeing involves a discovery of the self as inseparable from the discover of the world. The camera eye searches, questions and interrogates" (Grimshaw, 2001 p43)

Arguably the enduring influence of this work is Vertov's call to action for cinema as a tool of social revolutionary transformation of the everyday and as the media of the future. Central to the potency of this call is the Kino Eye – the world of truth as revealed by cinema. As already discussed in this Chapter, “truth” and scientific validity are both contested politics throughout the history of visual anthropology:

“Vertov is that world's great discoverer. His work is paradoxically concrete, the original and paradigmatic instance of an attempt to film, in slow motion, that which has been, owing to the manner in which it is perceived in natural speed, not absolutely unseen but missed by sight, subject to oversight. An attempt to approach slowly and calmly that original intensity which is not given in appearance, but from which things and processes have nonetheless in turn derived. The evolution of his work renders insistently concrete, as in a series of kinetic icons, that philosophical phantasm of the reflexive consciousness: the eye seeing, apprehending itself as it constitutes the world's visibility: the eye transformed by the revolutionary project into an agent of critical production” (Michelson, 1984 pxix)

This cinematic way of seeing truth is revealed by the camera eye and by editing – particularly film montage<sup>10</sup>. Montage, defined as producing a new composite whole from fragments by the Oxford English Dictionary, involves radical juxtaposition, the violent collision of different elements in order to suggest new connections and meanings. For Vertov montage confirmed film as art capable of producing a transformation of consciousness in the viewer - a transformation that was also an ambition of early modernist anthropology:

“Kino-Eye means the conquest of space, the visual linkage of people throughout the entire world based on the continuous exchange of visible fact, of film documents as opposed to the exchange of cinematic or theatrical presentations.

Kino-Eye means conquest of time (the visual linkage of phenomena separated by in time). Kino-Eye is the possibility of seeing life processes in any temporal order or at any speed, inaccessible to the human eye.

Kino-Eye makes use of every possible kind of shooting technique: acceleration, microscopy, reverse action, animation, camera movement, the use of the most unexpected foreshortenings – all these we consider to be not trick effects, but normal methods to be fully used.

Kino-Eye uses every possible means in montage, comparing and linking all points of the universe in any temporal order, breaking, when necessary, all the laws and conventions of film construction.

Kino-Eye plunges into the seeming chaos of life to find in life itself the response to an assigned theme. To find the resultant force amongst the million phenomena related to the given theme. To edit: to wrest, through the camera, whatever is most typical, most useful, from life; to organize the film pieces wrested from life into a meaningful rhythmic visual order, a meaningful visual phrase, an essence of “I see” (Michelson, 1984 pxxvi)

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<sup>10</sup> The first example of cinematic montage actually predates to the Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov but it is Vertov and Eisenstein (Eisenstein, 1924) whose more famous films theorised and popularised the principle.

Vertov's films seek to satisfy this ambition. In *Man with a Movie Camera* the camera is as evident to the viewer and as important as the hero (the cameraman). Montage is used as an editing technique to dramatise situations or objects that never existed in reality. The cameraman is mobile and the filmmaker climbs cranes, factory chimneys and films whilst driving a motorcycle and whilst lying down in a busy street reinforcing the idea that the camera can be anywhere. In some scenes the scale of objects are distorted and superimposed. A camera is animated as if able to walk on its own. The film audience is witnessed watching the finished film. Together these apparently endless techniques seem to propose cinema's new way of speaking without trying to resolve the language. Instead the invigoration of the everyday world raises the question: whose vision is this? And what could vision be?

As already stated, anthropologist Jean Rouch, the main proponent of *cinéma vérité*, frequently cites the importance of Vertov for anthropology. Indeed Rouch claimed his dream for anthropological film is to have "the sensitive camera of Flaherty armed with the mechanical eye and ear of Vertov" (Feld, 2003 p161). The crucial film in *cinéma vérité* development was *Chronique d'un été* (Rouch and Morin, 1961). This is a film that takes as its subject the intrinsic difficulties of observation including the representational issues debated earlier in this Chapter. Like *Man with a Movie Camera* the filmmakers in *Chronique d'un été* are visible. Like *Man with a Movie Camera* the people studied in the film are indigenous to the country of the filmmaker. And through technological improvements in camera and sound portability *cinéma vérité* also took a sync sound camera to the streets as if it too could go anywhere. This portability in and of itself seemed to erect around it a philosophy of documentary purity and intimacy that simultaneously led to cinema direct where the filmmakers kept interference with the subjects that they followed to an absolute minimum. The most influential films and filmmakers in the cinema direct genre were not made by anthropologists (though anthropologists would later claim them as ancestors) and included the documentaries *High School* (Wiseman, 1968), *Primary* (Drew, 1960), *Don't Look Back* (Pennebaker, 1967), and *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (Leacock, 1963). In these films the commentary is limited; there are no interviews, camera takes were often left long in the edit and jump cuts were not hidden. These films stylistically profess moral neutrality. This was not the case with *Chronique d'un été*, where Rouch and Morin discuss the moral fiber of the film they are making as they make it. These include inviting participants to comment on a rough cut of the film, the interrogation of their own interview strategies and the clear signposting of their fictional re-enactments. These strategies served to remind an audience of the constructive and interpretive nature of images and thus, in very different ways, both cinema direct and *cinéma vérité* argue that they are addressing a particular sort of truth conveying the feeling that here was the validity of the documentary idea.

## Power, control and authority

Even while the clear foregrounding and public debate of truth in direct cinema and cinéma vérité was developing, wider debates in textual anthropology began to increasingly complicate the asymmetries of power, processes of stereotyping, objectification and appropriation. The result was a new critical reflexivity and multi-vocality. As already noted, the raw realism of pictorial evidence was never an innocent authorship but the idea that authority is built into the apparatus, the systems of production and the viewing conditions of the final film began to take on new resonance with the work of post colonialists Fabian, Gupta and Ferguson and Bhabha amongst others (Fabian, 2002, Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, Bhabha, 1994). The politics of the apparatus will be analysed in depth later in this Chapter in the context of structural film, but this critique is also the subtle reading of Error Morris's aforementioned objection to cinéma vérité. Morris is suggesting that cinéma vérité is problematic because in essence it maintains an anthropological paradigm centred around 'truth' even while it is critiquing this term. The audience is still invested in considering material as evidence. In direct cinema this is even more so. The impression in direct cinema is that the audience is witnessing an event as it happened but these theorists began to contend that these methods are themselves culturally embedded in their own context. This includes the expectations of the audience viewing the work. This was a debate that also took place in anthropological writing (Marcus, 1999, Crapanzano, 1977, Geertz, 1973, Rabinow, 1977) as anthropology shifted its visual register to include approaching western culture as a culture of imaging of others and themselves. The boundaries between field anthropology, photography and the construction of its object become even more multilayered, complex and abstract.

Reflexive cinema is one term that has been used to group films that foreground this idea. A reflexive mode is one that demonstrates a conscious process of reading film, engaging the audience in issues of realism and representation often with multiple filmic structures. Examples of reflexive anthropological work include *Through Navajo Eyes* (Worth and Adair, 1972), which allowed Navajo people to make their own films in an attempt to qualify different ways of seeing and ordering visual space; *To Live with Herds* (MacDougall and MacDougall, 1969), in which the filmmakers incorporate field notes and journals into the film through personal voiceover; and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (Minh-ha, 1989), a personal documentary using dance, printed texts, folk poetry and the words and experiences of Vietnamese women that has been argued as "anthropological" by Russell in her book on *Experimental Ethnography* (Russell, 1999). Indeed it is this term experimental ethnography that is used in my research question marking my intention to embrace an expansionist version of anthropology and film that references the history of the avant-garde works. As Russell states:

"Ethnographic film is in constant danger of becoming art. But what happens when we claim it as an art? What kind of art is it? It has always been an aesthetic practice, drawing from a wide range of formal devices to structure its treatment of culture . . . Ethnography may even be considered an experimental practice in which aesthetics and cultural theory are combined in a constantly evolving formal combination" (Russell, 1999 p14)



This is reinforced by Ravetz who states: “anthropologists can go much further in their explorations of visual and sense-based ways of knowing. Critical is the forging of collaborative work across existing boundaries of visual practice. The ethnographic turn in contemporary art now offers a space for engagement that reaches beyond an anthropology of art. Indeed it makes possible the art of anthropology” (Grimshaw, 2005 p27). This art of anthropology is also a contested space as it implicitly raises the issue of where the anthropology is situated in an artwork and where the artwork is situated in anthropology, including whether these can be separated. Recently, authors such as Jay Ruby (Ruby, 2000) have tried to argue that the visual in anthropology limit itself to films in which academic disciplinary pressures are exercised, but authors such as Schneider and Wright (Schneider and Wright, 2006); Russell (Russell, 1999); and MacDougall (MacDougall, 2005) continue to argue that the visual in anthropology overlap and claim confluence with films acknowledged in other disciplines including art. But as noted already in this Chapter, this has never been a simple differentiation. The complexity in this is evident in the writing of Jay Ruby. On one hand, in his essay *An anthropological critique of the films of Robert Gardner* (Ruby, 1991) Ruby sets out clear criteria that the ethnographic integrity of a work should be determined by anthropology and not the aesthetics of film:

“Ethnographic films should be judged according to the following values: Is the film the result of ethnographic research? Is the person who conducted the fieldwork in a position of authority in the production? Are the decisions as to the shape of the film determined by the results of the research and not the current fad in film form? Does the film successfully address itself to anthropological concerns or not? ... Minimal methodological standards to be met if one is to call a film ethnographic – are that an ethnographer must make it, or at least be closely associated with its making” (Ruby, 1991 p4)

These criteria, if enforced, would again differentiate between documentary films and anthropological films by removing many documentary films that other authors now claim as masterpieces in the history of anthropology (Ravetz, 2005, Nichols, 2002, MacDougall, 2005, Moore, 1999, Pink, 2005), including the aforementioned *Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929); *High School* (Wiseman, 1968); and *Listen to Britain* (Jennings, 1942). It would also, as Ruby set out to do, exclude more recent anthropological work, including the later films of Robert Gardner who is considered by many authors to be one of the most important anthropological filmmakers (Ostor, 2001, Deger, 2009, Barbash, 2007). As Ruby states, “Whether or not a film is an artistic achievement is as irrelevant to social scientific goals as whether or not anthropological writings are literary achievements” (Ruby, 1991 pg4). For many authors this is a provocation at odds with an anthropological reading of ethnographic films including Gardner’s work. As already pointed out in this Chapter, this is the claim that what constitutes anthropological knowledge is also evident in the film experience as a perceptual experience. Paul Henley situates this divide as the gap between those that take Gardner’s images at face value as descriptive registrations of the world, and those that read them as signifiers of some more transcendent meaning (Henley 2007 p36). Ravetz argues against splitting the currents between the imagination (experience) and the social (representation) (Ravetz and Grimshaw 2005) and indeed Ruby, reflecting the complex challenges of authorship in visual anthropology, also champions reflexive forms of filmmaking even though he is aware these have a long history as a

mainstay of art practice. “Documentary filmmakers have an obligation to not be objective. The concept of objectivity, inappropriately borrowed from the natural sciences, has little support from social sciences: both social sciences and documentary filmmakers are interpreters of the world... To present ourselves and our products as anything else is to foster a dangerous false consciousness on the part of our audiences” (Ruby 1988 p75).

At the other extreme filmmakers and artists continue to make visual work that they claim as anthropological and that further obscure the boundaries of what this might mean (Foster, 1996, Buchel, 2005, Black Audio Film Collective, 1985, Breakwell, 1975, Buckingham, 1996, Lockhart, 1999, Giankian, 1987, Association, 1996, Stoller, 1989, Marks, 2000, Russell, 1999, Nagoris, 2008, Calle, 1986, Akerman, 1993). At the time of writing, Bourriaud’s *Altermodern* is the most recent manifestation of this relationship between Anthropology and Art in an exhibition held at the Tate Britain in 2009. Indeed Bourriaud’s description of the contemporary artist could substitute as a description of the anthropologist “We are entering the era of universal subtitling, of generalised dubbing. Today's art explores the bonds that text and image weave between themselves. Artists traverse a cultural landscape saturated with signs, creating new pathways between multiple formats of expression and communication. The artist becomes 'homo viator', the prototype of the contemporary traveller whose passage through signs and formats refers to a contemporary experience of mobility, travel and transpassing. This evolution can be seen in the way works are made: a new type of form is appearing, the journey-form, made of lines drawn both in space and time, materialising trajectories rather than destinations. The form of the work expresses a course, a wandering, rather than a fixed space-time” (Bourriaud 2009 p1).

Given the recent dynamic evolution of visual anthropology as an academic discipline, one starts to wonder where these complex confluences are headed? Altermodern art, for example, claims to be a hypertext where artists translate and transcode information from one format to another, and wander in geography as well as in history. If this idea of anthropology is being claimed as art from within art, what is the future direction of visual anthropology from within academia?

The following Chapters address this issue from within anthropology by asking what is at stake when experimental ethnography and structural film are combined? This confluence is set in motion through the writings of three contemporary anthropologists that directly address the future of anthropology and film. Each of these authors interrogates the developing status of the image in anthropology that came out of the crisis in representation and which now inform future analysis. I am going to use these as a prism through which to explore key strands in the confluence of experimental ethnography and structural film that are central to my analysis and practice-based work. Anna Grimshaw repositions vision at the centre of the development of anthropology (Grimshaw, 2001). George Marcus proposes six cinematic strategies to be used to expand the language of anthropological text making (Taylor, 1994), and Marc Augé warns of a global crisis predicated by a present day confusion over reality and image. (Augé, 1999). Each author proposes a different connection between anthropology as a visual medium and anthropology as a written

discipline, and each of the arguments are used here to start to test anthropology's confluence with different claims made on behalf of structural film ahead of this term being analysed in depth. Thus Grimshaw, Marcus and Augé are intertwined with Structural Film Theorists, Le Grice, Conrad and Sitney (Le Grice, 2001, Conrad, 2004, Sitney, 1974) amongst others.

In order to fully substantiate and explore the terms and conditions set out by these authors, this thesis not only takes experiments in ethnography as a subject, it also considers the thesis as a form of its subject. This is the placement of equal emphasis on both the process of construction of the fields of representation and the results of these forms of representation. In the writing that follows I have articulated this using shifting tones of reflexivity and authoritative styles as strategies already cited in the broad history of visual anthropology outlined. These styles are also articulated in the practice based work submitted as part of this thesis, the installation *The Autonomous Object?* and the film *The Exception and the Rule*. The intent here is to interrogate my own practice by asking the question as to how anthropological knowledge is constituted in my own work? Thus from this point forward extracts from newspapers from my field sites in Mumbai and Karachi are juxtaposed with developing arguments about the status of the image in anthropology and structural film.

## Chapter 2

### *The Ethnographer's Eye (Grimshaw, 2001)*

“We are now used to the fact that, wherever there is an act of terrorism, a finger is pointed at us. There is a well-rooted, well-planned policy and reason behind this. The western world has been unable to swallow the bitter pill of Pakistan being a nuclear and missile power. They will keep on harping on this issue with the sole aim of disarming us. It is a pity we could not produce nuclear-power plants to divert their attention. We should have produced at least 10 plants by now, but inefficiency and flawed planning brought us to a situation where load shedding has almost destroyed our industrial capacity. To achieve anything, one has to work hard and with sincerity. In Surah-e-Anfal, Ayat 53, the Almighty clearly ordained that “He never changes the fate of a nation until it changed it itself” (Khan 2008).

“Over the last decade anthropology has been much discussed as a particular kind of literary endeavour. What happens if we imagine it differently – as a form of art or cinema? Such a proposal may seem fanciful, perverse even, though it is not without its precedents. By suggesting that we ‘see’ anthropology as a project of the visual imagination, rather than ‘read’ it as a particular kind of literature, I believe that we can discover contrasting ways of seeing and knowing within the early modern project... In looking both ways at once, so to speak, I attempt to develop a way of seeing cinema, *anthropologically*, and a way of seeing anthropology, *cinematically*”. (Grimshaw, 2001 p9)

In Pakistan I organised a talk by the eminent Architect and activist Arif Hasan on the Evolution of Karachi within the context *The Architecture of Destruction*. Hasan Ji began his seminar with Karachi as a fishing village, “Pre British Karachi”. He then went on to cite names that Karachi has had over the years, the geographical significance of the port, the important events, wars, demographic and developments of the city since 1750 leading up to Partition and the catalogue of master plans for the development of Karachi by different governments that failed to be implemented or failed in their implementation. Each master plan was a different visionary experience of the city, a metaphysical construct of a new system of operation and a schema for its application. As new plans superseded the last so they reflected the changes in context, pragmatics and ideological vision as the nature of each task at hand also changed. Meanwhile Karachi continued to grow in size and scope with order and disorder, forced migrations, land grabbing, illegal settlements, disputed property and high boundary walls protecting the elite spaces. The resulting traffic bottleneck caused by the plans implemented in 1975 seem insurmountable, now including the noise pollution and air pollution that have resulted. The newest vision for Karachi is the Karachi waterfront, a major development that mimics the newest constructions in Dubai.

Later I visited the Blind School *Ida Riu* to talk to the pupils about making a radio programme about how they negotiate Karachi through sound. In a city with no detailed maps I had been given directions through visual landmarks, some of which no longer existed. At the Blind School they told me that they orientate themselves by filtering out sounds, listening for the sounds that are in the same places daily. For them the most disturbing sound in the city is silence - a sure sign that there is trouble on the streets and that people have retreated home. The sounds that are repetitive and constant are the ones that stand out for the pupils, these are the equivalent of my visual landmarks and are mostly sounds that to me were missed until I stopped to listen.

This experience of Karachi mapped in two different forms are two ‘ways of seeing’ that are also evident in the experimental method of writing in *The Ethnographer’s Eye* (Grimshaw, 2001). In this book Grimshaw splits her book into two halves with contrasting cinematic principles ascribed to a literary style. In the first half of the book she describes her approach as unashamedly speculative. It is inspired by a modernist vision. “Taking up Marcus’s challenge<sup>11</sup> I use montage to disrupt the conventional categories by which anthropology has come to be defined and confined ... It enables me to explore a series of imaginative connections and offers new perspectives on the history of twentieth century anthropology, I use vision here to illuminate the past, suggesting rather than arguing for the recognition that contrasting interpretations of the anthropological task comprise the modern discipline” (Grimshaw, 2001 p11).

In the second half of her book Grimshaw employs “the cinematic opposite of montage” – the *mise-en-scène*. In this way she is able to move from the panorama/scope to close-up/detail. The case study or *mise-en-scène* “foregrounds relationships within a particular camera frame ... the motif of ‘continuous space’ is suggestive of a different kind of interpretative approach, one which validates context or ‘situated knowledge” (Grimshaw, 2001 p12).

These two forms of cinematic structure replicate the mapping of Karachi presented in the first instance by Hasan Ji whose rendition of the multiple plans, interpretations and constructions of Karachi can be viewed as ‘montage’, both in the progress of Karachi’s city plans and in the way that people daily encounter radical and unfolding juxtaposition dramatically escalated by Partition. This is in stark contrast to the way the *Ida Riu* pupils negotiate the city with their caution, knowledge and skill. Moving around the city by listening deeply for its repetitive sounds is a *mise-en-scène* of situated knowledge. This is a sensory immersion also in keeping with contemporary sensory scholarship discussed later in this Chapter (Stoller, 1989, Stoller, 1997, Seremetakis, 1992, Pink, 2005, Marcus, 2007, MacDougall, 2005, Howes, 2003, Howes, 2005). Both are valid lived experiences of Karachi, and there are many more.

These multilayered experiences of vision and knowledge are the critical focus of Grimshaw’s text; they underpin the fundamental point of her book that: “What we see is inseparable from how we see” (Grimshaw, 2001 p11), a concept at the heart of structural film and of anthropology. It is Grimshaw’s contention that an ocular centric bias exists at the heart of anthropology. “Vision, the noblest of the senses, has been traditionally accorded a privileged status as a source of knowledge about the world. It was encapsulated in the commitment of modern ethnographers to go see for themselves. For in rejecting hearsay, the reliance on reports from untrained observers, the fieldworkers of the early twentieth century reaffirmed the association of vision and knowledge, enshrining it at the heart of a new ethnographic project” (Grimshaw, 2001 p7). Thus Grimshaw argues that from this point forward the history of anthropology is characterised by its different ways of seeing “built upon the acknowledgement that vision operates in two distinctive, but interconnected ways. First of all vision functions as a methodological

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<sup>11</sup> Discussed later in this Chapter.

strategy, a technique, within modern ethnographic practice. Secondly vision functions as a metaphor for knowledge, for particular ways of knowing the world” (Grimshaw, 2001 p7). This is of particular relevance to structural film, though structural filmmakers might balk at the idea of “metaphor”, it can be argued that structural film is a way of knowing the world that places emphasis on vision as a methodological strategy. Thus when Grimshaw conflates the birth of modern anthropology alongside the birth of film, she implicitly includes structural film within this context thanks to structural films own modernist sensibilities. In the same way when Grimshaw argues that Cezanne, Vertov, the Torres Strait Expedition, Picasso and Braque fall within one way of seeing, it can also be argued that structural films such as *Academic Still Life (Cezanne)* (Le Grice, 1976) or *Angles of Incidence* (Raban, 1973) are in this same trajectory because these works knowingly combine cubist painting, film and heightened vision.

Grimshaw’s proposal of Anthropology as a ‘way of seeing’ radically opens up the idea of how knowledge, technique and form are currently being constituted today. It is the developing argument of her book that different ways of seeing have evolved in anthropology exemplified by Rivers, Flaherty, Malinowski, Grierson, Radcliffe Brown, Rouch, David and Judith MacDougall and Llewelyn-Davies. At the same time, the acknowledgment of vision at the heart of anthropology opens up the possibility of a renewed future dynamic for visual anthropology as a discipline that would include structural film. “The potential of a new visual anthropology lies not merely in the recognition of what is different in pursuing questions of ethnographic knowledge and understanding through an interrogation of vision. It depends, too, on the reflexive use of such insights to expose critically other ways that we, as anthropologists engage in the world” (Grimshaw, 2001 p173). As she states: “My interest is in trying to try and reach an understanding of the spirit of the work under consideration rather than to attempt a detailed textual exegesis. I am interested in the dynamic relationship between vision as technique and as metaphysic. Vision, as understood to mean forms of knowledge or the metaphysics underpinning any anthropological project influences how vision is used as a particular methodological strategy (every mythology is transmuted through the alchemy of the particular artists and by the materials and techniques of the particular art form) But equally the techniques explored in the exploration of the world shape the metaphysic by which the ethnographer interprets the world” (Grimshaw, 2001 p8).

Here again this approach to both the technique and metaphysic of vision is in keeping with the theoretical claims of structural film. Just as anthropology, these claims are contested, but the most infamous definition of structural film by Sitney does foreground method, metaphor and the unconscious mind. This definition is analysed in depth later in this Chapter, but it is interesting at this stage to consider some of Sitney’s language in light of Grimshaw’s analysis of vision<sup>12</sup>. Sitney describes structural film as apperceptive, a

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<sup>12</sup> In the last pages of her book Grimshaw writes that *The Ethnographers Eye* is conceived as a future manifesto. This is announced in the epilogue rather than being presented up front. Grimshaw cites the pervading academic pressure for bureaucratic conformity that led to this decision: “The growing puritanism of academic life, accompanied by the narrow specialisation and reification of archaic literary forms, runs counter to the open, eclectic spirit which marked an earlier anthropology” (Grimshaw 2001 p173) Thus her decision to build an argument towards her manifesto reflects her perceived need to substantiate her practice before declaring the fullest ambition of her theory. Here, in the face of academic constraint, there lies a further possibility for anthropologists, as one of the claims made in later definitions of structural is that structural films themselves may be experienced as theory.

cinema of the mind rather than the eye that passes through vision to the unconscious. He traces this genre of filmmaking back to the influence of Warhol where duration was first used as a way of making the film try to outlast a viewer's initial state of perception. In describing the structural film *Back and Forth* (Snow, 1969) Sitney suggests "the metaphor of the camera movement as an imitation of consciousness" (Sitney, 1979 p381)<sup>13</sup>. That "the nearly mechanical scanning movement of *Back and Forth* takes a module of human perception and moves it in the direction of physical law, which denies to the human events it scans the internal cohesion of narrative, so that they in turn withhold from the camera the privilege of a fictive or transcendental perspective. Thus the filmmaker compares the manifold to physics, or he can say, "You aren't within it; it isn't within you, you're beside it" (Sitney, 1979 p381)

### ***The cinematic metaphor of montage (Marcus, 1994)***

"As they approached Mumbai by boat, the terrorists "steered the vessel using GPS equipment," according to the Daily Mail. A satellite phone was later found aboard. Once the coordinated attacks began, the terrorists were on their cell phones constantly. They used BlackBerries "to monitor international reaction to the atrocities, and to check on the police response via the internet," the Courier Mail reports. The gunmen were able to trawl the internet for information after cable television feeds to the two luxury hotels and office block were cut by the authorities. The men looked beyond the instant updates of the Indian media to find worldwide reaction to the events in Mumbai, and to keep abreast of the movements of the soldiers sent to stop them. Outside of Leopold's Cafe, "one of the gunmen seemed to be talking on a mobile phone even as he used his other hand to fire off rounds," an eyewitness told The New York Times. The terror group then took credit for the bloodshed with a series of e-mails to local media. They used a "remailer" service to mask their identities". (Shachtman, December 01, 2008)

"Far from being exhausted, as appears to be the case for contemporary artists and aesthetic theorists, modernist techniques of representation, in the ways that they problematically construct "the real", seem fresh and compelling in a discipline like anthropology, with the act of realist description at its core. While postmodernism may be a proper subject of anthropological (or sociological) study as an techno-aesthetic movement in society, anthropology itself as a practice is merely becoming modernist in the classic literary sense" (Marcus, 1994 p42)

We turn to *The Modernist sensibility in recent ethnographic writing and the cinematic metaphor of montage* (Marcus, 1994), which is the second of my anthropological texts for analysis. The idea of how knowledge is constituted and transferred has been a debate championed by Marcus and others since the mid 1980s (Marcus, 1986, Marcus and Clifford, 1986, Clifford, 1980, Crapanzano, 1987, Eco, 1989) Contemporary anthropologists including Marcus now widely acknowledge that they are studying people who are as embedded in modernity as the fieldworker. That anthropologists face the problem of explaining how cultural identity is constituted among people who are hyperaware of their own history and situation in a world system. This is how the modernist perspective works. The writer shares conditions of modernity, and at least some identities with his or her subjects dramatically presented in the article above about the

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<sup>13</sup> I am citing here from the expanded second edition of this book, Sitney's characteristics of structural film were first published in 1974.

Mumbai attacks. But this essay by Marcus is of particular significance to visual anthropology because Marcus lays out six strategies for how cinematic structures could be used for establishing the analytic presence of the ethnographer in his or her text:

Problematizing the spatial

Problematizing the temporal

Perspective and Voice

The appropriation of concepts and narrative devices

Bifocality

The contemplation of alternative possibilities

It is Marcus's contention that the articulation of these categories is more easily achieved in a cinematic medium than in a written one because these characteristics are essentially cinematic narrative techniques. In other words, text making in the face of the complex realities of late modernity and modernism is what the ethnographic writer and the filmmaker have in common. By inference this also extends to the anthropological subject<sup>14</sup>. These structures are significant precisely because Marcus only cites one example to substantiate his argument – the use of montage as a form of spatial simultaneity. Otherwise his strategies are phrased as an invitation to writers and filmmakers to interpret his structure as taken up by Grimshaw in *The Ethnographers Eye*.

#### **[i and ii] Problematizing the spatial and the temporal:**

Marcus suggests that the contemporary deterritorialization of culture emphasises the need for simultaneity in ethnographic representation. Cinematic simultaneity he suggests as the cinematic principle of montage exemplified in the work of Vertov and his contemporaries Eisenstein and Pudovkin (Christie, 1994, Eisenstein, 1949, Eisenstein, 1924, Pudovkin, 1927, Pudovkin, 1928, Vertov, 1929, Vertov, 1931, Michelson, 1984, Hicks, 2007).

For Marcus montage in cinema has the potential to depict the complexity of cultural movements that now cross physical and mental borders. As discussed earlier in this Chapter, montage facilitates the creation of a new composite whole through the juxtaposition of different fragments in order to suggest new connections and meaning. Thus in montage there is simultaneity not only in an image, but also between images. This is exemplified in the work submitted as part of this thesis *The Exception and the Rule*, where locations in Mumbai and Karachi are intertwined and set against a narration which foregrounds Partition as a logistical boundary. But montage could of course be used in any number of ways from its formal exploration of scale, volume, rhythm and motion to more conceptual values, such as class, privacy, commerce, religion and technology. Montage also draws to written anthropology the potential in those structural films that montage

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<sup>14</sup> An argument I will pick up later with Augé, M. (1999) *The War of Dreams: Studies in Ethno Fiction*, Pluto Press, London.



text or that can be read as text. Thus some structural films have approached viewing as an act of reading, literally as in *Zorns Lemma* (Frampton, 1970), where the alphabet is used as a mathematical image logic; in *Upside Down Feature* (Gidal, 1972), where words superimposed over image claim to function as two simultaneous forms of language; in *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (Landow, 1971), where textual puns play with the viewer's awareness that the image is a film image rather than reality; and in *So Is This* (Snow, 1982), where the text on screen makes reference to itself as an image in a parody of script writing and narration.

Also embedded in the potential of simultaneity is Marcus's next structure that asks whether ethnography can release itself from its explanatory attachment to the fully articulated argument as a narrative device. In this he is highlighting that the narrative form of anthropological discourse should reflect its study of emerging discourses in development. His concern about the widespread application of meta-narrative as a dominant academic style is supported by Davies's research on how news becomes news?<sup>15</sup> Davis suggests that in journalism this type of narrativity is a dangerous form of manipulation and fiction:

“[Contemporary] Journalism is organised to collect innumerable nuggets of self-contained fact, to report an atomised world of a million tiny tales’. These tales now are not merely atomised but, more than ever, they are internally constructed in order to sell. The failure to provide context has multiplied and divided into a preference for human interest over issue; for the current over the historic, for simplicity rather than complexity; for certainty rather than doubt. This applies in both print and broadcast, generating patterns of distortion so consistent as to amount to a bias against truth” (Davies, 2008 p139).

In these different contexts Davies and Marcus are pointing out that processes of self-contained fact tend to confirm popular consensus that also slip easily into the framework of popular assumption. The dangers of this artifice of popular assumption are argued in relation to Marc Augé later in this Chapter, but Marcus's distrust of this narrative form is also a reprise of the tension created in trying to separate the image as evidence from the image as art discussed earlier in this thesis. Could an academic thesis still be academically valid, for instance, without a conclusion? By inviting cinematic structures into this debate, Marcus significantly opens anthropological discourse to the history of avant-garde film, where there is no pressure to exert an ontological claim to the 'real'. In art films per se it is a familiar trope to present the complexity of discourse in development without resolve. But if this is the future of anthropology then the formal boundaries of ethnographic film form suddenly look porous. In this context structural film would simply be one in a long list of experimental forms that could have anthropological application. These boundaries are further complicated by the fact that structural film, like anthropology, is not a closed system:

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<sup>15</sup> In 'Flat Earth News' amongst other observations Davies concludes: "a few original producers of content provide the lion's share of the international news for those aggregators, despite the audacious pretence of source diversity". His argument is that all news is artifice, and that the great myth of news journalism is 'objectivity'. What the system promotes instead is churnalism where once active news-gatherers have been promoted into passive processors of material. "This is world news. What has been created is a vortex of concentric forces, reducing reality to a small cluster of reports, flowing through a handful of monopoly providers, who, in turn, channel each other's stories into their own streams. Frequently unchecked, commonly created by PR, this consensus account of stories, inherently unreliable in its reporting, daily generating the mass production of ignorance" (Davies, 2008 p108)

“These (structural) films had no fictional narrative content; they seem to leap over the history of film, and back to the experiments of Demeny, Muybridge and Lumiere. Here a line of descent is traced from the earliest cinema, with narrative as a grand detour. Bypassing the industrial norms of production and division of labour, the primitive or artisanal mode also led to expanded cinema. Le Grice’s *Horror Film* (Le Grice, 1970) is a ‘live shadow performance’ in which a naked figure in front of the screen plays with coloured light. In Guy Sherwin’s *Man with Mirror* (Sherwin, 1976), live action duplicates multi-screen illusion, while in Annabel Nicolson’s *Reel Time* (Nicolson, 1973) a projected loop film of the filmmaker at a sewing machine is slowly destroyed by passing the film through an actual sewing-machine and re-projecting it. The film alludes neatly to technology from which the film claw was derived. All of these films wittily expand film (affixed medium) into the realms of chance; they underline transience and challenge the illusion that ‘real time’ is ever suspended in the act of viewing” (Rees 1999 p81)

Marcus’s invitation to depict emerging discourses in development is taken up in *The Exception and the Rule*, which concludes its narrative voice with the sonic recycling of the sentence *Images I wish I had filmed but couldn’t*. This is discussed in Chapter 4.

**[iii and iv] Problematizing perspective / voice and the dialogic appropriation of concepts and narrative devices:**

Marcus argues that anthropology should be open to the registering of indigenous voices without pre-empting how these voices might be located in terms of the conventional correlates by which structure is constituted in realist descriptions. These include notions of class, gender and hierarchy. He then goes on to suggest that this is also the reshaping of the authority of narrative including how other discursive frameworks are included in anthropology’s framework.

As discussed above, the issue of what terms to use and how to represent the indigenous voice has been debated since the birth of written and visual anthropology. As already noted Jean Rouch discusses the film being made with the subjects of the film as the film soundtrack (Feld, 1989). Sol Worth and John Adair trained Navajo people in the use of the camera mechanics allowing them to control the discursive framework (Worth and Adair, 1972), and Buñuel so discarded the other’s discursive framework in the narrative of *Land without Bread* (Buñuel, 1932) as to make the viewer fully aware of its importance by its qualified absence. These examples are all cited by Catherine Russell as examples of experimental ethnography. Thus one way of addressing Marcus’s issues is to follow Russell’s argument that the avant-garde challenge the structures of realist description while anthropology challenges the social theory, cultural investment and political positioning of the filmmaker. As Russell states: “a subversive ethnography is a mode of practice that challenges the various structures of racism, sexism and imperialism that are inscribed implicitly and explicitly in so many forms of cultural representation (Russell, 1999 pxii). This structure includes the conditions of authority and historical determinants built into the production of the image by the film apparatus itself, as argued by structural filmmaker Malcolm Le Grice. For Le Grice the filmmaking apparatus is no more neutral than it is possible to make a neutral image (Le Grice, 1997). This is well known in anthropology and it echoes Grimshaw that ‘seeing’ is inscribed, limited and mediated.

However, the equation set out by Russell could also be reversed so that it is anthropology that challenges the structures of realist description while the avant-garde challenges the social theory, cultural investment and positioning of the filmmaker. This possibility is currently proving potent in “the sensory turn” in anthropology that moves against the historical ocular centrism of anthropology to realist descriptions that include other senses than sight. In these studies the key issue is the manner in which people experience and understand the world through sensory-perceptual dispositions. Thus the sensory turn, influenced by the work of Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, Merleau-Ponty, 2004) recognises the fieldworker as a person and that the study of the senses is at once a process of being inside and outside of an experience, a gap replayed in how this act is communicated afterwards. Thus Seremetakis states: “The senses are the switching place where the structure of experience and the structure of knowledge converge and cross” (Seremetakis, 1992 p2).

This has led to current work where, for instance, Feld and Basso have studied the relation of sense to place (Feld and Basso, 1996). Howes has sought to place sensory experience at the forefront of cultural analysis (Howes, 2003, Howes, 2005), and Tilley has sought to link phenomenology with landscape (Tilley, 1994). Paul Stoller believes that “taste, smell and hearing are often more important to the Songhay than sight” (Stoller, 1989 p5). While in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* Laura U Marks studies strategies that have been used to extract memory from the limitations of the audiovisual image. These include memories of touch, smell and taste that oscillate between the image proper and the body: “For intercultural artists it is most valuable to think of the skin of the film not as a screen but as a membrane that brings its audience into contact with the material forms of memory”. (Marks, 2000 p243). This resonates with Tilley’s architectural précis of perception that stands as a sensorial confluence between structural film and haptic cinema:

“It is about the relationship between Being and Being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-world resides in a process of objectification in which people objectify the world by setting themselves apart from it. This results in the creation of a gap, a distance in space. To be human is both to create this distance between the self and that which is beyond and to attempt to bridge this distance through a variety of means – through perception (seeing, hearing, touching) bodily actions and movements, and intentionality, emotion and awareness in systems of belief and decision making, remembrance and evaluation” (Tilley, 1994 p12)

This mixture of a process of objectification, the distance between the self and what is beyond the self, and the physical experiencing and mediating of media [seeing, hearing, touching] also resonates in structural film claims about the discourse created between the filmmaker and the spectator in structural works. The experience of a structural film is a process of bridging the gap between objectification and the self by both the filmmaker and the audience albeit in slightly different ways. This gap will be analysed in more detail in the different definitions of structural film that come later in this Chapter, but the claims made on behalf of structural films can be argued in this context as evidenced by structural filmmaker Le Grice:

“My current concerns might be described as: first, identifying (through a cinematic practice) the conditions which the apparatus and available conceptions of film structure tend to produce; second, attempting to dislodge them by making them problematic rather than exploit them towards the end of aesthetic expression; and third, to raise the issue of the relationship of the cinematic work to reality... The questions then, of the choice of cinematic content, become primarily not what subjects are appropriate to the nature of film? But, in what arena is it possible for film to make a transformational mediation? This arena is not fixed, but develops in relationship to the forms of film and the institution of cinema. The issue of cinematic reality becomes neither simply the adequacy or truth of representational relations, nor the unconditional assertion of the physical presence of the cinematic experience, but the appropriation of the cinematic experience and mediating construction by spectators within their subsequent material realisation (their reality). (Le Grice, 2001 p196)

#### **[v and vi] Bifocality and critical juxtapositions and contemplation of alternative possibilities:**

‘Bifocality’ is the working against an ‘Us-them’ exoticism. These are the connections that allow the construction of difference in full recognition of the already constituted relationship between observers and observed. Marcus then goes on to state his final structure that the function of modernist ethnography is primarily one of cultural critique not only of one’s disciplinary apparatus, but also of conditions within the site of ethnographic focus itself – the local world that it treats. This involves critical thought experiments whereby the ethnographer poses possibilities – the roads not taken, repressed possibilities documentable on the margins of culture studied – to those that seem to be dominant, and explores their implications in dialogue with one’s subjects.

In Chapter 3 it will be contended that constructing difference and sameness is the fundamental problematic in the practice-based research part of this thesis. But this cycle is evident in many other places and levels of society. One example in Algeria and France has Islamic fundamentalists and the French ministry in accordance. Islamic fundamentalist groups are referring to satellite dishes *antennes paraboliques* in French as *antennes para’dia’boliques* (or devils dishes) because these dishes allow their compatriots to view the outside world. While in some areas of France the same satellite dishes have become the symbol of immigrants threatening the integrity of French national identity. Replicating the pun of the Algerian Fundamentalists, these dishes are often referred to as *antenne paradiabolique* – signifiers of trouble or evil by the French leading the French Ministry of Social Affairs to state: “There are risks of those with satellite receivers being manipulated by foreign powers, all the more so in that the number of dishes is constantly growing, particularly in the banlieues ... In addition, the various channels are broadcast in Arabic, which could undermine years of literacy classes and other efforts at Gallicising these people. Moreover the religious content of certain programmes will probably increase the Islamisation of the banlieues” (Olsson, 2005 p313).

The devil’s dishes in both cases stand in for ‘the other’, a construction of difference from an already constituted relationship between observers and observed. It is these kinds of similarities and contradictions to which Marcus is referring. An ambiguity as to who is observing whom? How people describe each other

and see themselves. This is also a discussion of context, a further emphasis that the field subject is as embedded in modernity as the fieldworker. This is an argument pursued in more detail in an analysis of the current crisis of the image (Augé, 1999) that follows, but context is also critical to Marcus's final invitation for critical thought experiments whereby the ethnographer poses possibilities – the roads not taken and repressed possibilities documentable on the margins of culture studied.

This concept is difficult to describe in a single cinematic work because it is a problematic that stretches to the framework in which film is read. This is possible to exemplify in two ways. First, in January 2008 I presented as a panellist on the enduring significance of the structural film *Wavelength* (Snow, 1966-67). In preparation I drew a map. On the left of the map I wrote: 'Claims,' on the right 'Context: Then and Now'. At the top: 'These films are not about what you see, but about how you see' and at the bottom: 'What you see is inseparable from how you see including what you choose not to see'. When I began this presentation, I showed the audience that I was reading from a map and that my beginning proposition was very similar to my end proposition in keeping with the radical nature of *Wavelength* that the last frame of the film, a close up of a photograph of a wave, is visible in every frame of the film. Thus from the outset the audience can see where the film ends. The viewing experience becomes about the duration of the camera zoom from one end of the room to the other and the situations to be encountered on the way.

Reading my map, it became evident to me that *Wavelength* could be framed in the way that Collier (as discussed earlier in this Chapter) approached his experiments with moving images, as a field site that is a local world – a site of ethnographic focus delineated by filmic space, time and duration. A site with its own rules and structures with outside implications. These are most evident in the narrative gestures of *Wavelength* that occur during the extended camera zoom. A phone rings, there is a hammy death, a Beatles song plays, day turns to night. These events and interventions imply outside influences and thought patterns as the camera zoom continues. In this context these events illustrate Marcus's roads not taken. These are narrative events that connect not only to the world outside but also to the world of narrative cinema outside. Snow's film exists within the margins of narrative cinema per se, but within *Wavelength* it is narrative cinema that is in the margins as its tropes are alluded to and passed by knowingly. This makes us aware that, outside of the current experience, there are many alternative possibilities of narrative forms. Meanwhile this film continues with its own trajectory confronting the viewer with their own experience of passing through the film, including the 'potential journeys not being taken'. In this way *Wavelength* is both a comment on the structures of narrative cinema and a position of resistance.

Second, it is possible to consider the concept of roads not taken and repressed possibilities as a critique of the viewing site of film itself. This goes beyond the space in which the film is experienced, as it is already a familiar feature of avant-garde and anthropological work that films presented in different contexts transform the meaning of work. It is the philosophical context in which the film is viewed. This is a question as to where film language ends and where it extends into other forms. An emphasis away from the arguments in a work, to the manner in which people experience and understand the world and how

language is a limit in this process. This is an idea set out by structural filmmaker Peter Gidal:

"With some art, there exists a disjunction between what we know to be the real - ie. 'I will meet you in an hour at home' - and the limits of language. Hardly a sentence goes by that does not merit interrogation, hardly an image goes by that does not merit interrogation, unless the decision was taken to suppress precisely that. Which is why so often for life to proceed, it's a matter of measures not being taken. It is not that so many images and words are clear and transparent and not open to the need for impossible and endless interrogation. It is rather that an arbitrary ideological decision is made to curtail such, in the interests of getting things done (Gidal, 2008 p14)

It is the ideological decisions *not* to do something in favour of doing something else that Gidal and Marcus raise. As set out earlier in this Chapter, anthropology is a discipline built on the principle of participant observation. But Marcus and Gidal offer a future possibility of an anthropology of non-participation. This is a return to MacDougall's contention discussed earlier in this Chapter that we ignore the images that could have been, but weren't. That in most cases we have no conception of what they might be. This paradox between our (un) conscious decisions to take one action over another is a concept addressed in Chapter 4 where it is proposed that the submitted film *The Exception and the Rule* be assessed primarily as a film, and secondarily as a smaller part of the wider context of alternate possibility: *The Museum of Non Participation*.

### ***The War of Dreams (Augé, 1999)***

"The extraordinary events that unfolded in Mumbai last week have shocked the world. Much like the 9/11 attack on New York, global television audience watched mesmerised, as terrorists, in a meticulously planned operation, struck multiple sites and were eventually vanquished more than 48 hours later, but only after nearly 200 people had died and more than twice that number wounded. The fallout from the strike is now being felt. The flurry of allegations against Pakistan from India, many of them entirely senseless, has led to a war hype being quickly created" (Hyat, 2 Dec 2008)

"According to the Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association in India's film capital Mumbai at least 18 titles associated with the Nov 26 Mumbai strikes in which the city's Taj Mahal and Oberoi Trident and a nearby Jewish Centre were besieged by eight gunmen, had been registered so far. These include 26/11 Mumbai under terror, Operation five-star Mumbai, Taj to Oberoi, 48 hours at the Taj and Black Tornado. According to Ujwala Londhe of the Producers Association the first title was registered as early as Nov 28, a day before the siege was finally lifted". (Bedi, 15 Dec 2008)

Anthropologist Marc Augé suggests the modern world is a site of contemporary crisis caused by a saturation of images that are destabilising people's relationships to reality. For Augé the fictionalisation of the world is underway. His book is resonant with predictions heightened post 9/11 where his *War of Dreams* (Augé, 1999) is being played out as a war of images by the media and governments. This destabilisation of a relationship to reality is a complex multilayered process of repetition and feedback. The abstract nature of this shift in people's relationship to fiction is difficult to quantify precisely because the speed and scales of this operation are enormous: from Satellites bouncing images across the earth, to the rise of chain stores, television, advertising, background music in a supermarket, to the way 'surgical

strikes' are imaged by the military. Augé is inordinately expanding Marcus's 'Bifocality' and Davies's critique of the mass media by raising the question: what happens when, on the whim of the remote control, one moves from thousands dead in a flood, to a coup d'état in Africa, to a football league replay, to a motorway accident?

“From time to time, all references to any reality whatsoever disappear. Thus advertising plays upon the supposed effects of its prior repetitions and proceeds by way of allusion, by self referential quotation: the opening bars of a tune, the outline of a well-known image reminds us of a whole sequence and, by extension, of the excellence of a brand of coffee or a car. Television itself willingly becomes its own object and narrates the glorious hours of its brief history as if it were ours too, and indeed it is inasmuch as we have lived through and by the image” (*Augé* 1999 p109)

*Augé* argues that this fluctuation in the distinction between what is real and what is fiction, produces in our relating to each other a series of equally 'fictional selves' that are increasingly incapable of setting our reality and identity within an effective relation to others. This is a vision of humanity caught in a proffered game of mirrors deprived of the category of the real. Even though, he maintains, societies have lived in and through the imagination for centuries, in our accelerated modern state we must ask what happens when the conditions of collective representation change? “To put it in a nutshell, we all have the feeling that we are being colonised but we don't exactly know who by; the enemy is not easily identifiable; and one can venture to suggest that this feeling now exists all over the world, even in the United States” (*Augé*, 1999 p6).

Within this 'colonisation by fiction' it is essential to qualify the nature of the connection between the viewer and the image. To understand how viewers are identifying with what they see. Interestingly, this is the central question of *Augé's* book AND a key politic of the structural film practice of Gidal and Le Grice (Le Grice, 2001, Gidal, 1989). It is no coincidence that in posing this question *Augé*, Gidal and Le Grice all make reference to *The Psychology of Cinema* (Metz, 1982). Thus *Augé's* anthropological citation of Metz is another bridge between anthropology and structural film as the theories of Christian Metz fuel both disciplines albeit in different contexts. Thus the following discussion of the overlapping claims of *Augé* and Metz lead on to the historical definitions of the term structural film:

### ***The psychology of cinema* (Metz, 1982).**

Marc *Augé* and Christian Metz agree there are two levels of filmic fiction that can be combined without any immediate contradiction. The spectator is engaged in a fiction not just with the actor's role, but also with the actor as yet another character - "the star". These fictions feed each other and can even lead to the confusion where the star as himself or herself is a character who is cast to play themselves or the same repetitive role. Spectators become invested in a system which can lead to them believing that they know these people because they know their characters.

For Metz, this system makes the cinema a dual paradox where the performance catches the actor's reflection and not the actors themselves. As pointed out by Young and Collier, quoted earlier in this Chapter, films are not pure fictions. They disseminate the illusion of the piece of reality that they record; and as viewers we 'believe' in the story that unfolds on the screen. This does not mean that the viewers do not understand that this is a fiction, nor does it imply that they really believe in the reality of what is in front of their eyes. "But the fact that they cannot believe in the story is in this sense corrected by the sense that they 'could', that they were able to believe in it once, that they could still believe in it if they were children, the children they perhaps still are" (Metz, 1982 p92)

At this point Metz states that two themes intersect: that of the seeing authority and that of the spectator's sub-motivity. This sub-motivity refers to the spectator's state of passivity seated as they are in the cinema. This passivity facilitates identification with the entire process of screening which constitutes the film. What matters is not so much the identification with the characters in the film, but what precedes it, the identification with the seeing (invisible) authority which is the film itself as discourse, as an authority which sets out the story and offers it to be seen. This inescapable authority embedded in cinema is, according to MacDougall, one of the things most responsible for the impatience of many social scientists with film as a medium for anthropology.

"The glimpse gained of the original field situation may be so immediate and evocative that it proves tantalizing to those who would like to see more, and infuriating to those whose specific theoretical interests are not being served... the precision of the photographic image leads to an uncritical faith in the camera's power to capture, not the images of events, but the events themselves – as Ruskin once said of some photographs of Venice, "as if a magician had reduced reality to be carried away into an enchanted land". So persuasive is this belief in the magic of photography that it is assumed by scholars who in the rest of their research would challenge far more circumspect assumptions. When disillusionment comes, it is therefore profound" (MacDougall, 1975 p123)

This brings Metz to the examination of the perception of the film and states like dreaming and hallucination, a combination of passivity and heightened perception. This sleeping wakefulness Metz describes as 'Paradoxical Hallucination', an idea that also reverberates in the aforementioned work of Laura U Marks (Marks, 2000) on Intercultural Cinema and the sensory scholarship of Stoller and Howes:

"Intercultural cinema draws from many cultural traditions, many ways of representing memory and experience, and synthesizes them with contemporary Western cinematic practices. I will argue that many of these works evoke memories both individual and cultural, through an appeal to non visual knowledge, embodied knowledge, and experiences of the senses, such as touch, smell and taste. In particular I explore in the third Chapter how certain images appeal to a haptic, or tactile, viscosity. Haptic images, I suggest, invite the viewer to respond to the image in an intimate, embodied way, and thus facilitate the experience of other sensory impressions as well. These sense experiences are not separate, of course. They combine to form culturally defined sensuous geographies or our sensory experiences of place. More fundamentally, they inform each person's sensorium, the bodily organization of sense experience" (Marks, 2000 p2)



Even if the realism of the images is more pronounced in a film than in a dream, the result, according to Metz, is that going to the cinema means lowering the ego's auto-defences by a notch. This is one part of the investment of the spectator in the image; the other side of this investment occurs outside of the cinema. In an argument at the heart of the already stated difficulty that documentary film has in establishing itself as a 'factual' art form, Metz argues that fiction is a fact before it is an art or before certain art forms take it over, that film is not creating fictions for the first time and that fictions are a historically constituted regime of socially regulated psychic function.

This is the main thesis of *Augé's* book: that communities and societies have historically lived in and through the imagination for centuries. The issue is not that there have been no fictions; the issue is the way in which individuals 'rediscover' themselves in a fiction. It is one of Metz's main tenets that the peculiarly life-like photographic images of film, with the presence of sound and movement, have the effect of inflecting the ancient phenomenon of fiction towards historically more recent and socially specific forms. The accelerated development of technology has had a huge impact on our own regime of fiction, and that the narcissistic and self-indulgent viewing collusion with film of the spectator is unusual in two senses. First, in its intensity, and second, because the perceiving subject recognises the existence of the author analogous to himself or herself, analogous to the 'I' which is the subject of the perception.

It is this situation to which *Augé* directs his analysis. That fiction invades everything, and the author vanishes. The world is a hyper-modernity where it becomes increasingly difficult to create a social bond *in situ*. Visual anthropology faces a future where it must sustain a heightened critical relationship to the image to avoid anthropological films simply being absorbed by other images. This is another possible confluence between visual anthropology and structural film that requires further expansion of the term *structural film*.

### **Structural film**

"I'm at the cinema. The images of a Hollywood film unfold in front of me. It doesn't even have to be Hollywood: the images of any film based on narration and representation – of any 'film' in fact, in the sense in which the word is most often used today – the kind of film which it is the film's industry to produce. The film industry, and also, more generally the *institution of cinema* in its present form. For these films do not only represent the \$millions that have to be invested, made to show a profit, recovered along with the profit, and then reinvested. Beyond this they presuppose, if only to guarantee the financial feedback, that the audiences will come and buy their tickets and therefore that they will want to do so. The institution of cinema reaches far beyond the sector (or the aspect) which is usually thought of as directly commercial... Is it, then a question of 'ideology'? In other words, the audiences have the same ideology as the films that are provided for them, they fill the cinemas, and that is how the machine keeps turning, of course, but it is also a question of desire, and hence of symbolic positioning." (Metz, 1982 p91)

As noted earlier in this Chapter, anthropology and avant-garde film (including structural film) are heavily influenced by the work of Dziga Vertov (Chanan, 2007 Michelson, 1984, Vertov, 1929, Vertov, 1931). However, Vertov's films significantly predate the artists and ideas that were claimed to be structural film forty years later. Why is this is? What do theorists and practitioners claim was at stake that led to structural film practice at this time?

Much of the literature on structural film begins with the influence of Andy Warhol (Sitney, 1974, Maciunas, 1969, Gidal, 1989, Gidal, 1976, Le Grice, 1997, Peterson, 1994, Rees, 1979, Grimshaw, 2001). This is for two reasons. First, for the influence of the long-take fixed-camera aesthetic established in films such as *Sleep*, *Empire* and *The 13 most beautiful women* (Warhol, 1964b, Warhol, 1963, Warhol, 1964a) and, second, for his celebrated association with the contemporary visual arts. Many early structural filmmakers who rose to prominence after Warhol also had backgrounds in the visual arts. Michael Snow had been a minimalist painter; Tony Conrad had been a performance artist associated with the Fluxus Group; Paul Sharits was educated as a painter, Bruce Conner, Malcolm Le Grice and Robert Breer began their careers as artists while Peter Gidal frequented Warhol's factory.

It is no coincidence that Structural film occurred in the 1960s and 1970s when artists were engaged in a sustained cultural period of cross disciplinary experimentation exemplified by John Cage (Cage, 1961, Cage, 1950), Gordon-Matta Clark (Matta-Clark, 1974), Yvonne Rainer (Rainer, 1962, Rainer, 1963), Fluxus (Maciunas, 1963), Sol Le-Witt (Le-Witt, 1960), Vito Acconci (Acconci, 1973), Richard Serra and Nancy Holt (Serra, 1968, Serra and Holt, 1974). As Tony Conrad writes of New York at that time:

“All of these early '60s works arose within a cultural milieu of progressivism, a pervasive understanding that priority and "newness" were entrained with absolute developmental processes. Within this regimen, cultural influence was seen as abetted and impelled forward by epochal symbolic events, such as the first performance of Cage's 4'33" or (as we saw it) Flynt's sidewalk demonstration, in which I participated, against Stockhausen. Under today's postmodernist cultural regime it is difficult to appreciate the scope and sway of this patent office mentality, this presumption of the regulative efficacy of dialectical or artistic priority, which made incomprehensible the apparently unrestrainable continuation of art, of art making, of the art market, and of art in general as an institution, after their collapse that had been symbolically negotiated through the anti-art efforts of (at least some participants in) Fluxus and others” (Conrad, 2004 p2)

Conrad thus highlights not only the artistic climate of the period but also the pervading social and political currents. While artists were engaging with both the pictorial and material properties of film, theorists and artists were viewing these films through a mix of pre-existing schemas and turbulent global politics. One such pre-existing schema was already influential in the avant-garde: that any image which fails to produce the illusion of a three-dimensional space calls attention to the flatness of the cinematic image. This is a paraphrased version of Greenberg's modernist aesthetic as applied to structural film by Regina Cornwell (Cornwell, 1979b, Cornwell, 1979a, Cornwell, 1972). She appropriates Greenberg's argument that the most advanced or highly developed paintings aspire to a state of purity wherein its works are purged of all characteristics that are inessential to the medium itself. Cornwell writes on *History* (Gehr, 1970a) “the images created by the grain, shifting and changing in time, only suggest film's virtual three-dimensionality but constantly reaffirm its actual two-dimensionality” (Cornwell, 1972 p111).

Other influential schemas were the structural innovations coming through experimental music. Amongst the most celebrated was John Cage, who widened the possibilities of what might be sanctioned as art. One of his methods was to remove aesthetic value from the object and relocate it to the process that produces it. As

the viewer retraces the operative procedures, so they become less susceptible to media that hide their processes of production. Arthur argues that this was a major influence on structural film. "The relations produced in the viewer as concern the process of ordering are maintained by a kind of mental, temporal placement as he/she tries to retrace the operative procedures. Through this mechanism, the viewer imagines the succession of production stages which could logically "explain" the terms of the immediate filmic situation ... Understanding at what point (or points) a system was applied to production can be a key element in establishing the degree or pattern of viewer-distanciation and reflexivity" (Arthur, 1978-79 p124).

In the United States Tony Conrad, Henry Flint and George Mancunias saw a structural schema in the Concept Art of Fluxus where all media and artistic disciplines were available for combination and fusion. Just as with structural film, the Fluxus objects and performances were characterized by minimalist but often expansive gestures based on scientific, philosophical, sociological, or other extra-artistic ideas. In fact there is a sense among those that experienced both structural film and Fluxus that structural film was a disappointing tightening of the potential of Fluxus. Tony Conrad is verbose on this partly because he is as an artist often labelled [by others] as a structural filmmaker:

"By the mid-1960s I had been drawn to film because of its hopelessly shabby integrity, and also because of its restive and anarchic aspects, which implicitly challenged the progressivism of the art market. At the same time, and perhaps even because of its unruliness and freedom from the market, I felt that film could be used to construct aesthetic challenges that the existing market disciplines in art did not, would not, or could not touch. It seemed to me quite rational to look to the border regions of art for its greatest mobility and interest. After all, it had been within music, not painting or sculpture, that the most radical artistic challenges of the early 1960s had appeared.

Within the experimental film [I am willing to go along with the term "experimental film"] I found two major disappointments during the early 1970s. First, the film movement that P. Adams Sitney had so problematically dubbed "structural film" became a kind of fashionable doxology, within which younger filmmakers felt compelled to revisit many of the formalist issues that had been run ragged in painting and sculpture a decade earlier. The progressive and idealist sense of discovery and development that had moored painting to the religiosity of Greenberg and minimalism had now infected filmmaking.

The second disappointment I experienced was institutional. In 1972 Birgit and Wilhelm Hein invited me to show films at Documenta 5 in Kassel, Germany. When I arrived, I found that the work by filmmakers was shown in the local movie house, while the films by artists were displayed more generously in the palace. The filmmakers were--and for the most part still are--very obviously being sent to the back of the bus". (Conrad, 2004 p3)

Did modernist thought turn Structural Film in a disappointing direction? Certainly the modernist qualities inherent within structural film became fused with political agendas of the period. Making un-political Art had become deeply unfashionable, as resistance to authority was widespread elsewhere, including in the groundswell of protests against Vietnam. Structural Film viewed in this climate was no longer quite the same investigation begun by Fluxus or Warhol as its anti-Illusion qualities became imbued with the contemporary politic. Its modernist roots were now an attack on films that told you how to think and feel.

A structural filmmaker could claim to be purging theatricality and romanticism in order to get to 'pure film'. Structural film could be viewed as an attack on art as a co-modifiable capitalist venture of art-objects as well as an assault upon the expectations of film viewers. Inevitably these agendas led to formalism and to a gradual legible structural international iconography despite the contextual efforts of its key practitioners. But this problem of formalism was also systemically inflicted on structural film by the first text that defined this term. In 1974 this reducing of the philosophical claims of structural film by Sitney to a series of structural characteristics was based on the work of a handful of American artists, including Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton and Ernie Gehr (Snow, 1966-67, Snow, 1969, Frampton, 1969, Frampton, 1970, Gehr, 1968, Gehr, 1969-71).

As the first author to write about how these films predominate their temporal construction or shape, Sitney's common traits have become a frequently quoted shortcut to this "genre":

"Structural film insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline. Four characteristics of the structural film are its fixed camera position, the flicker effect, loop printing and rephotography off the screen. Very seldom will one find all four characteristics in a single film, and there are structural films which modify these usual elements" (Sitney, 1979) p370.

These four characteristics are often followed by the frequently quoted passage:

"If the often unacknowledged aspiration of the American avant-garde film has been the cinematic reproduction of the human mind, then the structural film approaches the condition of meditation and evokes states of consciousness without mediation; that is, with the sole mediation of the camera" (Sitney, 1979 p370)

Sitney sees structural films as a way of divorcing the cinematic metaphor of consciousness from that of eyesight and body movement. As already stated in this Chapter, Le Grice and others have since criticised this approach for not problematizing the viewer's relation to the film. But Sitney's interest in consciousness and the visionary strain of the American Avant-garde reflect his interest in framing this work as an extension of the concerns of romantic poetry of which he himself was a theoretician. Thus *Visionary Film* (Sitney, 1974) reads as the struggle of a protagonist with internal conflicts projected onto the world, an idea reminiscent of *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Rabinow, 1977). The artist hero in his book is particularly well placed to understand these conflicts and to find new ways of presenting them. In many ways this is another way of defining the agenda of structural film, through what the audience brings to the work as well as the agenda of the artist who made the work. Sitney finds 'himself' in structural film. And this in and of itself is another part of what structural film creates – a duration spent with ourselves and 'of ourselves'. The resulting conflict and criticism that this approach created resulted in Sitney's own problem with this terminology. In 1977, in conversation with Le Grice (whose own claims for structural film are analysed below), Sitney finally sought to distance himself from the very term that he invented.

"I used the word 'structural' to describe a tendency in certain films. I never spoke of structuralism. I never spoke of structural-filmmakers, but of particular tendencies in particular films. The use of the word meant to have nothing to do with anything in Levi-

Strauss, or French Structuralism. I had no notion, at all, that this article would catch fire, more than anything else I had ever written; that it would become a disease; that it would come back to haunt me. It was hopeless. But it's a word that has stuck, and I'm stuck with it. You're right, I wish I had thought of a different word at the time". Sitney in conversation with Le Grice 1977 (Le Grice, 2001 p140)

### **Structure/apparatus/spectator: Linking visual anthropology and structural film**

Le Grice and his counterpart, Peter Gidal, are known for both films and critical texts on structural film. However, they have also both stated that their theoretical claims for their works came out of their practice. In other words, the theoretical claims made on behalf of these films do not predate the first films. The film practice was underway. Now, years later, the boundary between whether the theory inspired the practice or the practice inspired the theory has become impossible to separate. This mirrors my ambition for this practice-based research, where both the practice and the theory are intertwined 'in time'. In this regard the following analysis of Le Grice's structural film theory is also an opportunity to think about how these filmic principles could be applied to my own research text.

So when Le Grice argues that the spectator does not have the same access to the production of the film as the filmmaker, it is important to recognise that these same relationships are being reinforced in this text where 'I', 'the author', claim authority over you 'the reader'. As Le Grice argues, in commercial cinema this is further reinforced by the extreme economic imbalance between the spectator and the film production. But even in avant-garde works, the time, investment and apparatus put into the film by the filmmaker results in an authoritative relationship to 'place' for both the filmmaker and the spectator which is historically embedded in the cinematic institution and in the conventions of film construction. This is an argument already quoted earlier in this Chapter by MacDougall, who stated in the context of anthropology that "the precision of the photographic image leads to an uncritical faith in the camera's power to capture, not the images of events, but the events themselves" (MacDougall, 1975 p123). This is an idea repeated by Le Grice: "The spectator tends, unwittingly or complicitly, to take up a posture conditioned by this implicit authority. Psychological relations are both determined and reinforced within the terms of this authority relation, and spectator and film-maker are equally subject to their effects" (Le Grice, 2001 p197).

Although neither party can completely eradicate this relationship, Le Grice in his structural film practice seeks to problematize this authority. In many ways he is empowering the viewer in this relationship, certainly in comparison to commercial cinema. In so doing Le Grice integrates many elements that help us to understand what structural film 'is', at least in terms of its physical and psychological parameters. The following terms are a summary of his main concerns and patterns of thought:

- [I] Making evident the conditions of production
- [ii] Defining the forms of structuration
- [iii] Initiating the desire in the spectator to release their perceived role of passivity.
- [iv] The authority of the historical determinants acting on both filmmaker and spectator.
- [v] Duration
- [vi] Temporal sequentiality

### **[I and ii] Making evident the conditions of production and defining the forms of structuration**

Le Grice argues that by not effacing the conditions of production of the film, the source and terms of origin of the film are more locatable. The authority of the film becomes more specifiable rather than general. Le Grice does not enumerate what these conditions of production are because they change from film to film, but in the context of this research one could (for example) take Marcus's six structures: (i) The spatial (ii) The temporal (iii) Perspective and voice (iv) The appropriation of concepts and narrative devices (v) Bifocality, and (vi) The contemplation of alternative possibilities. Equally, the conditions of production could be Grimshaw's or MacDougall's tension between vision and the other senses. Whether this is achieved through responsive camerawork, interactive camera work or some external logic, Le Grice argues that the mechanisms of coming to these decisions should not be hidden from the viewer. This type of recognition is also evident in the practice of MacDougall:

“MacDougall highlighted the drawbacks in taking up an observational stance as a film-maker. For him, it was a stance predicated on a fundamental inequality – as he put it, the film subject gave while the film-maker withheld. The strength of observational cinema, that the camera learned to see again, MacDougall argued, was also its weakness, for it became a voyeur. He proposed instead a participatory cinema in which the processes and relationships of film-making were explicitly acknowledged as integral to the work's meaning”. Beyond observational cinema lies the possibility of a PARTICIPATORY CINEMA, bearing witness to the ‘event’ of the film and making strengths of what most films are at pains to conceal. Here the film-maker acknowledges his entry upon the world of his subjects and yet asks them to imprint directly upon the film their own culture”. For MacDougall, such reflexive practice is predicated on the forging of a new, open-ended relationship with both film subjects and audience.” (Grimshaw, 2005 p25)

Drawing the viewers' attention to the structuring principles of a film they are about to watch is one way of creating a more open dialogue with the viewers, allowing them to enter the work without facing the implication of inevitability or authoritative certainty. This dialogue with the viewers is evident in *Wavelength*, where the viewer is aware that the duration of the film is the length of a camera movement from one end of the room to another (Snow, 1966-67); *Line describing a cone*, where it is evident that the duration of the film experience is the time taken for a line to become a circle (McCall, 1973); *Nostalgia*, where a narrative voice describes the next image to come in the sequence (Frampton, 1971); *Ten skies*, which depicts ten skies (Benning, 2004); and in the anthropological films *The Ax Fight*, where the narrative voice tells the viewer that they are about to compare edited and unedited sequences (Asch, 1975); and *Chronique d'un été*, where Rouch and Morin set out the terms of their experiment (Rouch & Morin, 1961).

**[iii and iv] Initiating the desire in the spectator to release their perceived role of passivity and the authority of the historical determinants acting on both filmmaker and spectator.**

This is the notion that film may be structured to initiate a desire in the spectator to function more thoroughly as the constituting instance of the film.

“Indeed in a more radical analysis, the spectating subject, rather than being seen as the ultimate agent of the film’s constitution, may be viewed as only a further agency through which the film does its work of maintaining (without conflict) social and economic divisions. In this argument, the spectator is neither the constituting instance nor constituted in any full subjectivity by the film but serves merely as a partially constituted transmitting instance (of the film’s cultural and social effect)” (Le Grice, 2001 p197).

This issue can also be approached through the filmmakers’ and viewers’ relationship to ‘looking’. MacDougall states that before constructing a composition, filmmakers engage in a process of looking: “In many respects filming, unlike writing, precedes thinking, it registers the process of looking with a certain interest, a certain will. When we look, we are doing something more deliberate than seeing and yet more unguarded than thinking. We are putting ourselves in a sensory state that is at once one of vacancy and of heightened awareness” (MacDougall, 2005 p7). This process of a heightened sensory awareness is referred to by Le Grice (influenced by Christian Metz) in the suggestion that the spectators unconsciously invest their senses in producing meaning in a film. Le Grice desires that in structural film the filmmaker and the spectator engage equally in a shared position of sensory awareness. And to achieve this the filmmaker should take on the role of being the representative of the spectator’s by recognising that their own position is also subject to historical determination. In recognising this, the filmmaker can produce some distance from which his position may be communicated, viewed and transformed. This is the mixture, discussed above, of a process of objectification, the distance between the self and what is beyond the self. Le Grice argues this objectification through the cinematic apparatus rather than through writing or through the physical body. He replaces the physical body with the observation that the filmmaker’s position in relation to historical determinants is deeply embodied in the design and functioning of the filmic apparatus - one of cinema’s fundamental problematics. This has often been mistaken as a purely materialist argument when experienced in film, but as already argued materialism is a reductivist way of reading work when films are as diverse as Raban’s optically charged installation *After Duchamp* (Raban, 2003). McCall’s light sculpture *Line describing a cone* (McCall, 1973), and Landow’s play with linguistic structures in *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (Landow, 1970).

## [v and vi] Duration and temporal sequentiality

A major feature of commercial cinema is that it represents extensive time scales within the relatively short duration of the film. Structural duration seeks to subvert the illusionist continuity of commercial cinema by getting the spectator to invest in the experience of current duration (the currency of duration) and so create a value for (evaluation of) the duration of the recorded event. As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, this was a stylistic choice within direct cinema where the unedited real time sequence lends an authenticity to the image. The viewer is experiencing time as the filmmaker did. The real time take is also evident in the later work of Robert Gardner that invites the viewers to assemble their own thoughts whilst experiencing a prolonged development of an image. Gardner follows the film's protagonist in *Forest of Bliss* (Gardner, 2001) from his home, down the steps to bathe in the Ganges in a scene that unfolds without explanation, narration or translation (Gardner, 1964, Gardner, 2001, Barbash, 2007, Ostor, 2001, Deger, 2009, Gardner and Lewis, 2003). The duration of a 100 foot camera roll as a marker of time is also evident as a structuring principle in recent ethnographic work by Ben Rusell, where a scene of a man attempting to fix a motor would last the length of the roll of film without any internal edits or switching off of the camera (Rusell, 2008)

However, for Le Grice it was also the case that the problems of cinematic structure even in abstract and highly formal work are bound by temporal priority in presentation. While structural film could avoid narrative as temporal representation – it was impossible to circumnavigate the condition of narration as temporal sequentiality. Although Le Grice could not get around this, he could state his ambition for structural film to be clear about the movement of identification between the camera, a recorded action and the spectators conceptual structuring. This raises the difficult and controversial problem of what the spectator's place is within the film. Le Grice quotes Metz: “not only do we see, but we seem to produce what we see” (Le Grice, 2001 p203), which is a close repetition of Grimshaw's assertion “What we see is inseparable from how we see” (Grimshaw, 2001 p11). This is in line with the conclusion of this Chapter that some structural films may be experienced as theory.



## Practice as Theory

“My editor has written that parts of the book [Materialist Film] are like moving into, and then out of, a benign fog. I would merely add, not so benign. (Gidal, 1989 pxiv)

“In Fifty years time, there will be no more anthropological books, only anthropological films” (Rouch 1963 p19)

This chapter has suggested confluences between structural film and anthropology intertwining MacDougall, Grimshaw and Augé with Le Grice, Gidal and Sitney in order to test a series of relations that could be explored in my own anthropological structural film practice. In so doing, this thesis has conspicuously interchanged the terms experimental ethnography and visual anthropology as if they are the same term. But to what end? Should it not be an expectation within a thesis to define what these two terms refer to in general practice? to explain what distinguishes one from another? or to use one instead of another?

My justification to interchange these terms is also a principle that I wish to extend to the terms ‘Theory’ and ‘Practice’ - an embodiment within this text that these terms are open sites of contestation and confluence. Thus whilst chapter 1 illuminates on key points within anthropological discourse, it also argues that both visual anthropology and experimental ethnography should not be read as stable categories with a single history, but that they are in fact in the process of rapid expansion and consolidation of their own terms and conditions across history. The claims of Rouch, Ruby, Schneider and Wright, Russell, Gardner and Grimshaw (at al.) are together a complex process of arguing mutually dependent histories whereby influences, sometimes unarticulated at the time and sometimes recognised, continue to be claimed to have shaped its historical canon. As Russell states “ethnography may even be considered an experimental practice in which aesthetics and cultural theory are combined in a constantly evolving formal combination” (Russell, 1999 p14). Thus Russell herself approaches the term experimental ethnography as an open form: “The term “experimental ethnography” has begun to circulate in post colonial anthropological theory as a way of referring to discourse that circumvents the empiricism and objectivity conventionally linked to ethnography ... Experimental ethnography is intended not as a new category of film practice but as a methodological incursion of aesthetics on cultural representation, a collision of social theory and formal experimentation. In the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries, experimental ethnography is a means of renewing the avant-gardism of “experimental film”, of mobilising its play with language and forms for historical ends” (Russell, 1999 pxi)

In the same vein, ‘visual anthropology’ is also proposed within this thesis as an open form. The authors already cited in this thesis are en masse provoking inherited genre distinctions, and (to differing degrees) their diverging intellectual discourse allows for the consideration of "experimental" films, "ethnographic" films, "documentaries" and "video art" to be within the same fluctuating critical framework. Thus as argued in chapter 1, one of the most exciting things that has sustained visual anthropology is that there is no consensus on how to make anthropological films, there is no consensus on how to define visual

anthropology, nor is there consensus on what makes a film “anthropological”. As Young stated at the first conference of visual anthropology in 1973: “There is no need to argue exclusively for one method. Conferences about method are arguments about power; representatives of one approach are racist about all others. This is obviously a waste of time. If different languages are being used, we just have to learn their rules to avoid confusion” (Young, 1975 p4) Thus within this thesis Collier is quoted as arguing that the basis for defining visual anthropology is the value of the camera’s ability to evoke raw reality. In contrast Young approaches the visual in anthropology as another form of translation, a record of the behaviour of the process of being filmed. Timothy and Patsy Asch argue that vision itself experiences cultural bias and that visual anthropology should include the development of a semiotic of visual communication. While Rouch advocates the camera apparatus as a site of discourse, exchange and participatory narration with a shared processes of visioning. In the three case studies analysed within this thesis Grimshaw places an ocular centric bias at the heart of the wider field of anthropology – a modernist discipline predicated on the principle of travelling to “vision” other cultures, whilst Marcus argues that cinematic narrative techniques extend anthropological text making. For Augé the modern world itself is a site of a saturation of images that are destabilising a relationship to reality. In this context Augé is arguing that it is essential to qualify the nature of the connection between the viewer and the image. To understand how viewers are identifying with what they see. In this context visual anthropology could be argued to include the way that a viewing public consume and produce images thus extending this field even further.

Russell argues that these confluences and contrasts allow for “mutual illumination”. But I am arguing that because these discourses are not static, defining these terms leads to their limitation. Instead visual anthropology and experimental ethnography are to be understood within this thesis as “contested spaces”. The interface between these contested spaces finds physical fruition in the conclusion of this thesis with a story of how *The Museum of non Participation* was founded when I stood in one contested space (the National Gallery in Islamabad) and looked out the window at another contested space (a lawyers protest being violently disbanded by police). The idea here is not to view these two sites of contest as separate spaces. Instead they are proposed as frames whose connections both ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ reflect the viewers’ own condition (conditioning) of seeing. Thus Judith Butler argues in relation to the photographic frame in scenes of torture: “As we know to be framed is a complex phrase in English: a picture is framed, but so too is a criminal by the police or an innocent person (by someone nefarious, often the police) so that the frame is to be set up, or to have evidence planted that ultimately ‘proves’ one’s guilt. The frame builds and confirms acts for those who would name them as such. To learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see is no easy matter. And if there is a critical role during times of war it is precisely to thematise the forcible frame, the one that conducts the dehumanising norm, that restricts what is perceivable and, indeed, what can be. Although restriction is necessary for focus, and there is no seeing without selection, the restriction we have been asked to live with imposes constraints on what can be heard, read, seen, felt and known and so works to undermine a sensate understanding of war. This not seeing in the midst of seeing, this not seeing that is the condition of seeing, became the visual norm, a norm that has been a national norm”. (Butler 2009 p100)

By interchanging the terms ‘visual anthropology’ and ‘experimental ethnography’ *this thesis seeks to continually re-perform these ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ sites of contestation.* To move away from fixing their meaning in order to avoid what Davies and Marcus point out as processes of self-contained fact that tends to confirm popular consensus and that also slips easily into the framework of popular assumption. In chapter 1, MacDougall similarly argues against the idea of the fixity of images: “The film image impresses us with its completeness, partly because of its precise rendering of detail, but even more because it represents a continuum of reality which extends beyond the edges of the frame and which paradoxically, seems not to be excluded. A few images create a world. We ignore the images that could have been, but weren’t. In most cases we have no conception of what they might be” (MacDougall, 1975 p122).

This is an ‘oscillation between frames’ also exemplified in the fullest ambition for this practice-based thesis: that *Theory be read as Practice and that Practice be read as Theory.* This practice / theory praxis can be expressed in the idea that in very different ways both the structural filmmaker Peter Gidal and anthropologist Jean Rouch share the desire that the viewer *experience* problems of representation. The representational problems at stake have already been addressed throughout this chapter; the difference here being that the films by these two contrasting filmmakers ask the viewer to make theory, not just to consume it. Gidal wants the viewer to experience the philosophical question as to what pre-exists the process of representation for themselves: “To be released from being able to interpret/decipher/disentangle a composition - to release narrativity as an ideology in film and in life” (Gidal, 2006 p22). To watch a Gidal Film *is* to get lost, not to lose yourself in the image – to get lost, and his films are frequently experienced as ungraspable, unfixed, ‘unthoughts’<sup>16</sup> - an “attempt to push the image, often a purposefully mundane one, to the limit of comprehension without collapsing into abstraction” (O’Pray, 2003 p98). Similarly, Rouch’s films on ritual seek to ‘embody’ the phenomena of possession, a physical viewing experience as cine-trance. Thus, in the terms of Paul Stoller: “Rouch’s political films [Jaguar, Moi Un Noir, La Pyramide Humaine, Petit a Petit] are a cinematic extension of Artaud’s notion of the theatre of cruelty<sup>17</sup>. In a cinema of cruelty the filmmaker’s goal is not to recount per se, but to present an array of unsettling images that seek to transform the audience psychologically and politically... a lesson in *sensuous scholarship*”. (Stoller, 1997 p120)

While Rouch did not himself use the term sensuous scholarship, he did frequently pay homage to the sensuousness of surrealism for its attack on recognised patterns of perception. “When Rouch witnessed his first possession ceremony among the Songhay of Niger in 1942, it evoked for him the writings of Breton

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<sup>16</sup> “The Structural/ Materialist film and production of meaning in film is the production of film itself, in its (thought or ‘unthought’) theoreticalness and (thought or ‘unthought’) ideological intervention. To intervene crucially in film practice, the ‘unthought’ must be brought to knowledge” (Gidal 2006 p23)

<sup>17</sup> For Artaud, The Theatre of Cruelty was the solution to social asphyxiation, for it constituted a space of transformation in which people could be reunited with their life forces, with the poetry that lies beyond the poetic text. More specifically, the Theatre of Cruelty “means a theatre difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And on the level of performance, it is not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other’s bodies, carving up our personal anatomies ... but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all” (Artaud 1997 p123)

and the poems of Eluard. Perhaps the vitality of Songhay possession rituals, a virtual pre-theatre – compelled Rouch to make “cruel” films. In some of his films, especially those he refers to as “ethno-fiction”, he pursues an Artaudian path. He always tells a story in his films, but the narratives in these films are secondary to his philosophical intent. In these films Rouch wants to transform his viewers. He wants to challenge their cultural assumptions” (Stoller, 1997 p126).

For both filmmakers this is a foregrounding of process rather than the ostensible object. This is an agreement that process has ideological and political consequences of representation. These authors do, however, differ as to what process means in filmmaking. Thus for Gidal process is a possibility to disallow secure self-identity in the viewing experience of the audience<sup>18</sup>. For Rouch, process is a contestation articulated through “a need to produce a medium that allows dialogue and dissent along societal lines” (Feld, 2003 p137). For Gidal, the process of making a film and watching a film is the main function for vision and knowledge through vision of the spectator. For Rouch, narrativity and fiction are means of intervening and provoking rather than recording a reality in both the filming and viewing experience.

Inevitably, the subtleties of these philosophical enquiries have often been overwhelmed by authors because of their material/technological implications. In particular Gidal’s rejections of filmic conventions have often been termed as a fetishization of film as a material. This led Gidal to revisit his philosophy in his book *Materialist Film* (Gidal, 1989) and in the essay *Matter’s Time Time For Material* (Gidal, 2006) to distance himself from ‘process for process’ sake where “process is just another image – an image of process. This simply recreates the same problem of coherent experience, a reinforcement of self-identity versus the other” (Gidal, 2006 p23). For Rouch, his canonical body of work employing provocation, intervention and discussion<sup>19</sup>, including his unsettling juxtapositions that jolt the viewer’s assumptions now perches on a precipice of becoming ‘a Rouchian aesthetic’. This misreading of cinéma vérité focuses on his use of hand-held cameras and ‘single take’ narratives rather than his “intent to defy our expectations and make us ponder our own categories of sameness” (Stoller, 1997 p129).

Nevertheless, these ambiguities are also the challenge of this work. Films that posit process as theory lead to the question: Which process as theory? There are many processes involved in both making and viewing of a work. Thus process becomes a question - an idea that I took to the field in making my own work and which is discussed in chapters 3 and 4 through my submitted works *The Autonomous Object?* and *The*

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<sup>18</sup> “If you are suddenly able to see how a film has been brought together you may see the relations of how it has been brought together. You suddenly see both what is, what makes up the image, and viewing itself as problematizing. Such (apperception) is then an experience of moment-to-moment filmic *perception*. All this means is that there is something that at least in this moment you don’t know. And know you don’t know. This leads the audience back into the process. If this actually happens, no matter whether that’s for a minute or an hour, once it becomes evident, it won’t be possible to form an *object* from or of this experience. What is evident then is that as long as the subject (in this case the audience) does not establish an object (in other words, a pretext), it can’t establish a self identity and therefore can’t endlessly rely on such... Therefore we can say that here and there through this working and thinking mode the whole issue became political” (Gidal 2006 p23)

<sup>19</sup> “To be able to leap from one point to another is my essential dream. To be able to go everywhere, to ramble about like you ramble in a dream, to go somewhere else. The mobile camera, the walking, flying camera – that’s everybody’s dream. Simply because making a film, for me, means writing it with your eyes, with your ears, with your body” (Rouch 2003 p138)

*Exception and the Rule.* These chapters address how my own film practice is provoked by conflicting currents between the imagination and the social as experienced in India and Pakistan and discussed in chapters 1 and 2. Together these works propose a continuation of the arguments and claims laid out in these first two chapters as experienced in the making of work. An extension of these ideas and theories sets out the possibility of an exciting new film practice that challenges the categories of visual anthropology and of structural film to create new innovative and critical possibilities in both.

### Chapter 3: The Autonomous Object?

“What is finally disappointing in the ideal of filming “as if the camera were not there” is not that observation in itself is unimportant, but that as a governing approach it remains far less interesting than exploring the situation that actually exists. The camera is there, and it is held by a representative of one culture encountering another. Beside such an extraordinary event, the search for isolation and invisibility seems a curiously irrelevant ambition. No ethnographic film is merely a record of another society: it is always a record of the meeting between a filmmaker and that society. If ethnographic films are to break through the limitations inherent in their present idealism, they must propose to deal with that encounter. Until now they have rarely acknowledged that an encounter has taken place” (MacDougall, 1975 p125)

“With good reason postmodernism has relentlessly instructed us that reality is artifice yet, so it seems to me, not enough surprise has been expressed as to how we nevertheless get on with living, pretending thanks to the mimetic faculty – that we live facts not fictions” (Taussig 1993 pxx)

*The Autonomous Object?* is a serial document of encounters between filmmakers and passers-by negotiated around the camera. As proposed by MacDougall, the camera is not hidden or treated as an invisible eye in this interaction. Instead the balance of power in the production of this work is to the fore, first, in the creation of a situation that would not exist without the presence of the camera and, second, by exploring this fabricated situation as though it were a legitimate meeting of one culture encountering another. In *The Autonomous Object?* these camera rolls are then treated as sculptural materials engaging the viewer in what Groys describes as a mimesis of thinking: “the decisive step in the representing of thought processes by taking pure thinking as an object and thus aestheticising it” (Godfrey, 2005 p55-56). This approach resonates with approaches to structural film already described in Chapters 1 and 2, including Sitney’s emphasis on the unconscious, Le Grice’s interrogation of the psychology of cinema and Gidal’s desire that the viewer experience the problems of representation. *The Autonomous Object?* is a step in relocating this debate within an anthropological context by asking what happens to structural film when its western iconographic forms are situated in a politically and discursively postcolonial context. In so doing this usefully reverses my research question by asking how experimental ethnography can expand the language of structural film in recognition that this thesis is not a one-way dialogue between disciplines but a multi layered collection of claims and influences. It is an interesting aside that the most influential structural films on this work, *Mirror Film* (Morris, 1969) and *Colour Aid* (Serra, 1970-71), were made by sculptors, a fact that incidentally reinforces the contention that structural film grew dynamically within a period of cross-disciplinary experimentation.

It is also important to stress that the process of unpacking the influences on *The Autonomous Object?* in the context of an academic thesis is to project onto this work a descriptive narrative form that distorts the disparate reflexive, personal and collaborative micro-histories that constitute this work. As noted in Chapter

2 through quotations from Davies, Marcus, Le Grice and Young<sup>20</sup>, descriptions that use self-contained fact and narrative sequentiality can amount to a bias against truth. In this case a post-rationalisation of this work cannot fully convey how it developed as a process of experimentation in time. *Mirror film* was known to me long before this thesis topic emerged, whereas the idea of using a mirror in India was an accident of timing as my collaborator Karen Mirza and I were revisiting mirrors as part of another work *The Glass Stare* (Butler and Mirza 2007) whilst concurrently curating a film festival in Mumbai. *Colour Aid* was a film that Karen Mirza viewed at the Frieze Art Fair in 2005; it met our mutual desire at that time to disturb the illusory depth of our own mirror films shot in India earlier. Equally, we were aware of Smithson's mirror displacements (Smithson 1969), Richter's Grey paintings (Stallabrass, 1992), and Caufield and Mangold's simultaneous but alternative approaches to figuration<sup>21</sup> (Cork, 2003), and as such we could equally have discussed our desire for flatness and depth in our own images in the context of these works. As discussed in Chapter 1 in the terms of Gidal, Russell and Schneider & Wright, where one influence steps into another is almost impossible to delineate. This Chapter as far as possible contains the discussion in the development of *The Autonomous Object?* within the terms and references that were turning points in this work. This is significant for this thesis in two ways. First, it has been a continued concern of both structural film and visual anthropology to explore how processes of production can be represented. This has led me to construct an experiment entitled INTERMISSION that is completely composed of unedited fieldwork notes revealing the *cul de sacs* and unfinished thoughts that led to *The Exception and the Rule*. Second, it is important to recognise *The Autonomous Object?* as an earlier transitional work that itself led to *The Exception and the Rule* as it was out of the experience of one that the other emerged even whilst it was being influenced by my constant reading<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, whilst developing my work I did experiment with expanding the implications within *The Autonomous Object?* by "spatialising" the interface between theory and practice. This was based around the following quote in the Tate Modern catalogue for the 'Open Systems - rethinking art c.1970' exhibition (Salvo, 2005), where Mark Godfrey describes how in 1967 the artist Mel Bochner taped up two pieces of paper on the wall of his studio and measured the distance

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<sup>20</sup> "Some sociologists have been working on the difference between the structure of actual events and reported conversation, between the structure of complex events and the reportage of these events. In journalism, compression is usually inevitable, either because of space (in a newspaper) or of time (television). The same is true in education. This compression introduces orderliness to the proceedings, and closes out in the mind of the viewer the need to make any further analysis. The job has been done for him, but again in the style of the privileged author who conceals the evidence of his analysis. Thus the events appear to be more coherent or more rational than they probably were" (Young 1975 p112)

<sup>21</sup> "Caufield thrives on a high level of representational content, whereas Mangold eschews figurative references altogether and confines himself to a wholly abstract interplay between line and colour. His austere geometrical elements constitute a kind of ultimate refinement, an ideal purity of language that would never want to muddy itself with the illustrational details Caufield so lovingly delineates. The rigorous limitations imposed by Mangold's use of the square, the circle and the triangle imply a radical belief that there is no longer any sense in transcribing the external appearance of the world onto canvas. Caufield, however, still subscribes to the traditional idea of the canvas as a window, looking out at this very world and setting down a factual account of the accumulated objects it contains. He presents us with a pictorial warehouse stuffed full of props, utensils and incidental scenery, while Mangold not only empties that warehouse of all distracting clutter but refuses to admit even its bare architectural framework as the legitimate concern of art. *Two sharply alien interpretations of the activity called painting* are therefore elaborated here, and they remain at loggerheads with each other" (Cork 2003 p225)

<sup>22</sup> *The Autonomous Object?* was also filmed at the very start of my thesis research and can be viewed as a first encounter with my field site.

between them, writing the measurement of 25 inches:

“After removing the paper, there was just the measurement, and this was rather perplexing. Without the paper as a boundary, what did the 25 inches measurement mean? Bochner has recently called it a ‘signifier with nothing to signify’. Curator Brenda Richardson noted: the situation opened up all sorts of questions: ‘Where were the edges of the “piece”? What comprises a boundary? What is inside and what outside a given measure of length or width or height? What can or cannot be measured? By what criterion is any unit of measurement determined? How verifiable is a measurement? Does a measurement’s verifiability depend on the action and /or perception of the measurer? Or the viewer?’” (Godfrey 2005 p33).

In the context of this research I sought to reconstitute Bochner’s measurement by replacing his pieces of paper with two texts offering contrasting ideas of structural film and visual anthropology. These were the public discussion between Stan Brakhage and Malcolm Le Grice: *Structural Film v Personal Filmmaking* (Le Grice, 2001) and an expanded critique of the work of Robert Gardner by Jay Ruby already cited in Chapter 1 (Ruby, 1991). Imagining that these debates could be positioned 25 inches apart, I then proposed to spatialise *The Autonomous Object?* between these texts by claiming that Bochner’s measurement and *The Autonomous Object?* share principles. One is that a 25 inch gap is equivalent to the question mark [?] that appears in *The Autonomous Object?* title and which addresses the sensuous notion from Chapter 1 that “Our consciousness of our own being is not primarily an image, it is a feeling. But our consciousness of the being, the autonomous existence, of nearly everything in the world involves vision” (MacDougall, 2005 p1). However, as my reading progressed, I gradually concluded that this spatial experiment was yet another way of describing the tension between the material and metaphysical issues of Chapter 1. Thus I have chosen not to pursue this visualisation further; it is mentioned here to emphasise the playful nature of this work, to exemplify Marcus’s belief in the contemplation of alternative possibilities, and to place value on information that exists outside of the frame, an issue that is directly addressed in the clearest influence on *The Autonomous Object? - Mirror film* by Robert Morris

### ***Mirror Film* (Morris, 1969)**

The clarity and distance of the reflection offered a space of performance, a theatre lending itself to disguise and show. All games, all illusions are now possible since the transparent mirror makes one forget its physical presence, and the man manipulating space in this fashion delights in his power. (Melchior-Bonnet, 2002 p270)

“The mirror is a mute surface – uninhabitable, impenetrable, where all is event and nothing is memory” (Borges, 1953 p162)

*Mirror Film* is a 16mm film of a large mirror being held in a snow filled landscape. The film stock is black and white, and the film is projected without sound. The man holding the mirror is not seen clearly at first. Only his fingers are in view as he begins to walk around the camera. The camera follows this action, keeping the mirror centrally framed. Every movement and stumble in the deep snow changes the mirror reflection. As Hamlyn writes of one of our own early mirror performances “Given that the “real” space is the space around the edge of the mirror, the mirror is actually framing out real space and depicting reflected



space. Since there is no border, however, between the mirror's edge and the space around it, the mirror could be said to crop, rather than frame. This is cropping "in" rather than out, since it reverses the usual ratios and relationships of frame to framed. That relationship is simultaneously reiterated (affirmed) and inverted (denied). Its virtuality echoes, is equivalent to, the virtuality of the image reflected off the mirror, even though that has become a substantial image. Light, of which the image is composed, is switched". (Hamlyn, unpublished)

Thus *Mirror Film* is also a double portrait. The man is reduced to significant details: hands, eventually a face and finally a full-length figure. He also bears/holds the image and is held by/in it. The mirror refers back to the camera directly at one point where the photographer and focus puller are reflected in the mirror. Otherwise they are invisible - an 'absent presence' - whose presence is displaced into the whole image, in that they are both behind the camera and their presence is required to create it. The viewer's presence is both denied and implied since the mirror could reflect back to the audience. A chain of looks runs from outside the picture to its inside: the viewers look into the mirror, which reflects back to the photographer, who sees the man, who holds the mirror that abstracts the landscape. The mirror thus reveals what is out of frame and obscures what is in frame.

Though it is not readily claimed as a structural film, *Mirror Film* does fall in line with different structural film claims set out in Chapter 1. The title of *Mirror Film* can be argued to be a descriptive text that makes evident to the viewer the conditions of production of the film. This, according to Le Grice, is a more open dialogue with the viewer. *Mirror Film* also bears witness to the event in front of the lens. It can thus be argued to be both a *participatory cinema* (MacDougall) and a *structural film* (Le Grice) in three ways. First, in the illusion that the viewer is experiencing the unfolding of an image with the filmmaker in that the abstraction and movement of the mirror reflection develops in real time in front of the lens in a manner that the photographer does not fully control. Second, the use of a mirror implicitly references the mirror optics within a camera lens and in so doing it foregrounds its means of production, and third, in its silence the film asks the viewer to do "something more deliberate than seeing and yet more unguarded than thinking. We are putting ourselves in a sensory state that is at once one of vacancy and of heightened awareness" (MacDougall, 2005 p7).

This, as set out in Chapter 1, is also a claim for structural film and visual anthropology which both consider the passivity of the viewer. It follows that the filmmaker who is capturing an image in camera (without editing afterwards) is aware that they are a representative of the spectator at that moment. This is another claim for structural film made by Le Grice. The spectator and the filmmaker engage equally in a shared position of sensory awareness.

The use of the mirror as a formal device is predominant in the temporal construction (or shape) of the work. Despite the fact that the work does not fit all of Sitney's common structural traits, *Mirror Film* does situate content as minimal and subsidiary to the outline of the film – a slow walk around and then away from the

camera. The metaphorical double portraiture already cited in this text invokes Sitney's claim for structural film to approach "the condition of meditation and evokes states of consciousness without mediation; that is, with the sole mediation of the camera" (Sitney, 1979 p370). Here too is the influence of Warhol, whose early portrait films (Warhol, 1964) invoke in the audience a semi-conscious self-reflexiveness where the viewer stares at the film image while the subject looks straight back and often past them. The mirror gaze functions in a similar way in that it is a process, a mechanism, a technological and an ideological process that not only includes the viewer but that cannot exclude the viewer. The position of the spectator, the filmmaker, the mirror and the person holding the mirror all are important. Gidal's critique of *Blow Job* (Warhol 1963) can also be applied here<sup>23</sup>:

"What can be called the condition of spectating is the awareness of being viewed at the same time that one is viewing – which is, in the end, an ideological condition. There is an object, that which is filmed. Yet the protagonist – the man seen – is, of course, at the same time also the subject of the film, so we can call him the subject/object. And the question as to who, what where, when and how does a subject become an object, and to what degree does it carry ideological implications of objecthood – ie. fetishisation, reification, etc – is important for the definition of the object, both in concept and in concrete reality... Warhol is in the act of materialisation – ie. the making of this film – as much as with the *projection* of this film, strikes the real and the imaginary together. The real world is appropriated by the film, and this physical appropriation collides and becomes one with the cinematic means of production. It is the disintegrating of the one from the other that makes for the impetus and libidinal energy of the film" (Gidal, 2008 p8)

### **Power, control and authority: in practice.**

Nevertheless, *Mirror Film* has never been claimed to be an "anthropological" film nor to be such for its theoretical structural value that it was used in India. My interest in drawing it into these areas developed from ideological and pragmatic reasons. First, in Mumbai filming in public created a situation where passers-by would stop to see what was being filmed. A camera shoot could gather a crowd that turned the act of filming into a performance. Second, it became evident that a varied cultural registrar was possible using the camera as a point of contact. The camera became a way of accessing disparate levels of society. In India and Pakistan the camera became the start of a conversation. Nonetheless, ideologically it was always plain to me that my filming closely reflected my own individual and cultural biases<sup>24</sup>. As argued in Chapter 1, the notion of a filmmaker's cultural bias has been a significant tension in visual anthropology. As MacDougall argues, "No ethnographic film is merely a record of another society: it is always a record

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<sup>23</sup> This is not to imply that Gidal would view *The Autonomous Object?* as a structural work in his terms. The representation content of this work would situate it in his category of pseudo-documentary: "However different seeming a work might be, if it allows for example, representation of the male and female body or if it contains figurative or recognisable elements, then it is really a pseudo-documentary about precisely the naturalism / realism it purports to be against. The result is one form of compositional formalism or another in the end, the artwork being a mirror of the maker (yet again) or of this style or that, where the viewer / spectator only knows truth, beauty and history through recognition" (Gidal, 2008 p9)

<sup>24</sup> This bias led to the structural film *The Space Between* (Butler & Mirza 2005) which is not submitted with this thesis because its interrogation of an architectural complex called Bombay Heights, could in the end, have been made in any number of tower blocks around the world. The architecture in this case, was a backdrop to an imported structural schema that totally dominates the image.

of the meeting between a filmmaker and that society” (MacDougall 1974 p119). Sol Worth and John Adair gave cameras and film to Navajo people to include in their contribution to the development of a semiotic of visual communication (Worth and Adair, 1972). Jean Rouch turns the ethnographic camera back on the people of Paris in *Chronique d'un été* to ask “are you happy?” (Rouch and Morin, 1960/1) and Godard challenges the politicians during the Vietnam War in *Loin du Vietnam* to “stop asking what we can do for the Vietnamese and ask what the Vietnamese can do for us” (Marker, 1967).

This early experience of filming led to my own awareness of these representational issues. In so far as my camera remained on a tripod, each film performance also evoked still photography and portraiture and was treated as such by the participants. Indeed I now classify this initial period of field contact as *Orientation and Rapport* - an overview or a phase of descriptive study. “This period is necessarily one of orientation and education of researchers. It is a phase of fact gathering about the total environment under study, often essential to obtaining a wide view within which cultural detail can find an organic place. A grasp of ecology and cultural geography opens an orderly road to future levels of investigation” (Collier, 1967 p7). This centering of the anthropological encounter around the camera replicated issues running throughout Chapters 1 and 2, including the subtle mediation between the camera as a witness of events and events staged for the camera that would not have existed had the camera not been present, as well as how the camera transforms events that are underway by its presence: “That normal behaviour being filmed is the behaviour that is normal for the subject under the circumstances, including, but not exclusively, the fact that they are being filmed” (Young, 1975 p102). As the quotation by Taussig states at the start of this Chapter, “reality is artifice yet, people get on with living, pretending thanks to the mimetic faculty – that we live facts not fictions” (Taussig 1993 p xv).

The mirror used as a mediation in anthropological representation reinforces the camera as a point of contact. This mediation includes the double portrait of the person holding the mirror and the filmmakers/crowds caught in the mirror’s reflection. It includes the inadvertent movements in the mirror that dramatically change its reflections. It includes the issue of who was in control of each unfolding mise-en-scène and whether participants were given instructions. These issues are encompassed in the subject / object tension that the mirror foregrounds. This tension can be framed within the power balance of these situations, including the control over the camera as opposed to the unfolding movement of the scene itself. This is a site of multiple layers of negotiation. The first between Mirza and myself was over ideas and concepts from our backgrounds in art (Mirza) and documentary (Butler). The second was to gain the participant’s agreement to be filmed. The third was the instruction given to the person holding the mirror, as movement in the mirror substantially altered the image development. The fourth was whether the participant was aware of how ‘we’ - in control of the means of production - intended to use this image? But these are all ways of asking how a subject becomes an object - the degree to which these images have an ideological implication of objecthood. This is resonant in anthropology where many authors, including Fabian, Nandy and Appadurai have problematised the appropriation of time, space and images by western industry, language and psyche (Fabian, 2002, Nandy, 1994, Appadurai, 2006). Therefore this work

ultimately presents an ethical dilemma as to the objectification and appropriation of people as image objects. In this way *The Autonomous Object?* title begins to form itself into a question as to the filmmaker's, viewer's and participant's autonomy within the endless repositioning, re-looking and re-mirroring of images described in the quotation of Augé in Chapter 2, where our contemporary experience of images is a complex multilayered process of repetition and feedback where from time to time all references to any reality whatsoever disappear. This is a reiteration of Augé's theory: "a vision of humanity caught in a proffered game of mirrors deprived of the category of the real ... To put it in a nutshell, we all have the feeling that we are being colonised but we don't exactly know who by" (Augé, 1999 p6).



Screen grab from camera roll: *The Autonomous Object?*

### ***Colour Aid (Serra, 1970-71)***

*Colour Aid* influenced the next stage in the development of these ideas. The film is made of a series of colour cards framed in close up so that each colour fills the frame. The movement of one colour to the other is created by a thumb (with dirty fingernail) acting as the apparatus pulling off the top coloured card to reveal the colour underneath. Silence is punctuated by the sound of this movement when it occurs. Over the course of 220 cards and 36 minutes *Colour Aid* foregrounds the apparatus of projection, texture, flatness, colour and the material grain of film. It is for these “reductionist” qualities that the film is structural in the terms of Cornwell as argued in her article on *Some Formalist tendencies in the current American Avant-Garde Film* (Cornwell, 1972). As already noted in Chapter 2, Cornwell emphasised the material properties of structural film in a paraphrased version of Greenberg’s modernist aesthetic. This is the twofold argument that any image that does not produce the illusion of a three dimensional space calls attention to the flatness of the cinematic image and that the most advanced or highly developed paintings aspire to a state of purity wherein its works are purged of all characteristics that are inessential to the medium itself. Cornwell’s already cited exposition on *History* (Gehr, 1970) can equally be applied to *Colour Aid*: “the images created by the grain, shifting and changing in time, only suggest film’s virtual three-dimensionality but constantly reaffirm its actual two-dimensionality” (Cornwell, 1972 p111).

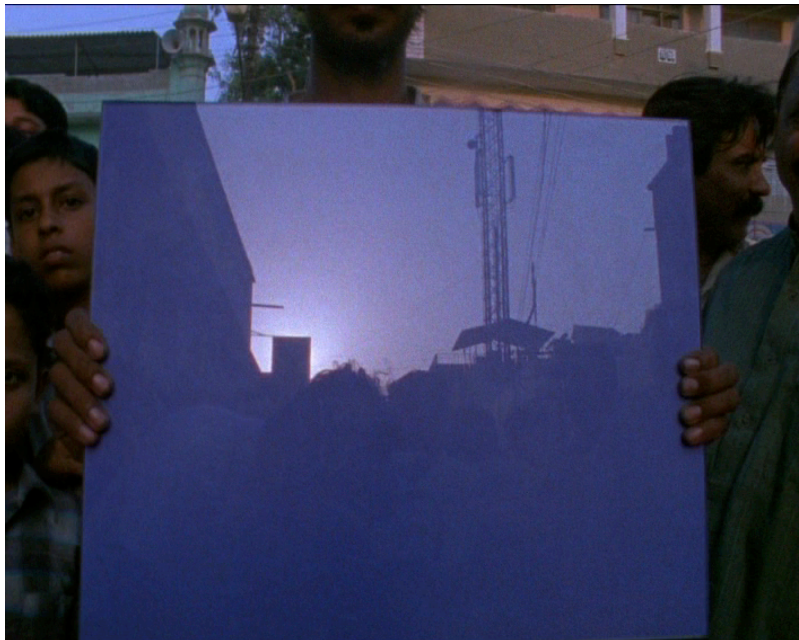
During the development of *The Autonomous Object?*, the viewing of our mirror performances led to our desire to antagonise and exaggerate the illusionist qualities in these images. This intention is captured in a diary entry by Mirza written in the midst of our discussions:

“The mirror in this work draws attention to the surface of the screen, reinforcing the illusion of depth in and outside of the mirror. We now want to further build on this frontal plane by replacing the mirror with a monochrome. We like the idea that anyone can make a monochrome - that the monochrome is found in the everyday and that that draws in the threshold between art and non-art. By playing with intention and attention, we are looking for a meaningful relation to the pictorial and the abstract. We are asking ourselves whether the camera on the tripod replicates easel painting? Does the monochrome mark the end of representation in art? What are the conceptual dimensions of the monochrome? What are its practical limits? What are its cultural implications? Given the serial nature of our camera rolls can repetition be used to re-visit and re-work these ideas so that the illusion of naturalism is eroded to make way for something else to happen in the image?” (From the diary of Karen Mirza 2005 unpublished)

This extract also reinforces the language being used to discuss this project. Although *Colour Aid* proved to be a turning point in this work, we were also in the midst of discussing the wider formal and conceptual framework of the colour monochrome prior to the viewing of this film. This included David Batchelor’s *Chromophobia* (Batchelor, 2000), which now seems prescient to *The Autonomous Object?* He states: “The colour chart divorces colour from conventional theory and turns every colour into a readymade. It promises the autonomy of colour; in fact, it offers three distinct but related types of autonomy: that of each colour from every other colour, that of colour from the dictates of colour theory, and that of colour from the registrar of representation” (Batchelor, 2000 p105). We also discussed Ellsworth Kelly’s *Colour for a Large*

*Wall* (Kelly, 1951), an eight foot square painting composed of 64 separate canvases, Gerhard Richter's *Grey paintings* (Richter, 1966 - 2002), which include monochromes in glass that reflect the architecture of the gallery, *Wheel of Delights* (Pape, 1968), a circle of bowls containing coloured water and the colour swatches in Duchamp's *Tu'm* (Duchamp, 1918). These references reflected an interest in using colour not so much as a painting palette, but as a ready-made 'material'.

These references were utilised in *The Autonomous Object?* when passers-by were asked to hold a colour card (sometimes with glass) towards the camera rather than a mirror. This shifted the spatial relationships within the camera frame. The eye is drawn to "reality" around the monochrome exaggerating the spatial expansiveness of the mirror. Despite the fact that the monochrome images are of equal representational value to the mirror performances, the viewer is held out of the full illusionist depth of three dimensionality. The monochrome breaks from photography as a preserve of evidential authority and illusion, a disturbance in the viewer's predisposition to subconsciously collude with the raw realism of moving images discussed in relation to Collier in Chapter 1 and Augé and Metz in Chapter 2. They consider that to experience cinema is to lower the ego's auto-defences by a notch.



Screen grab from camera roll: *The Autonomous Object?*

## Open Systems

“There is a gallery in the collections section at Tate Modern that the curators have called ‘the Autonomous Object’. Were a historian of American Minimalism to draw up such an inventory of its contents, they would list two Frank Stella [b1936] paintings, One Carl Andre [b1935] floor sculpture, three works by Larry Bell [b1939] one Donald Judd diagram and two works [one set of drawings, one set of sculptures] by Sol LeWitt. Now look again at the same room, but picture it through the eyes of an artist of a slightly later moment. See the museum gallery minus the artworks, make another inventory and what have you got? There are two main entrances, but also three other doorframes. One is a fire escape, with a metallic push-bar and appropriate signage. The other two have no visible handles, so must open from the other side, granting access from concealed corridors for cleaners and art movers. At around eye-level on the walls there are two plaques announcing this to be the ‘Richard B, and Jeanne Donovan Fisher Gallery’, and a further eleven curatorial plaques describing the contents of the room and the titles and dimensions of the artworks. Higher up the walls there are four surveillance cameras, one alarm sensor and one small box whose function is harder to determine. On the ceiling there are seven sections of fluorescent strip lighting behind translucent frosted glass panels, and two spots for the paintings. Once you joined the second inventory to the first, the rooms’ title becomes absurd. The autonomous object? not likely” (Godfrey, 2005 p32)

The serial nature of collecting multiple performances (currently 35) led to the gradual consideration of these filmed performances as an open-ended photographic archive and a site of contestation of power and control over process. There are many precedents in anthropology that affected the development of this thinking. Karp and Levine criticise the museum archive as a site of the West’s appropriation of other cultures (Karp and Lavine, 1991), Marcus writes on the arrogance of power within the western art market that accords market value to exoticism while keeping its own world intact (Marcus and Myers, 1995), whereas Foster problematises the critical consciousness of the idea of the artist as ethnographer (Foster, 1996). Other authors have also pointed out the need for sensitivity by the museum and gallery to the point of view of the people who actually produced the art (Clifford, 1988, Clifford and Groys, 1988, Layton, 1991, Myers, 1991, Peers and Brown, 2003), while specifically in the realm of photography and anthropology both Wolpert (Wolpert 2000) and Faris (Faris 2003) critique the nature of anthropological photographic observation. “Influenced by Foucauldian works such as Alan Sekula ‘The Body and the Archive’ (1989) and Tagg’s analysis of the instrumentality of photography (1988), the anthropological archive became a double trope of post-modern fixation, photography and taxonomy, through which the objectified body of ‘The Other’ was produced. The archive was analysed as an articulation of encyclopaedic desire and knowledge production and taxonomic certainty, reproducing dominant hierarchical values ... Perhaps the most extensive and unforgiving is Faris’ discussion of the cultures of imaging and imagining the Navajo people. In *Navajo and Photography* he explores systemic and ‘predatory success’ of the politics of appropriation which render the Navajo powerless and passive before the camera as an instrument of western oppression” (Edwards, forthcoming)

Nevertheless, the defining critical confluence in the development of *The Autonomous Object?* was not from anthropology or film but was from the exhibition: *Open Systems - rethinking art c.1970* at Tate Modern. This exhibition proposed to bring together the work of international artists who radically rethought the

object of art in the late 1960s and 1970s. Like structural filmmakers of the same period the featured artists<sup>25</sup> sought to connect with the increasingly urgent political developments of the decade and make their work more responsive to the world around them. “Building on the structures of Minimalism and Conceptualism they reacted against art’s traditional focus on the object by adopting experimental aesthetic ‘systems’ across a variety of media including photography, dance, performance, painting, installation, video and film” (Salvo 2005 p1). In a parallel argument to the institutional critique levelled by anthropologists, Open Systems problematised the power and politics of the institution housing the art. These artists asked how museums are maintained, serviced and policed? How the museum is funded and by whom? How the artworks in a museum are collected, categorised, grouped, and into what narratives they are inserted?<sup>26</sup> This critique of the social and political system of art production and exhibition therefore overlaps the concerns of structural film and visual anthropology set out in this thesis. “This visual economy might be defined as the political, social and economic matrices in which photographs operate and which pattern their production, circulation, consumption and possession. It encompasses both the production and consumption of images in a seamless flow. In this model the social functions of the photograph are as important as the image content” (Edwards 2003 p133).

This complex idea is exemplified in the earlier Godfrey quotation that suggests the viewer look at the same room but picture it through the eyes of an artist of a slightly later moment. Godfrey not only draws attention to the perceptual multiplicity of politics within every room, he invites the author to take up the perceptual and evidential position of the camera. In so doing the viewer not only confronts the idea that every context can be seen, described and archived in multiple political, social and economic terms, but he also puts the viewer in the position of an active content producer rather than a passive content consumer.

Seen in this way the Open Systems exhibition (combined with anthropological and structural film analysis) finally clinched the idea that these different levels of autonomy could be phrased as a question. To ask the viewer to experience and question the shared terms of engagement and symbolic values of artwork where “the sharing of symbolic value of a photograph means that certain photographs accrue value as greater evidential expectation is placed upon them. These processes link photographs not to an historical reality, but to an ‘historical poetics’ – a vast and sprawling domain which extends from historiography proper, through historical novels to visual art, spectacle and the historical museum” (Edwards, Forthcoming)

In order to do this *The Autonomous Object?* once published<sup>27</sup>, will be presented as an expanded installation

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<sup>25</sup> Bas Jan Ader, John Baldessari, Mel Bochner, Alighiero e Boetti, Marcel Broodthaers, Lygia Clark, Braco Dimitrijevic, Valie Export, Robert Filliou, Gilbert & George, Dan Graham, Hans Haacke, Eva Hesse, Sanja Ivekovic, Joan Jonas, Donald Judd, Ilya Kabakov, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Gordon Matta-Clark, Cildo Meireles, Bruce Nauman, Hlio Oiticica, Adrian Piper, Charles Ray, Gerhard Richter, Martha Rosler, Robert Smithson, Andy Warhol

<sup>26</sup> This became known as ‘Institutional critique’, a term most associated with the work of Hans Haacke (Skrebowski, 2008. Bourdieu & Haacke 1995)

<sup>27</sup> The boxed object will be published in September 2010 for this works premiere at the Museum of Image and Sound (MIS) in Sao Paulo



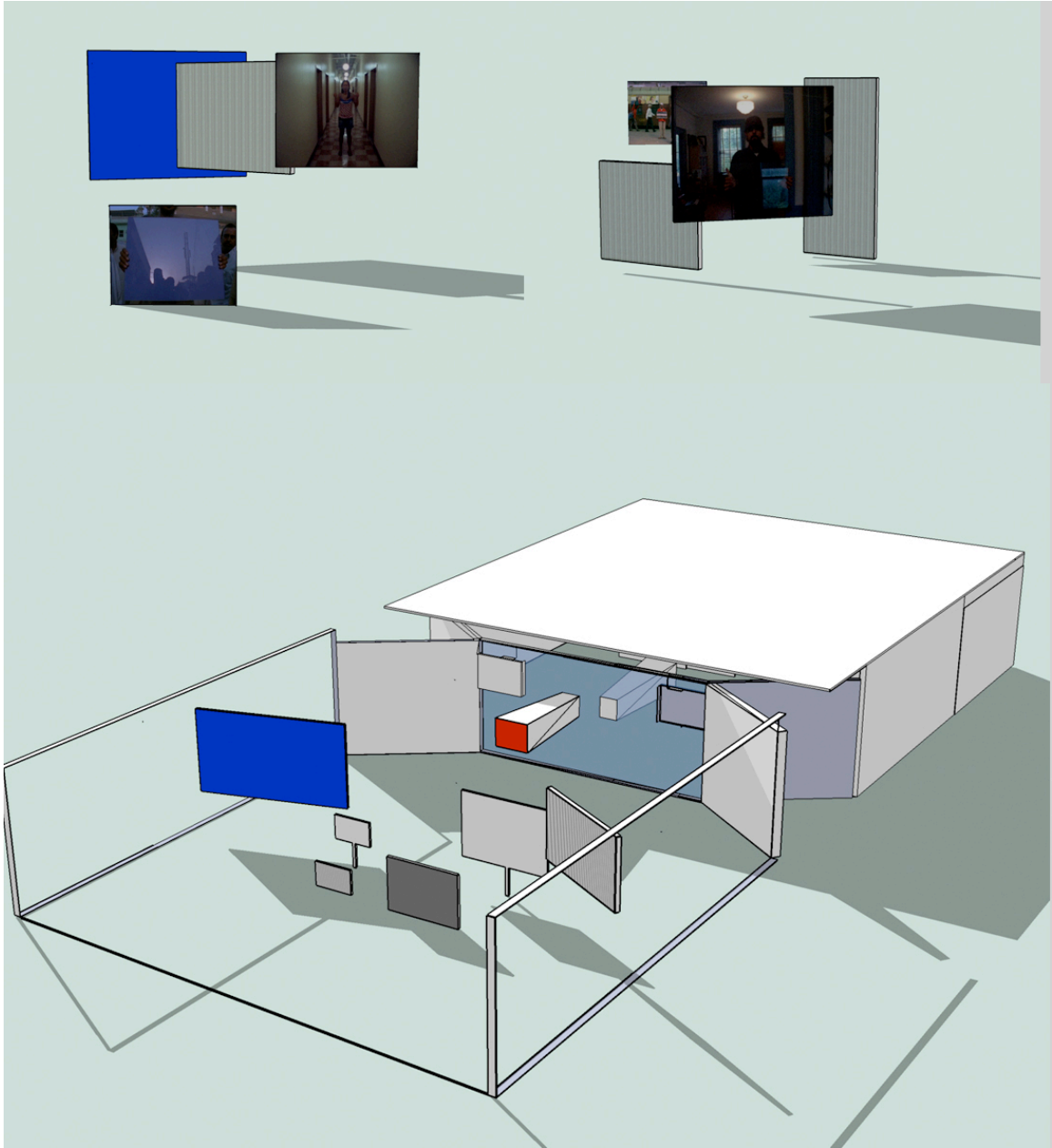
of performances framed as an archive of materials, mirror performances, and texts in a box/object that will itself called *The Autonomous Object?* In this object it is the intention of the work that its public presentation as a multi-screen installation (see examples below) would be proposed as an invitation to interpret the materials in this box as an open system “a decisive step in the representing of thought processes by taking pure thinking as an object and thus aestheticising it”<sup>28</sup> (Godfrey, 2005 p55-56). In *The Autonomous Object?* this thought process will be provoked by handing over control and interpretation of the installation form to the curator who opens the box and encounters materials without interpretative guidelines. This situates the negotiations and power dynamics that went into making these images into the materials met in this work. Not only do the artists place themselves in the position of the participants holding the mirror (as people only partially in control of the artworks visual economy), but the work also reinforces the material qualities of visual studies, the physical attributes of photographic representation: the image object. In this way *The Autonomous Object?* seeks to bridge the material form of film with intellectual anthropology ideas as a relationship between technology, format and representation. When Edwards argues that the still photograph can be read as an object and an image, her language resonates with the material claims of structural film:

“The way in which material and presentational forms of historical photographs project the image into the viewer’s space is overlooked in many analyses of historical images or critiques of the archive, whatever their nature. The transparency of the medium is such that in order to see what the photograph is ‘of’ we must first suppress our consciousness of what the photograph ‘is’ in material terms – in such analyses photographs become detached from physical nature and consequently the functional context of a materiality that is merely glossed as a neutral support for images rather than being integral to the construction of meaning ... (But) photographs are both images and physical objects which exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience. They have volume, opacity, tactility and a physical presence in the world enmeshed with subjective, embodied and sensuous interactions with them” (Edwards, 2002 p67).

Amidst such confluences *The Autonomous Object?* can be seen to be a process work and an investigation of the contemporary visual economy of photographic representation. Bourriaud defines this territory as an "other" modern – a rootless modernism for the 21st century: “A synthesis of modernism and post-colonialism, in which the artist turns cultural nomad. There are no longer roots to sustain forms, no exact cultural base to serve as a benchmark for variations, no nucleus, no boundaries for artistic language” (Searle, 2009 p1) ... “Artists are looking for a new modernity that would be based on translation: What matters today is to translate the cultural values of cultural groups and to connect them to the world network. This “reloading process” of modernism according to the twenty-first-century issues could be called altermodernism, a movement connected to the creolisation of cultures and the fight for autonomy, but also the possibility of producing singularities in a more and more standardized world” (Bourriaud, 2009 p1)

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28 Examples of other open systems include Joseph Beuys and Lygia Clark complicated systems of meaning production and communication, Marcel Broodthaers who subversion of socially accepted visual codes, and Martha Rosler’s analysis of the vocabulary of images. (Clark & Beuys 2003, Broodthaers, 1966, Rosler 1974)



Examples of possible interpretations of the materials within *The Autonomous Object*?

# **INTERMISSION**



Captured still from *The Exception and the Rule*

This INTERMISSION is an experiment in communicating thinking processes that led to *The Exception and the Rule* as they developed over time. These ideas are presented here as “field notes”, though to be accurate this writing was not constructed on location in the field (India, Pakistan). Instead these notes present my grappling with theories and ideas before travelling on my first trip to India (hereinafter: FIELD NOTES A) interwoven with a critique of these ideas before travelling to Pakistan (hereinafter: FIELD NOTES B). My actual field diaries are not quoted here because it is the contention of this experiment that the INTERMISSION is the gap between field trips and not the experience of being abroad. Positioning these thoughts originating in London (which are edited, mediated and interspersed with scholarly apparatus) as field notes prompts the question: where is the field located?

Pragmatically, the INTERMISSION clearly shows that much of the content for this film was imagined before the camera was switched on in Mumbai or Karachi. This is a subtext overshadowed when the film is analysed retrospectively (Chapter 4) or experienced in a cinema as a fixed work. It is my intention that the INTERMISSION should be read as an exposition of the process in establishing my position within this film, a struggle with the process of imagining the field, a struggle to turn theory into practice, a struggle with my own cultural bias and a struggle with the gap between my intention and my realisation. It is, however, also an exposition of Marcus’s proposition that the modern anthropologist shares conditions of modernity, and at least some identities with his or her subjects. Where one “field” starts and another ends is ambiguous, an idea deeply implicated in my research question that proposes the collision of a western approach to the camera with the politics of anthropological representation.

I have also left uncorrected any naïveté in this early theoretical writing. The two time periods under observation are indicated at the start of each passage by whether they are passages of text from FIELD NOTES A (written 1<sup>st</sup> September 2007 to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008) or FIELD NOTES B (22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008 to 19 January 2009). FIELD NOTES C are continuing experiments with textual forms for the film. The tentative status of this INTERMISSION within a conventional academic thesis is further acknowledged in the use of a different coloured font indicating that this text should be experienced ‘as practice’. This INTERMISSION can also be circumvented as this thesis is still comprehensible when bypassing this section. For this reason the INTERMISSION is not included in the overall word count of this thesis. Nevertheless the possibility of reading the INTERMISSION is an important juxtaposition to Chapter 4 because the INTERMISSION allows the reader to experience being lost in ideas, confluences and unfinished thoughts as well as feeling narrative agency. Feeling lost is a juxtaposition to the authoritative nature of the rest of the writing in this thesis, a parallel process to *The Exception and the Rule* which starts in documentary narrative structures and ends with abstraction *Images I wish I had filmed but couldn’t*.

## FIELD NOTES A

*"I'm interested in the viewer not working out my meanings, but in doing a process, the way I'm doing a process, which may mean that the film I have and the film the viewer has are almost equal, but opposite. Which dialectic is strongest? Whether it be time moving in a circular way against words which are flashed, or the authority of the word versus the image, doesn't matter. But the fact of a dialectic happening is important ... a constant dialectic rather than a received statement, or interpretation" (Gidal 1972 p1)*

*"It is necessary to conceive of ethnography not as the experience and circumscribed "other" reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects" (Clifford, 1988 p41)*

*"The death of the author" in anthropology of the 1980s was a textual critique of ethnographic realism, ethnographic authority and the ways in which anthropologists construct societies as totalities (Clifford, 1988, Clifford, 1980, Geertz, 1973, Marcus, 1999, Marcus and Clifford, 1986, Marcus, 1998). The majority of this anthropological discourse was writing on writing - an examination of written forms also resonant with the reflexive strategies of structural film. When Clifford argues that "coherent presentation presupposes a controlling mode of authority" (Clifford, 1988 p54), it is of the same sentiment as Gidal's argument that "People have been taught that passivity gives them a pleasure. They're being dominated, being walked over. The most brutal, elitist and condescending filmmaker is not some esoteric, over-difficult experimental filmmaker but someone like Ken Russell or Alfred Hitchcock". (Gidal 1972 p1-2)*

*This issue is especially urgent when our contact zone with other cultures is through news and television channels where there are fewer opportunities for flexible strategies of image presentation than the avant-garde. But both anthropology and structural Film DO take responsibility for their systematic constructions of others and of themselves through others. Their argument for the break-up of monological authority brings into prominence the inter-subjectivity of all speech and widens the references that can be drawn into this debate. This also throws up the problem of how to contain my research. This has led to my drafting of two questions that I feel are now a subtext for my single screen film: Where does a film start to be considered structural? Where does metaphysical speculation disguised as an empirical science become anthropology?*

## FIELD NOTES B

I have just read back through my first ideas and have come to recognise that I need to take a step backwards before I can think about Pakistan. This is in recognition of the fact that my written thoughts before going to India are fragmented, lateral and full of the imaginary even though at the time these lateral jumps felt to me like a clear and coherent strategy. I now believe that these initial ideas and influences are actually valuable clues as to how I was visualising anthropology. The writing that follows presents a rereading of my initial ideas. I will re-examine the text for my relationship to the fieldwork site and how I set about forming a subject. How my ideas were fixing my position prior to visiting the sensory immersion of the field. I have come to realise that preparing for this transformation from the outside looking in is a challenging but productive imaginary space to work from. This has led me to ask fundamental questions of my process that will likely influence the final film: How can being in the field not involve a translation of this experience into my own textual register? How can I creatively find a commentary on the substance of the film from inside the film rather than bringing it to bear from the outside?

## Self-critique:

Reading back, what is evident to me now is the degree of anxiety I carried as to how to visualise my subject. Starting by citing Peter Gidal with James Clifford is a broad way of sweeping anthropology and structural film together. They are linked here loosely through their opposition to other representational forms (to films that tell the viewer how to feel) rather than what they have in common. This is evident in two questions that appear in this text: Where does a film start to be considered structural? Where does metaphysical speculation disguised as an empirical science become anthropology? While these two questions *are* current in visual anthropology enquiry - in this context they can also be read as personal: Where do the boundaries of my enquiry lie? The unsaid implication being: Where will I situate myself within these borders?

Why start like this when more recent writing by Paul Stoller, Marc Augé, Anna Grimshaw, Catherine Russell or Amanda Ravetz could link anthropology and structural film tightly? My justification is in Gidal's sentence: "Authority brings into prominence the inter-subjectivity of all speech and widens the references that can be drawn into this debate". Here is an indication of the psychology of my initial field strategy: [a] my intention to explore a broad spectrum of boundaries of representation from within art and film [b] that the 'death of the author' syndrome is a key cultural period [c] that both structural film and anthropology overlap with art. This link is an agenda that I brought with me to this research question. That art might be a way of cross-fertilising both disciplines.

## FIELD NOTES A

*Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco (Rabinow, 1977) begins with the author's troubled state of mind in Chicago and ends with a critique of his relationships with his participants in the field in Morocco. In this ethnography fieldwork is Rabinow's subject. The text is written chronologically with a heroic narrative structure: a dangerous journey faced and a successful return home. This book was written years after this fieldwork took place by memory and field notes. Still Rabinow frequently profiles interruptions, boredom and miscommunications as a core content of this enquiry: "Most of the anthropologists time is spent sitting around waiting for informants, doing errands, drinking tea, taking genealogies, mediating fights, being pestered for rides, and vainly attempting small talk – all in someone else's culture. The inadequacy of one's comprehension is incessantly brought to the surface and publicly displayed. Interruptions and eruptions mock the fieldworker and his inquiry; more accurately, they may be said to inform his inquiry, to be an essential part of it." (Rabinow, 1977 pg15)*

*In film this approach resonates deeply with both *Walden* by Jonas Mekas (Mekas, 1964-69) and *Excerpts from the Diary* by Ian Breakwell (Breakwell, 1975). These works also make purposefulness, interruptions, boredom and the everyday a narrative subject. In the case of *Walden*, continuity and narrativity is maintained using intertitles<sup>29</sup>. In each case Breakwell, Rabinow and Mekas establish themselves at the centre of the journey we are about to inhabit. From the first frame we, as viewers, know how these works will develop - using diaries, notes, sketches, anecdotes, broken time frames and locations. In each case we are presented with the author. Both films open with a close up of Mekas's / Breakwell's face and from then on they each periodically reconstitute themselves at the centre of our mediated*

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Including: Dedicated to Lumiere, Diaries notes and sketches also known as *Walden*, Sitney is fingerprinted by the police, I cut my hair to raise money.

experiences<sup>30</sup>. Thus the introduction to *Excerpts from the Diary* (Breakwell, 1975) could also read as a description of the other two works:

*“This video tape consists of some extracts from ‘the diary’, a continuous work, being various combinations of writing, drawing, photography, collage, film, video and many other media. It is a diary of description and observation, a celebration of all aspects of everyday life. Here are some written descriptive observations...*

*27<sup>th</sup> January 1973. Queens park Rangers football ground, Loftus road, London West 12. The man from the football crowd pulls a whole roast chicken from inside his overcoat, he pulls off the legs and wings and passes them in front of the face of the man beside him to his friends on the other side ...”* (Breakwell, 1975)

*Each of these authors uses anecdote and observation to create an image in our mind’s eye. We are being asked to focus and experience the act of seeing. In my script notes I wrote these ways of seeing down as: through visual language [Mekas] through the continuity of autobiographical narrative [Rabinow] and through pinpoint description of isolated experience [Breakwell]. I also noted where I felt the viewer was being asked to meet these ways of seeing. Whether the viewer sits back and allows the work to dictate to them, whether they meet the work halfway or whether the audience projects onto the work itself. This has led me to question whether where an audience meets an artwork also constitutes a field site? Within my script I am becoming aware of how textual and visual fragmentation might go hand in hand with strategies of continuity. And how the first moment of entering a work can settle the viewer into the abstract structures that will unfold.*

## **FIELD NOTES B**

My anxiety in how to begin this film is clearly evident in this text. Pooling references widely, my examples illustrate the intimate personal position of the diary from anthropology [Rabinow], the film avant-garde [Mekas], and art [Breakwell]. In each case I look at how the authors begin their personal stories. The text from Rabinow in particular seems to have been chosen for its empathy with my own position. I cite how it begins with the author’s troubled state of mind [could this be my own?] and it goes on to describe how this led to a journey that establishes Rabinow’s position of the hero within his text. [Did I choose this text because I projected myself into it?]. Like Rabinow I began my research by creating structures and experiments to take to an imagined field. And like Rabinow [and in the absence of my own defined community to study] I imagined that my journey would be an analysis of the personal and the everyday<sup>31</sup>. Since then all my working film edits to date have all started with an image from London that I call *view from my kitchen window in Brixton*. I imagined this image provided context for the viewer of where I (the filmmaker) lived in the United Kingdom. But on reflection, beginning at home is also a way to pragmatically begin at all. It allows for the establishment of an image before fieldwork has begun. This reinforces my interest in how Mekas and Breakwell both establish their authority and position in their work. How the rules of engagement with the audience are set upfront. This reflects my own need to establish the rules of engagement with my subject, my imagined audience and with the

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<sup>30</sup> We also encounter the hero’s investment in politics in the everyday which are subtexts in both works: ‘Sitney is fingerprinted by the police, as director of the Cinematheque’ is an establishing structure mirrored in Rabinow’s early decision to leave the United States after the assassination of President John Kennedy.

<sup>31</sup> My perceived need to justify this as an approach began with an early encounter with the anthropology department at Goldsmiths. Despite their interest in my thesis proposal, they would not accommodate the idea that I did not want to play out ethnographic research in relation to a community or a ritual.



film itself<sup>32</sup>. Thus in my working film edit to date I am now considering beginning with the following title used to dictate the parameters of the viewing experience to follow:

YOU ARE INVITED TO READ THIS AS A GUIDE TO WHAT CAN BE SEEN

INDICATIONS

LOCATIONS	Karachi, Mumbai, London
DIMENSIONS	A continuous work being various combinations of description and observation.
MATERIAL	Anthropology, Structural Film
START	The view from my kitchen window in Brixton.



*Captured still from The Exception and the Rule  
View from my kitchen window in Brixton*

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<sup>32</sup> I discovered later that this need is not just personal to my own working process as David MacDougall writes: “Sooner or later every film starts with an image, once the titles and opening business have been cleared away. Perhaps it doesn’t even matter what we count as an image, whether it is a title, a blank screen with sounds, or a film image in the conventional sense. Once an image has been given, the entire rest of the film is an attempt to explain it – or to explain the other images that have been brought into play to explain it. The film is a progressive unfolding from that initial, presumptuous image addressed to the audience” (MacDougall 2005 p38)

## FIELD NOTES A

*“The ethnographer’s central purpose is to describe a social world and its people. But often beginning researchers produce field notes lacking sufficient and lively detail. Through inadvertent summarizing and evaluative wording, a fieldworker fails to adequately describe what she observed and experienced. The following strategies enable a writer to coherently depict an observed moment through vivid details: these strategies are description, presentation of dialogue, and characterisation. As is evident in several of the included excerpts, fieldworkers often merge several strategies” (Emerson, 1995 p3)*

*Reading that Rabinow wrote his ethnography years after the fieldwork experience has led me to consider the relationship between field notes, memory and recycled footage. At what point does one inadvertently release the field? At what point do collected images call attention to themselves as images rather than evidence? Key to this issue in film is the structural film *Nostalgia* (Frampton, 1971). This film records the destruction of selected photographs from Frampton’s seven-year photographic career. As the photographs are being destroyed, a narration talks about the photograph to come rather than the photograph disappearing in front of our eyes. This slippage causes the viewer to scrutinise each image closely attempting to relay it against the narration just experienced and being experienced. Here the photographs become the object of study, a still moment of time re-contextualised through narration, becoming filled with language as they disappear. In this way “the film digs deep into the affinity of time with consciousness” (Moore, 2006 p5) and it is this process of scrutiny slipping between present experience and past memory that is the experience of translation of one’s own material from the field into post production.*

*Nostalgia also exemplifies how the narration of field notes is itself a field to be observed. That field notes reflect upon assumptions and commitments that the fieldworker holds about the nature of ethnography. To develop this idea in my script, I have begun to source different textual experiments still in the context of the everyday that balance introspection and objectification. Of these - two approaches particularly resonate. *Indian Journals* (Ginsberg, 1970) is the ethnographers fieldwork notes as raw visual material, authored, sub/consciously strategized, personal and sometimes unfinished<sup>33</sup>. *The Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (Perec, 1997)<sup>34</sup> asks the reader to contemplate the many ways in which space is occupied. This is reminiscent of how structural filmmaker James Benning teaches his students film. Instead of providing the students with a camera he denies them the apparatus for months, replacing the camera with *Looking and Listening* exercises.*

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33 Friday 13 July 1962 – Top Floor Hotel Amjadia Chandy Chowk & Princep St. Calcutta: looking out the barred window at sunset & the clouds like a movie film over the sky with cheap red paper kites fluttering over the 4 story roofs against the mottled green & orange mists of maya – down for a cup of tea, the sloppy Moslem waiters barefoot & bearded in black-edged white uniforms – the clang of rickshaw handbells against wooden pull staves – bells under hand cars – slept all afternoon after the M last nite and visit to doctor this morning – worm pills – & read Time & Newsweek & Thubten Jigme Norbu’s autobiography.” (Ginsberg 1970 p33)

34 Things we ought to do systematically, from time to time. [p44]  
Index of some of the words used in this book [p93]  
Notes concerning the objects that are on my worktable [p144]  
Attempt at an inventory of the Liquid and Solid Foodstuffs Ingurgitated by me in the Course of the Year Nineteen Hundred and Seventy Four [p244] (Perec 1977)



*Captured still from The Exception and the Rule  
Looking and Listening sequence*

## FIELD NOTES B

Having established that the view from my kitchen window in Brixton would start my film, my next text assessed fieldwork notes as a potential film narrative strategy. In my research I had read a number of books on field notes (Davis, 1999, Van'Maanen, 1988, Wengle, 1988), anticipating that different strategies of anthropological written observation could be used for a film narration. But what this reading actually raised was the problematic of how field notes could adequately describe experiences in the field. This dominated my reading as opposed to strategies of narrative experimentation partly due to the conservative nature of the written methods I encountered in these books and partly because these books made me question where the field is actually situated. Is the field a geographical space or do the images that are brought back also become a field? I articulated this with two questions: At what point does one inadvertently release the field? At what point do collected images call attention to themselves as images? These questions imply that I was also trying to imagine the authority of the images that I might bring back from fieldwork.

Two possibilities began to form. One was whether I needed to travel to the field at all?<sup>35</sup> as I supposed I could also implement my ideas using recycled footage. The other was whether I could raise the issue of where the field is located through a narration reflecting the different strategies of recording observations. These two ideas converged around the film *Nostalgia* (Frampton, 1971), where the narration treats the filmmaker's footage as recycled footage. In this film, as I discussed, the tension between what you see and what you hear come close to my imagined experience of recording images in the field and using the images at home as if they were the field.

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<sup>35</sup> I decided that a film made using found material would be interesting as a future project having gone through the fieldwork experience myself first.

To counter the more conservative strategies of field writing that I had been reading, I also began sourcing experimental forms of writing and observing that they are also proposed as fieldwork strategies (Eco, 1989, Cage, 1961, Perce, 1997, Hopper, 1995, Wengle, 1988, Hastrup, 2004, Ginsberg, 1970). My interest in Perce, Ginsberg and Benning began to draw me to strategies of representation in conceptual art that linked text making, with text as image, with image as text. Bringing these conceptual art strategies began to resonate strongly with me. First, the minimalist tendencies in conceptual art run through structural film<sup>36</sup>. But, second, I also began to consider conceptual artists as fieldworkers who were attempting to articulate thinking as an object, an idea I was concurrently playing out in the development of *The Autonomous Object*? I began to ask if conceptual art could provide me with new strategies of image making in anthropology. Part of this potential seemed to lay in the transference of western signature art into a new context and part in the provocative position these practices would place me in.

## FIELD NOTES A

*"Once one understands that art is not in objects but in the completeness of the artist's concept of art, then the other functions can be eradicated and art can become more wholly art" (Burn, 2000 p190)*

*"Kovanda's minimalist actions and interventions of the 1970s, were often so subtle they were almost imperceptible... Simple actions like gazing fixedly into the eyes of people encountered on an escalator, for example, or intentionally-unintentionally touching chance passers by on the street can be understood as attempts to make contact" (Kontakt 2007 p1)*

*Just as structural film and anthropology, authors and artists have had difficulty in creating a definitive account about what conceptual art 'is'<sup>37</sup>. Lippard suggests this is because in this period artists took a decisive step in the direction of representing 'thought processes' by taking pure thinking as its object<sup>38</sup>. This took on many manifestations, including artists taking up systems as radically self-reflexive strategies. The potency of this for structural film lies in the tension in the encounter of an abstract infinite generative concept that regulates the production of art within both film duration and the many frames inherent in film production and projection. What is included in the frame of reference of conceptual art points at what is not included and thus, that which we bring to the work ourselves: "A view of art, as a symbolic vehicle with the capacity to subvert and collapse both itself and other disciplines as well" (Conrad, 2004 p 1-2).*

*The three examples I have so far been thinking about are those that I feel would end up in the final film if executed successfully. The restaging of 'Performer / audience / mirror' (Graham 1977) in a filmic space would place the performer in the position of the camera describing what the viewer cannot see for themselves. Statement of intent*

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<sup>36</sup> This also neatly fitted my agenda [that I still held at this time] to situate both Anthropology and Structural Film within an Art practice.

<sup>37</sup> "Conceptual art never coalesced into a definable movement; the specific interests, aims, and modes of production (if any) of its participants were far too diverse for any kind of consensus... We might think then of "Conceptual art" as a tendency, a sensibility, an attitude, or even a practice, but these terms have connotations of style, as if conceptual art or "Conceptualism," to invoke a label with even greater stylistic implications, was simply another kind of medium or format. This was one of the art-historical dead ends that artists were trying to escape, by means of a radical rethinking and dismantling of the traditional art apparatus--from the entrenched market system of value-obsessed collectors, dealers, and museum professionals to the hegemony of the discrete object and the perceived cultural imperialism of critics and art historians. History, however, has a way of ignoring such insolent details, of weaving them seamlessly into its larger narrative fabric" (Alberro & Stimson 1999 pxviii)

<sup>38</sup> This may be compared to the analysis by Sitney that "The often unacknowledged aspiration of the American avant-garde film has been the cinematic reproduction of the human mind. Structural film approaches the condition of meditation and evokes states of consciousness without mediation, that is, with the soul mediation of the camera" (Sitney 1979 p370)

*(Weiner, 1968) would create images in the viewer's mind's eye that need not be filmed. Rather they would exist in the gaps inherent in language. While 'Boston New York Exchange Shape' (Huebler 1968) offers a way of selecting and documenting locations with a camera while simultaneously removing aesthetic decision making from the photographic records. I have also recently become interested in 'Following Piece' (Acconci 1969) and wonder whether this could be integrated into anthropology?*



*Captured still from **The Exception and the Rule**  
**Following piece sequence***

## **FIELD NOTES B**

*On Performer / audience / mirror (Graham 1977)*

Graham faces a seated audience, behind him covering the back wall is a mirror reflecting the audience. Graham starts a continuous description of what he can see in an attempt to close the gap between a thought occurring and his speaking of the thought. In the process Graham avoids conjecture, although his changes of position produce a change of visual perspective reflected in his description. Graham describes his intentions as follows:

“In stage 1 through the use of a mirror the audience is able to instantaneously perceive itself as a public body (as a unity), offsetting its definition by the performer. This gives it a power within the performance equivalent to that of the performer. In stage 2, the audience sees itself reflected by the mirror instantaneously, while the performer's comments are slightly delayed and follow, as they are verbal discourse, a continuous temporal forward flow. This effects 'cause and effect' interpretation for the audience. First, a person in the audience sees himself “objectively” (subjectively) in terms of the performer's perception. The slightly delayed verbal description by the performer overlaps/undercuts the present (fully present) mirror-view an audience member has of himself and of the collective audience; it may influence his further interpretation of what he sees”. (Graham, 1999 p124 – 125)

In this performance Graham is foregrounding awareness in the viewer of their own perceptual process while at the same time the stages he passes through show the difficulty he is having in representing a pure present tense thought. My experience of this performance on video led me in India to create a performance sited solely for the camera. This was staged in India with a passer by outside of the gallery context. My aim became to create a social commentary on the environment in which this action was taking place that included the power dynamic between the performer and the camera. In the most successful version I had a friend face the camera in Gandhi bazaar and describe what they could see and by consequence what the camera cannot see. The performer became the camera allowing the audience to experience the perceptual process of this camera performing.



*Captured still from The Exception and the Rule  
'Performer, Audience, Mirror' sequence*

## FIELD NOTES A

*“If you are protesting in Pakistan: Do not announce your rallies well in advance. ○ Distribute stickers and posters amongst the public. Also try to convince them to stand with you. ○ Consider staging a small scale education campaign to inform people about what this martial law means and its implications on Pakistan and its people. This might prove more effective. ○ Name enemies of the state and shame them in public. ○ Graffiti is a good means of dissent. Vandalism is not. ○ Everyone must wear a black article of clothing or a black armband until this is over even outside of protests. ○ Black flags should be hoisted on the rooftops of houses and shops. ○ Unions should be contacted to encourage their participation in the protests and movement. ○ Pamphlets and banners are an effective way to counter the media blackout.-Don't Get Arrested! A premature arrest will only fill up jails, limit your future participation and cause trouble for your family” (The-Emergency-Telegraph, 2007)*

*“Organ Ring Steals Kidneys from India's poor labourers” (Headline New York Times, Sunday February 10 2008)*

*‘Making Art in a dictatorship’ was a topic discussed in Pakistan by the Artist Group: VASL inspired by a talk on the same title (Nagoris, 1996 October 8) VASL asked: Does the declaration of martial law powerfully override the relevance of art? As lawyers protest on the street, what is the role of Art? During martial law can Art afford to ignore Politics?*

*In 1967 Godard, Klein, Lelouch, Marker, Resnais and Varda (amongst others) made ‘Loin Du Vietnam’ (Marker, 1967). Within this documentary Resnais and Godard made fictional interludes. Godard begins in front of the camera operating a camera. His narration states that he has been denied permission to travel to Vietnam to film. As a result, he discloses that his experience of Vietnam has been entirely mediated through other people's images. Like Nostalgia (Frampton, 1971), the act of describing is being combined with the act of being described but the target here is our mediation of war images. Godard's contact zone with Vietnam becomes his own isolation and his empathy. A war that everyone could watch combined with the remoteness of a conflict on foreign soil. He resolves to mention Vietnam in every film he will henceforth make.*

*Where does my research question come in contact with content? Is it in Perec's way of seeing minutiae, Weiner's linguistic object analysis, Rabinow's self reflexive narrative, Ginsberg's confessions, Frampton's disjuncture between what we see and what we know or Godard's isolation and empathy? Is it in the latest news headlines, instructions on how to avoid being arrested, a protest march, documentation of domestic abuse, repetitive cycles of social and political domination, images of torture and war? And what does my film mean for people whose everyday circumstances do not allow them the privilege, means or time to ask these questions?*

*Although my research questions the boundaries of structural film and experimental ethnography, my process has led me to question whether this film's subject is its relationship to content. This is an anthropology that purposefully does not anchor knowledge through research in a specific group or society. Instead I propose a confusion of locality, language and intention to create a work “In search of structure” – a potential title for this work. A fragmentary narrative using a range of source material intertwining everyday observations of the local and global with experiments in ways of seeing and thinking that ask where is my contact zone with content?*

*Thinking about how as an outsider I could pragmatically reflect content from the Indian point of view has led me to the invention of a collaborative filmmaker from India who would allow for self-critique and direct contact with content as a lived experience. To explore the material substrate of my film language I have decided to link this collaboration with recording platforms so that broadly speaking wherever the audience recognises that something has been originated on Video, it is intimated that it is a work made by my Indian collaborator. This will allow me to take up both Godard's position of being Far from Vietnam and a position from inside society. To complete the war analogy, I intend to use this to ask: where is the front line of fieldwork? Is it physically in being in the structure and looking out, or is it being outside and looking in? I find myself back at the first quote that I wrote down in this passage of writing: "It is necessary to conceive of ethnography not as the experience and circumscribed "other" reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects" (Clifford, 1988 p41).*

## FIELD NOTES B

"Der standpunkt einer aufnahme ist bereits eine stellungnahme zur sache" – "Choosing the point of view of a take means choosing a perspective on the cause" (Videoladen-Zürich, 1980)

Visiting India did resolve my question as to what the subject of my film was going to be. I would come to realise that power and control was both my subject matter and a structuring problematic. But this did not come as a realisation straight away. It emerged from a developing process.

In my original draft of ideas I was still unsure about this. Instead I started with a newspaper headline reporting the physical exploitation of vulnerable people in India. This could have been any one of numerous daily headlines. I coupled this with *The Emergency Telegraph* giving advice on how to protest safely in Pakistan. My thoughts had turned from How can I situate my Western register in another country? to my own privilege in being able to even ask this question. Thus when I cited a discussion held by artists in Pakistan that asked: Does the declaration of martial law powerfully override the relevance of art? I could equally have been asking: "What is the relevance of my art?"

This began to feel like a crisis. Building up a practice and then ripping it up by questioning its relevance forced me to think about my personal politics. What could this film realistically achieve? Who could its audience be? Were my experiments simply manipulating people and events? One of the books that I read at this time was *Ethnographers in the Field: The psychology of research* (Wengle, 1988), which explores what sort of psychological stresses and strains beset anthropologists. Having not yet started *The Exception and the Rule*, I cite this book now for the stresses and strains that I placed on my images before they had even come into fruition<sup>39</sup>. *The Autonomous Object?* had shown me that taking a

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**39** The following text has been appropriated from Wengle and adjusted to describe the type of personal positional conflict I was asking of my imagined images at this time:

"The principle psychological difficulty faced by anthropologists making images during fieldwork is whether to maintain a stable sense of their own identity in these images. As a result of the sudden loss of their familiar social and physical signifiers, the images being created depict an ambiguity as to who and what they are now representing. They experience a disruption in their sense of personal continuity. The question becomes whether the filmmaker should repair this disruption to stabilize a viable sense of their own identity because by doing so they will be activating a series of behaviours designed to restore their familiar home world?"

The desire to alleviate this disruption may lead the filmmaker to seek out a member of the native culture with whom they share certain characteristics as a bridge between cultures. In extreme cases, the desire to maintain a western image formation will completely collapse, which leads to active efforts to reconstruct a new identity, first through appropriation of the native culture [going native], and later through identification with the work and the discipline of anthropology itself".



western mode of representation into another culture does change the images. But I had become unsure how to focus this transformative agency working with the type of content that makes news headlines. In essence I was pulling my practice apart on two fronts. I had become uncertain as to how much I should dictate the work by the psychology of my western identity coming to the field, and I was unsure of the relevance of my uncertain position when presented with human suffering and inequality.

These problems began to resolve only when I returned to my core concepts. This began when I went back and re-found a personal instruction that I had left for myself intended as a reminder of my intentionality at the outset.

Read yourself into a position of crisis

Make your film from there

Turning my crisis into a position and an instruction led me out of my anxiety. I concluded that if I create a way in to my film for the viewer where they enter from the position of the filmmaker, then I could take them with me as I sought to understand my position in relation to these issues. I articulated this by citing Godard's own crisis in *Far from Vietnam*. My intention with this reference was to show how a limitation could be transformed into a creative tool<sup>40</sup> as I was starting to piece my ideas back together. Having reaffirmed that I had a position and that the film would be a journey made with the audience, I now turned to what kind of journey this would be. This explains why the question: "Where does my research question come in contact with content?" is followed by a list of the different reflexive strategies I had uncovered so far. This list is an indication of how I was still imagining that the film's journey would unfold across different strategies of representation. I conclude in this paragraph "that the film's subject is its relationship to content". Within this statement is the subtle question: How is anthropological knowledge constituted? This issue was drawn to my attention in the article *Getting it right, Knowledge and evidence in Anthropology* (Hastrup 2004)<sup>41</sup>. As Hastrup states: "The point of anthropology is not to tell the world as it is (which would be practically impossible) but to interpret it and to suggest possible (theoretical) connections within it as perceived and inferred from being in touch with a world that cannot be taken for granted – unlike the home world. By definition the home world is where frames and events are seamlessly and imperceptibly fused ... Anthropological knowledge is not simply knowledge about particular events, practices and ideas, but about the processes by which these come to appear meaningful." (Hastrup, 2004 p 468)

Of course, at the time of drafting my original ideas I had not yet articulated this to myself with these terms; instead I had been working with experiments that were fragmented and fluctuating. Thus in this text I declare that this film "is a fragmentation of narrative styles that result from a fractured range of source material. A diaristic format that will intertwine observations of the local and global everyday with experiments in ways of seeing and thinking that ask where is my contact zone with content?"

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<sup>40</sup> Denied access to travelling to Vietnam as he intended, Godard uses his exclusion to speak about how his experience of Vietnam had been mediated through other people's images. In doing so he also constructs an image sequence that both reinforced and subverted power and control in the image per se. He turned his isolated position into a critique.

<sup>41</sup> The implication of Hastrups argument is that knowledge is 'relational' and so it cannot be disconnected from the objective of its investigation. She goes on to argue that not all experience is reducible to knowledge. This means that both historical events and social experiences have lost their immediate status as positive evidence of the connections between events, actions and experiences. Such connections are inferred by historians and anthropologists aiming at a kind of *explanation* beyond the truth of the events themselves. Anthropological knowledge, then, is not simply knowledge about particular events, practices and ideas, but about the processes by which these come to appear meaningful, perhaps inevitable, or mandatory, possibly contestable or even mad.

In this early writing this way of thinking led me to a solution. I had connected ‘content’ with the desire to create a voice of critique from inside my film looking out, rather than my actual position from the outside looking in. I had in light of my reading since then begun to release myself from attempting to film the world as a solid thing. Instead I had started to believe that knowledge is relational, leading me to a structure that would emphasise how knowledge appears meaningful. This led me to create a fictional collaborative partner from India through which I could gain access to a different perspective on the film and within the film. This character I decided to call Raj Kumar because Raj was the main character in the language books I was using to learn Hindi. In my mind the fictional character Raj represented the actual and real collaborations that would occur in making this film. The people I stayed with, the friends who would help me, the invitations to places I would not have known of otherwise, the problems I would face when taking a camera onto the street. But Raj would also represent a way of incorporating Wengle’s psychological analysis about control, authorship and identity. Raj could confuse the relationship between where the ideas and images for the film were coming from. Early on I resolved to ambiguously link the images that Raj would claim as ‘his’ with Digital Video as a recording mechanism. “So that broadly speaking wherever the audience recognises that something has being originated on Video then it was probably filmed by Raj”. Framing authorship in this way would make the influence of Raj a perceptual issue personal to each viewer as the work would fuse formats and materials.

#### **FIELD NOTES B:**

“Observational cinema demands that the filmmakers forge a place within the process and the action from which to communicate. Such a place can only be founded through relationships understood as process, involving the constant negotiation, the giving and withholding of permission and trust. Thus the difference between text and process ... hinges on the balance of power film-makers manage to achieve with those that they film”.(Grimshaw 2005 p23)

This observation by Grimshaw has helped me prepare to head to Pakistan to construct my subject using the terms power, control and authorship. Grimshaw highlights the personal and public negotiation that goes into making non-fiction films. How the balance of power between the filmmaker and the subject filmed is a relationship understood as process sometimes hidden but highlighted in the work I am researching here. This negotiation is evident in *The autonomous object?* as this playfully explores the issue of authorship<sup>42</sup> while in *The Exception and the Rule* this will be argued using tropes traditionally ascribed to the documentary film. These tropes bring hierarchies that are not easily circumscribed because of the way they have been reinforced in so many other films. It is not enough to imagine that a documentary vernacular can be problematized by making the filmmaker's role in the production explicit as is the case in *The autonomous object?* This can be argued to be another aesthetic – an image of process. Instead the negotiation is for a filmic real in which a process is instituted as a process and not the documentation of a process. This phraseology belongs to Gidal.

“The film as “record” of its own making and the modernist/post modernist contingencies of such, must not be understood as some kind of record–of, but rather as the abstract of that. In the concrete empirical sense this does not mean a film that documents the filmmaking techniques via what we are given to see by the illusionistic capacities of the photochemical recoding device (film). Rather, it means film’s abstract, a filmic real in which a process is instituted as a process. A process of its own contradictions of presentation/representation, reproduction/effacement, attempted narrativizational hold of the spectator/impossible narrativizing of the spectator... This is how “record of its own making” must be understood. A radical sense of realism. Such a film is not about some ‘other’ real, but it is real” (Gidal, 1989 p73)

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<sup>42</sup> Whether the camera and or/ its subject matter is acting as the agent, mediator and/or the performer.

Currently, I am thinking about how introducing text and voice within these processes will add hierarchical relationships. In documentary films the traditional hierarchy is that the image is subjugated by sound<sup>43</sup>. The use of sound radically undermines sight as the central condition of the films intelligibility. Documentary narration is frequently used to reinforce what we are seeing. These narrative structures are inherent in the film's construct as soon as one image is followed by another image. My intention with this work is to reinforce my fragmented image structure by repeating the fragmentation using voice. The complexity will arise from the overlapping delays that will coexist or mirror the ordering of the images. As voice brings an equal relationship to content, with it as the image I also see the voice as a medium through which I can ask where the subject is situated? Introducing Raj Kumar as a second character in this negotiation of subject and subjectivity creates an opportunity for a conversation about this. I see this conversation as a dialogue between Gidal's drive for a "filmic real in which a process is instituted as a process" and Hastrup's questioning of how anthropological knowledge is constituted. In other words, *the film is a process at work that documents the changes in my position as I receive knowledge*. The key to its success will lie in how well I am able to transcend the present political boundaries of structural/anthropological filmmaking by harnessing the presentational strategy of the processes and materials of the film's construction to critique the politics of how this knowledge came to be meaningful for me.

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<sup>43</sup> Which is why you can put sound over any image and create a confluence as if the image were naturally cohering with that sound.

## FIELD NOTES C:

### Textual experiments for *The Exception and the Rule*

*Statement of Intent* (Weiner 1968)

“In the 1960s Lawrence Weiner developed an artistic use of language in reference to materials that makes a physical realization of his linguistically defined work unnecessary” (Stemmrich and Fietzek, 2004 p9). This was explained in his *Statement of Intent*

#### *The artist may construct the piece*

The piece may be fabricated  
The piece need not be built  
Each being consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership (Weiner, 1968)

By setting out to deal with art that does not make a unique object, Weiner showed that ‘everything’ is an object, including a sentence. And because he establishes that language is itself a material, his art is still dealing with real materials and real relationships (of human beings to those materials).

*A conversation with William Furlong concerning 20 works by Lawrence Weiner* (Weiner, 1980) presented in London 1980<sup>44</sup>

WF: AN OBJECT TOSSED FROM ONE COUNTRY TO ANOTHER. What object and which countries?

LW: An object, and most feasible for tossing would be countries that butt on each other.

WF: Why should an object be tossed from one country to another?

LW: Not to fall into the habit of answering questions with questions – why not? Movement is a sculptural procedure, movement is a sculptural fact. Sculpture deals with objects. The placement and the movement of one object from one place to another is a legitimate sculptural fact.

WF: Is the statement an intention or a description?

LW: It’s an empirical reality: an object tossed from one country to another.

WF: We are to believe that no other action is necessary other than the object of language as we’ve expressed it, or as I’ve expressed it and as you’ve defined it in text.

LW: If it is possible without confusing the issue by relying upon documentation and relying upon illustration, to convey the same information by physically tossing one object from one country to another, I think it would be the same. It is a form of language. Language is just the most convenient at this point.

WF: Could the language describe the activity in any other way, and if it did, would the idea become different?

LW: Well, it conceivably could. But that’s asking if a red painting in fact is different from a blue painting. Yes, of course, it would be a different work of Art.

Weiner is not only creating sculpture with his words, he is also creating images [text as image] and images in the viewer’s mind’s eye [projected on the work by the audience]. This has influenced my overarching film structure. I now release myself from filming a ‘real’ subject to create a cycle between fact and fiction. A film with layers of mediation and incommensurability made visible and explicit. Making an ethnographic film is to step into existing representations produced by journalists, anthropologists, historians, creative writers, television and popular media. I felt my structure should reflect these local effects of globalizing processes. An oscillation between Weiner’s empirical reality and the placement of an image in a context with which it is not conventionally associated to unsettle our normal expectations.

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<sup>44</sup> This extract is an interaction between William Furlong and Lawrence Weiner recorded in audio. The structure of the tape is based on 20 works shown at Anthony D’Offay Gallery, London in Autumn 1980. As the interview proceeds, the voice of Miranda Frawley can be heard reading texts by Lawrence Weiner.

*Boston New York Exchange Shape* (Huebler: 1968)

“The work “Boston New York Exchange Shape” included maps of the downtown areas of New York and Boston, each with a superimposed hexagon. The hexagons defined the same dimension of space in each city. At each of the six corners, Huebler designated a letter of the alphabet (from A to F on the Boston Map; A’ to F’ on the New York map). He typed a list of the specific sites demarcated by the corners on an 8 1/2 x 11 – inch sheet of paper and then travelled to each site, where he placed a white, one-inch square sticker and made photographs”. (Alberro, 2003 p77)

In *Boston New York Exchange Shape* Huebler queries the status of the ‘objecthood’ of sculpture by presenting work where the existence of each sculpture is a document of its documentation. This takes the form of photographs, maps, drawings and descriptive language. Huebler insists that:

“The marker material and the shape described by the location of markers have no special significance, other than to demark the limits of the piece.  
The permanence and destiny of the markers have no special significance.  
The duration pieces exist only in the documentation of the marker’s destiny within a selected period of time.  
The proposal projects do not differ from the other pieces as idea, but do differ in the extent of their material substrate” (Alberro, 2003 p75)

Two currents are running throughout these statements: one frames the material of the works; the other, less tangible or material, demarcates ‘the idea’. Together they parallel, respectively, the material and the phenomenological aspects of minimal art and the structuralist elements of the theory of conceptual art. They also impact ethnographic fieldwork techniques because Huebler is attempting to remove aesthetic decision-making from his photographic records. “I use the camera” declared Huebler “as a dumb copying device that only serves to document whatever phenomena appear before it through the conditions set by a system. No ‘aesthetic’ choices are possible. Other people often make the photographs it makes no difference” (Alberro, 2003 p77). In Anthropology the most fundamental distinction between various observational strategies concerns the extent to which the observer will be a participant in the setting being studied (Davis, 1999). This still constitutes a system even if the self-reflexive status of the anthropologist photographs might not be as visible as Huebler’s system of spatial determinacy – they still belong to a strategised form of behaviour and decision-making. This led me to construct a narration<sup>45</sup> for my own hexagon system where I would replace New York and Boston with Mumbai and Karachi. As soon as I decided to combine these two particular cities, I became curious to see where the partition might exist in the actual material filmed. The question of whether a problematized location of the images would override the procedural system? Or whether the viewer would take the system as the content and accept that the markers have no special significance.

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<sup>45</sup> My Voiceover “ I would send people out to record these places set by my system. ‘Aesthetic’ choices were not important to me. I wanted the camera to work as a mere duplicating device to document whatever phenomena appeared before it. I wanted to remove decision-making and intuitive processes and then I wanted to dismantle this material into a vehicle of expression and feeling, to make and remake these images, analogous to models of language where meaning is produced by relationships. So that words are broken down into letters in multiple ways each and every time I viewed the material.

## Voice / Text

At this point I am still considering that the intertitle text and the voice text are of the same theoretical project. The principal difference between them is that an intertitle text is read in the viewer's own voice. But as the voice text evolves, I can see a point where the intertitle text position might require that it be analyzed separately. However, at this time I have collected texts not knowing what form they will take. I have never envisioned this is a film that has constant narration; rather, I have always considered that narration would be used sparingly.

[1] Raj Kumar and Johannes Fabian (Fabian, 2002)

*Indian Voice of Raj Kumar:* ..... You must accept that neither political space nor political time are natural resources. They are instruments of power. You admit this with regard to space. You understand the monstrous lies you used to take our resources. But for this to even occur, your expansive, aggressive, and oppressive societies not only needed space to occupy, they also needed to occupy 'Time' in the name of progress, development, modernity - and their negative mirror images: stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition. Within this you cannot exclude the possibility, to say the least, that the repetitive enactment of research by thousands of aspiring and established practitioners like yourself, are a sustained effort to maintain a certain type of relation between you - and me. And that as long as you continue to present us 'as seen', as long as knowledge is conceived in terms of models, symbol systems, and so forth - then you deny me my equality. Why should I accept your domination as a fact? It is you who must find a new way to say something. The structures of power in your film should reflect the structures of power in society. Otherwise - you observe us like insects, one foot in your country and one in the forest.

In this text the character Raj Kumar personalises the critique of anthropology set out by Johannes Fabian (Fabian, 2002). Formulated as a question, the topic of Fabian's essays was: *How has Anthropology been defining or constructing its object - the other?* This is a question I have been asking of myself, and it explains my interest in turning this text into a personal allegation. Using Raj Kumar to voice this critique makes it clear that, in the field, 'I' am in fact 'the other' who is perceived to represent, (however inaccurately), a collective called anthropology. Twisting this western reflexive criticism into the words of someone within the culture is a repetitive re-enactment of a power relation that the sentiment is critiquing. This is actually a dialogue I am interested in having through the film with the film's viewer about their relationship to the images they are watching. My real target is a twisting of Fabian's question *How has Anthropology been defining or constructing its object?* into: *How has Cinema been defining or constructing its object - the viewer?* As Anna Grimshaw has argued, the different ways of seeing in anthropology emerged and consolidated as a discipline within the same historical moment as cinema's consolidation. Using Raj to voice this allegation reinforces that time is an instrument of power not only in anthropology - but also in film.

[2] From: 'Rough draft of a letter' (Perec, 1997 p54)

*Western Voice* ... I think of you often, sometimes I go into a café, I sit near the door, I order a coffee I arrange my packets of cigarettes, a box of matches, a writing pad, my felt-pen on the fake marble table. I spend a long time stirring my cup of coffee with the teaspoon, I pretend to be preoccupied, to be reflecting, as if I had a decision to make. At the top and to the right of the sheet of paper, I inscribe the date, sometimes the place, sometimes the time, I pretend to be writing a letter. I write slowly, very slowly, as slowly as I can, I trace, I draw each letter, each word, I check the punctuation marks. I stare attentively at a small notice, the price list, at a piece of ironwork, a blind, the hexagonal yellow ashtray.

This extract of voice is about the different experience of time that comes with experiencing solitude. How being away from home (alone) allows for minor thoughts and observations. How we sometimes pretend to be preoccupied with reflective thoughts when we are actually blank. How our thoughts are actually about being in another space. This text slows the pace down. It is about sitting and being in a space and losing oneself to a performance staged for oneself that also asks the viewer of the film to do the same. In the context of this film it also describes the process behind the film. The waiting and the repetition of daily actions that are hard to capture on film because of the agency that film has as a framing device that says look closely. It also begins with a romantic notion “I think of you often” that could easily belong to a story.

[3] 10 common criticisms of this film:

Text: White on black to appear word by word as punctuation through the film so that each sentence appears as a thought from inside the film.

- [1] The images are nostalgic and exploitative*
- [2] The images are made by a [white] male*
- [3] This film may never reach the viewer*
- [4] The characters in this film including the first person singular are entirely fictitious*
- [5] This film is only comfortable with otherness as long as it is not really other*
- [6] This film does not credit its participants or its sources*
- [7] This film utilises old ideas*
- [8] The world already has too many films*
- [9] This film does not substantiate itself as a scientific account*
- [10] I'm too sad to tell you number ten*

For viewers it is unclear who has made these criticisms, though our best guess is that the filmmaker did so. We are told they are important, and they seem to present themselves as facts, although they are opinions. Coming from within the film as if they belong to the film, they challenge our position as viewers. Should we take them as Chapter headings? Should we read the images that come next in light of the new criticism? Each criticism is valid, but the intention here is to create a multiplicity of narrative structures that simultaneously act in parallel. This will be occurring across geographies (Karachi, Mumbai, London); Language (English, Urdu, Hindi); film language (image, text, sound and silence); and subject matter (from developing processes to knowledge presented as fact). The speed with which the single words appear on the screen will mean that they feel like punctuation. The idea that these happen over the timeline of the whole film should encourage the sense that there are different timescales of knowledge development occurring over the course of the film. The last criticism ‘I’m too sad to tell you number ten’ documents that moment where self-critique becomes immobilising.

Multiple readings - Lawrence Weiner: Performance or reportage.

“Nobody can think and hit someone at the same time”.  
(Sontag 2007 pg 10)

How might my narration be heard? Sontag’s sentiment is that to engage the thought process of an individual is to otherwise occupy them in the act of thinking. In *On Photography* (Sontag 2001) she approaches the problem of imagery from multiple perspectives, one of which is female. Sontag quotes from *Three Guineas* (Woolf 1938) where in

an exchange with a male correspondent Woolf asserted that atrocity photographs from Spain would depend for their effect on whether the viewer was a man or a woman. I am very interested in this idea of approaching imagery from a multiplicity of perspectives, including gender. I have since concluded that some passages of voice will be in English and others will be in Urdu. I will also question whether my collaborative partner Raj Kumar is male or female and to experiment with whether my narration is read or performed.

“While we may have endorsed the demise of the grand narratives and their implied truth claims, we are still in need of narrative imagination. The objective of the anthropological narrative (of whatever scale) is to provide a mode of imagining how individual actions and collective illusions are interlinked, and how they are framed by an implicit sense of a common good. To explain how the world works is not to explain it away but to make connections between social ‘facts’ that may provide unprecedented insight into the workings of social worlds in general”. (Hastrup, 2004 p468 - 469)



#### Chapter 4: Practice based submission 2: The Exception and the Rule

“Earlier I stated that this film’s subtext is to question the boundaries of structural film and experimental ethnography. Asking these questions above has led me to conclude that the film’s subject is its relationship to content. This has led me to an anthropology that purposefully does not anchor knowledge, through research, in a specific group or society. Instead I have a confusion of locality, language and intention to create a work ‘in search of structure’ – a potential title for this work. A fragmentation of narrative styles that result from a fractured range of source material. A diaristic format that will intertwine observations of the local and global everyday with experiments in ways of seeing and thinking that ask: where is my contact zone with content? (From unpublished field notes, Brad Butler, written 2007).

“Shot primarily in Karachi, *The Exception and the Rule* employs a variety of strategies in negotiating consciously political themes. Avoiding traditional documentary modes, the film frames everyday activities within a period of civil unrest, incorporating performances to camera, public interventions and observation. This complex work supplements Mirza/Butler’s Artangel project *The Museum of Non Participation*” (Webber, 2009).

This research began with the question: How can structural film expand the language of experimental ethnography? Since then, the argument has developed that both visual anthropology and structural film are contested and complex sites of representational, aesthetic and political micro-histories. It is possible to position significant arguments along this path, but equally the sophistication, complexity and excitement of these approaches are due to their confluence of shifting and often contradictory philosophical, material and sensorial claims. As argued in the preceding Chapters, there are multiple histories in the development of visual anthropology, including (but not exclusively) the modernist vision of Vertov, the technological changes in film production, the crisis of representation circa 1970, the raw realism of photography, the cultural bias within the film apparatus and the limits of the photographic frame. Amidst these confluences this thesis has sought to highlight the arguments that overlap with structural film. These included critical debates in the 1973 International Committee on Ethnographic and Sociological film, Augé’s warning of a global image crisis, Grimshaw’s situating of vision at the centre of the development of anthropology and Marcus’s six cinematic extensions of text based analysis. In addition, the claims for structural film have been problematised from Sitney’s key characteristics, to Le Grice’s apparatus theory to Cornwell’s materialism to Gidal’s structural materialism. Taken together, these material and metaphysical claims have extended beyond the multiple ways of addressing social issues to include how anthropological knowledge itself is constituted. As Hastrup states: “Anthropological knowledge is not simply knowledge about particular events, practices and ideas, but about the processes by which these come to appear meaningful.” (Hastrup, 2004 p468)

*The Exception and the Rule* proposes to take these issues and situate them within a film that argues through these complex politics of knowledge while still reflecting the local and global situation in the field. It is the intention in this, in keeping with the argument of my research question, that the viewer experience the problems of representation in this film. This is an objective argued throughout this thesis but one that finds particular volition in the work of Gidal and Rouch who, in contrasting ways, ask the viewer to make theory and not just to consume it. Thus *The Exception and the Rule* proposes itself as a series of questions to the

viewer in a choreography of consciousness, body, senses and vision that first engages the viewer's brain and next the body whilst simultaneously criss-crossing the geopolitical border of India and Pakistan in a way that would be impossible for the vast majority of nationals of either country. Viewed in its entirety, this multilayered fragmentation of situated knowledge interrogates vision in order to explore Grimshaw's contention "That what we see is inseparable from how we see" (Grimshaw, 2001 p11), whereas the representational conflicts within the film *mise-en-scène* reflect issues raised by Augé and Marcus, amongst others. This Chapter draws back into this argument *references and ideas already quoted* in this thesis to exemplify how they have now found expression in a film form.

The following analysis is developed as an example scene by scene in order to argue the developing theoretical and social issues at stake in this work. Nevertheless it is advised that the film should be viewed now before reading further. As quoted in Chapter 1, Marcus argues that certain arguments are more easily articulated in a cinematic medium than in a written one because these characteristics are essentially cinematic narrative techniques

A Black and White image: Two people are sitting on the floor. To their right is a plastic bag, a can of Holsten Pils and a can of Carling Special. One man (A) has a woolly hat on and legs stretched out, the other (B) sits supported by one knee raised. (A) takes a cigarette and puts it in his mouth, he offers a cigarette to (B) who takes it. A passer by crosses frame and (A) asks him for spare change, but is ignored. The wind is agitating the plastic bag and (B) appears drunk in his shaky movements as (A) asks another passerby for money but is ignored. A double decker bus passes and we now know we are in London. As (A) light's up the sound of a sitar and police sirens grows in volume.

*The Exception and the Rule* starts an ends with scenes filmed in Brixton. It is not revealed in the film but the first scene is shot from the front window of my house while the last scene is from the back window. It is, however, thematically relevant to this work to start and end in London for a number of anthropological and structural reasons. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is a structural concern of Le Grice that the viewer's attention be first drawn to the structuring principles of a film in order to create a more open dialogue with the viewer. With this in mind this first image of Brixton is used to draw into this work possible connections between the close world of the filmmaker and the far away world of the rest of the film (India, Pakistan). I have come to question whether this operates in the exact way that Le Grice is referring to. His concern is, I believe, for the empowerment of the viewer allowing them to actively enter a work without facing authoritative certainty. An image of Brixton does not do this, as it is not a structuring principle for the whole film. Nevertheless, this image does reveal that the source and terms of origin of the film production are from the west, while the social plight of the people filmed means that any forthcoming social issues will also be seen (by a western viewer) to be problems at home and not just abroad. This is a structuring principle that I borrowed from anthropologist Paul Rabinow, who begins his field studies of Morocco with his dissatisfaction with domestic politics in the United States (Rabinow, 1977). It is also an application of David MacDougall's proposition already cited in this thesis that "Once an image has been given, the entire rest of the film is an attempt to explain it – or to explain the other images that have been brought into play

to explain it. The film is a progressive unfolding from that initial, presumptuous image addressed to the audience” (MacDougall, 2005 p38).

The sound of sirens develops into a multitude of voices as the image cuts to a news report from Pakistan. The image abstracted by a red bar first depicts men with guns then the 7/11 explosion residue and then riots in Pakistan. The voiceover is in Urdu with English subtitles: Last year I tried to go to Mumbai | I wrote to the embassy in Delhi | I asked them for | permission | to film in the North or in Mumbai | It took 8 months for them to turn me down | It’s tough to make movies in | ... in Pakistan. So I thought I’d go to | London, Cuba, Dubai or even Yugoslavia | and then came this call from Delhi | It showed me ... | that as a Karachiite I could also make | movies in Karachi | I decided that in every film I would | mention | Partition | With no rhyme nor reason [PAUSE] When the people making this film | asked me to collaborate | I said “Sure I’m full of ideas” |

INTERTITLE: ten common criticisms of this film

But then ideas aren’t much | The fact that Delhi had turned me down | gave all the ideas I had |

CUT TO STREETS OF BOMBAY TIMELAPSE WITH 4 FRAME STRUCTURAL RYTHMIC IMAGE INTERVENTIONS OF BLUE THEN RED FRAMES, SOUND OF TRAFFIC HAS RYTHMIC TEMPO

A sort of hollow sound | I thought of filming images of ‘my’ Karachi | The most alive, the warmest of places | And then to make the length of each shot | relate to the length of each article on the | violence in Pakistan [PAUSE] But it required an effect | I couldn’t get it | I couldn’t seem to connect things | If all art is political | How can you make a “Political” film?

INTERTITLE: EACH WORD SEPERATELY AND FAST PACED: This film is only comfortable with otherness as long as it is not really other

This scene is built around the problematizing of authority and access for the viewer. It intertwines the raw realist aesthetic of news footage with a personal testament that argues a camera politic from (it claims) inside Pakistan. The complexity within this scene is in disrupting the conventional categories being used in this sequence. While the news material reinforces the most frequently imported and exported images of Pakistan, this material is visually abstracted with a red banner, smaller size and pulled out of sync with itself. While the voice describes logistical barriers faced by the filmmaker, the images travel from Pakistan to London, back to Pakistan and then to Mumbai.

This sequence directly introduces several of Marcus’s categories for establishing the analytic presence of the ethnographer in their text. In their intertwining of Pakistan and India the images emphasise the simultaneity of ethnographic representation and thus allude to the complexity of cultural movements that cross physical and mental borders. This crossover is repeated many times in the film in order to suggest connections and meanings across the two countries. This however, is agitated by the Urdu voice that emphasises partition as a censorship on both ideas and physical movement. This sets up a further politic

throughout this work, that despite its claims otherwise, this film could only have been made by an outsider with the access and freedom to move between these two countries. Nevertheless, by contrast the voiceover as spoken by a native Urdu speaker does appear to be registering the indigenous voice. This is another of Marcus's categories<sup>46</sup> that anthropology should be open to the registering of indigenous voices without pre-empting how these voices might be located. By stating that this voice belongs to a filmmaker, the film supports Marcus's contention to work against any us-them exoticism. The viewer becomes aware that there is a likely relationship between the images and the voice leading them through this film. This us-them exoticism is then further agitated with the intertitle "This film is only comfortable with otherness as long as it is not really other" which suggests that these categories and the film's narrative cannot be taken for granted.

The representational claims within these images are an important politic in this sequence. The opening news clip is an un-contextualised image sequence that jumps from a man with megaphone urgently gesticulating, to wounded people being taken out of an ambulance. An American news reporter stands in a crowd as subtitles translate his interview: "They tried to destabilise Pakistan because we are supporting America". Benazir Bhutto addresses a rally before we cut to the 7/11 attacks in London. A missile launches, an army marches and Pakistani lawyers throw stones. As Augé might argue, the speed and scale of this image montage are enormous, yet the images feel cohesive and familiar as they are sourced from a library of well-known historical images and the history of television. As articulated earlier in this thesis, "Television itself willingly becomes its own object and narrates the glorious hours of its brief history as if it were ours too, and indeed it is inasmuch as we have lived through and by the image" (Augé, 1999 p109).

*The Exception and the Rule* quotes this image history, reminding its viewers that these are the images that they bring themselves to cinema. Used in the film in this way, this sequence proposes to make these images its object and its subject. This is reinforced where the voice of Raj Kumar states: | I thought of filming images of 'my' Karachi | The most alive, the warmest of places | And then to make the length of each shot | relate to the length of each article on the | violence in Pakistan [PAUSE] But it required an effect | Raj proposes the idea that the length of a shot could be connected to news content. The voice then states a suspicion of this kind of "effect" just as the film embarks on one of Sitney's defining qualities of structural film, a 4-frame flicker. This rapid reference to effects, duration and content is designed to make the viewer suspicious of the aesthetic composition of this film. To ask the viewer to experience Augé's contention cited in Chapter 2 that "From time to time, all references to any reality whatsoever disappear. Thus advertising plays upon the supposed effects of its prior repetitions and proceeds by way of allusion, by self referential quotation" (Augé, 1999 p108). The viewer, assaulted by the flicker, is left to question the representational quality of ALL the surrounding images. Raj speaks for the viewer experiencing the film: I couldn't get it | I couldn't seem to connect things This is followed by a question that has run throughout this research: If all art is political | How can you make a "Political" film?

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46      Problematizing the spatial: Problematizing the temporal: Perspective and Voice: The appropriation of concepts and narrative devices: Bifocality: The contemplation of alternative possibilities

Crowds at night in Mumbai, the sound of traffic in the distance dislocated from the image. A female English voice speaks: THIS FILM IS BEING MADE IN COLLABORATION WITH THE VIDEO ACTIVIST FROM PAKISTAN RAJ KUMAR. RAJ WAS INTRODUCED TO ME BY THE SWISS VIDEO ACTIVIST GROUP VIDEOLADEN ZURICH WHO MADE THE FILM ZURI BRANNT – ZURICH IS BURNING – IN 1980. IN THIS FILM THEY STATE THAT CHOOSING THE POINT OF VIEW OF A TAKE MEANS CHOOSING A PERSPECTIVE ON THE CAUSE. OR PARAPHRASED, POSITIONING THE CAMERA MEANS TO CHOOSE SIDES. RAJ AND I HAVE CHOSEN OUR SIDES. I WILL SHOOT ON FILM AND HE WILL SHOOT ON VIDEO. Film cuts to photographs of policemen and policewomen in public spaces. SO BROADLY SPEAKING THE SEQUENCES THAT YOU MIGHT RECOGNISE AS BEING FILMED ON VIDEO WERE PROBABLY FILMED BY RAJ. THESE PHOTOGRAPHS ARE HIS. RAJ HAS BEEN CHOOSING A POLICEMAN AT RANDOM, IN THE STREET, EVERYDAY AND THEN FOLLOWING THEM WHEREVER THEY GO. HOWEVER LONG OR FAR THEY TRAVEL. EACH PURSUIT IS CAREFULLY DOCUMENTED WITH PHOTOS AND TIME CODED TEXT. RAJ SAYS THE CHASE CAN LAST FOR HOURS AND ENDS WHEN THE POLICEMAN ENTERS A PRIVATE SPACE, HIS HOME, CAR OR OFFICE ETC. HE TELLS ME THAT ONE CAN RELATE THIS TO THE FAMOUS DISTINCTION BETWEEN MAKING POLITICAL FILMS AND MAKING FILMS POLITICALLY. [pause] RAJ SAYS YOU CAN SEE HIM IN SOME OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS CAUGHT BY THE PHOTOGRAPHER DOCUMENTING THE PURSUIT. Film cuts to timelapse inside male only train carriage, After one minute the timelapse continues but the camera is on streets at night. The camera is on the move creating streaks of light.

This sequence reinforces the contention that runs throughout structural film and anthropology: that there is no neutral image. It also gives clues to the viewers that this fictional film uses a factual documentary language to create what Marcel Schwierin calls “a non-documentary” (Schwierin, 2009 p1). This is created by the multiple positions that the viewer is asked to take up. Thus the voiceover states: CHOOSING THE POINT OF VIEW OF A TAKE MEANS CHOOSING A PERSPECTIVE ON THE CAUSE. OR PARAPHRASED, POSITIONING THE CAMERA MEANS TO CHOOSE SIDES. This is a rephrasing of the selectivity, cultural bias and politics of the camera apparatus quoted in Chapter 1, including both Young’s argument that “normal behaviour being filmed is the behaviour that is normal for the subject under the circumstances, including, but not exclusively, the fact that they are being filmed” (Young, 1975 p102) and Timothy and Patsy Asch’s statement that the filmmaker and the sound person introduce selectivity into filmmaking by “angling the camera, choosing the frame, focus, time, placement of microphone and so on ... Bear in mind though that the same process of selection occurs when we look at film images. We read these signs through our individual and cultural biases” (Asch & Asch, 1975 p338).

Despite the many fictional and appropriated structures in *The Exception and the Rule*, the film *Zuri Braant* (Videoladen-Zürich, 1980) does exist. This document of the 1980 youth uprising in Zurich<sup>47</sup> is structured to confront the passivity of the viewer with the suggestion that there is no neutral state of non-participation.

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<sup>47</sup> “Anarchically impudent and self-ironical documentation of the youth uprising in Zurich in 1980. The film arose from a video project of the scene itself, chronologically accompanying the events (produced with the work of Markus Sieber, Werner Schweizer, Marcel Müller, Patricia Loggia, Thomas Krempke, and others). The prologue depicts Zurich as an inhuman concrete desert, rich but lacking any money for youth culture. The most important phases of the conflict follow: the opera house demonstration, the conversion of factory halls into an autonomous youth center, and the public debates about squatting. We see scenes from the legendary Swiss magazine broadcast of the television discussion 'Telebühne', in which representatives of the youth movement, disguised as the upright 'Herr und Frau Müller', provocatively demand a tougher approach and the use of napalm” (Frieling 1980 p1)

This notion is examined in more detail later in the conclusion, but the implication to the viewer of *The Exception and the Rule* is that Zurich and Karachi, despite their huge differences, must have some connection even if it is just at the level of activism: **RAJ WAS INTRODUCED TO ME BY THE SWISS VIDEO ACTIVIST GROUP VIDEOLADEN ZURICH** This is an idea explored later in this thesis in *The Museum of Non Participation*, but in *The Exception and the Rule* at the minimum this citation directly references a social disturbance in a western city drawing further attention to the shifting us-them positioning in this work.

When viewers are told that **RAJ HAS BEEN CHOOSING A POLICEMAN AT RANDOM, IN THE STREET, EVERYDAY AND THEN FOLLOWING THEM WHEREVER THEY GO. HOWEVER LONG OR FAR THEY TRAVEL**, they are also experiencing contradictions. These police from Mumbai could not have been filmed by Raj because the film has already told us that Raj has been refused permission to travel. This subtle identification conflict is exaggerated by Raj's name which belongs to a Kashmiri Hindu well known in India and Pakistan for quitting his former job as a police inspector to become a famous Bollywood star. Further reverberations of fictional content are subtly inserted using a factual vernacular. This supports the idea proposed by anthropologist Young cited in Chapter 1 that "The camera tends to lie but the audience tends to believe" (Young, 1975 p100)

In my own terms I have come to refer to this film as a work that operates with multiple immersion levels. In this I refer to the different levels of experience or knowledge that the audience can access within this work – a replication of my experiences in the field where I gained access to some areas but discovered barriers in others. This is exemplified in both my relationship to Urdu/Hindi and my limited access to female gendered spaces, to name but two. Not being fluent in Urdu meant that language was both a barrier and an opportunity for mistranslation. This is reflected in the next scene in *The Exception and the Rule* where an Urdu interview remains un-translated to the English speaking audience.

But these different immersion levels are embedded in the film language structure. Thus Raj's tracking of policeman is a direct re-contextualising of the conceptual artwork *Following Piece* (Acconci, 1969), itself a famous critique of voyeurism, while the train carriage depicted in *The Exception and the Rule* is a male only space which flows into the late night streets of Mumbai perhaps implying this is a male dominated time of day. Seen from the United Kingdom the stalking of policemen references recent "terror" laws where it is now illegal to film the police, while the statement **RAJ SAYS YOU CAN SEE HIM IN SOME OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS CAUGHT BY THE PHOTOGRAPHER DOCUMENTING THE PURSUIT** apparently turns the camera back onto the filmmaker, who is himself stalked by the camera he has set in motion.

In the terms of structural film the audience is being made aware of their own situation as an active viewer. As set out by Le Grice, this is an awareness of the movement of identification between the camera, a recorded action and the spectators conceptual structuring. This, Le Grice argues, is the difficult translation of where the spectator's place is within the film in which he quotes Metz "not only do we see, but we seem

to produce what we see” (Le Grice, 2001 p203). As quoted in Chapter 2, this resonates with Grimshaw’s assertion in anthropology that “what we see is inseparable from how we see” (Grimshaw, 2001 p11). This is also referred to directly in the dialogue **RAJ AND I HAVE CHOSEN OUR SIDES. I WILL SHOOT ON FILM AND HE WILL SHOOT ON VIDEO. SO BROADLY SPEAKING THE SEQUENCES THAT YOU MIGHT RECOGNISE AS BEING FILMED ON VIDEO WERE PROBABLY FILMED BY RAJ.** The very nature of the structural image material qualities are apparently being linked to inside/outside positions within the culture being filmed.

INTERTITLE:

Interview with Naseem Mohammed

Using predetermined questions and answers selected by director and chosen at random by Naseem Mohammed

A man in a public street is handed a piece of paper by the camera crew. He reads out the text in Urdu as others listen. The text is not translated into English. He finishes his dialogue and the scene cuts to newspaper articles in Urdu and English superimposed with Karachi streets including political graffiti on the walls. Some of these wall chalkings are translated with words on the screen. **EVERY VOTER HERE IS YOURS ONLY – MALIK TAIMAR AIMAN | JOIN OUR MARCH AHEAD WE ARE ALL WITH YOU**

[English voice] I think of you often. Sometimes I go to a café. I sit near the door. I order a coffee. I arrange my packets of cigarettes, my box of matches, a writing pad, my felt pen on the fake marble table. I spend a long time stirring my cup of coffee with a teaspoon. I pretend to be preoccupied. To be reflecting, as if I had a decision to make. At the top and to the right of the sheet of paper I inscribe the date...

[Graffiti translation] **COMMON PROTEST AGAINST DICATATORS AND BLACKMAILERS NISHTAR PARK, MUTAHIDA MAJLIS E AMAL 27 AUGUST 4PM**

... sometimes the place, sometimes the time. I pretend to be writing a letter. I write slowly. Very slowly, as slowly as I can... [Graffiti translation] **CALL FOR PROTEST, NISHTAR PARK 9 SEPTEMBER MMA**

... I trace, I draw each letter, each word. I check the punctuation marks [pause] I stare attentively at a small notice, the price list, at a piece of iron work, a blind, the hexagonal yellow ashtray

[Graffiti translation] **DESECRATION TOWARDS THE PROPHET (PBUH) MEANS OPEN WAR FOR THE SUNNI TEHRİK**

This sequence begins with an interview to camera in Urdu using **predetermined questions and answers selected by director and chosen at random by Naseem Mohammed.** The script, which is not translated into English, is a quotation that is also an artwork from Joseph Beuys whose practice has frequently been claimed to be an anthropological enquiry<sup>48</sup> (Schneider and Wright, 2006, Zurbrugg, 1993, Beuys and Harlan, 2004):

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<sup>48</sup> “I try to go further on over the threshold where modern art ends and anthropological art has to start” (Beuys 1993 p64)

“Art is the image of a human being. This means that when a person is confronted with art, then they are in fact confronted with their own self, and so open their eyes. And so it is the creative person who is addressed, their creativity, their freedom, their autonomy. And this is only possible using the concept of art; however, this concept must be made more comprehensive. You cannot and should not deal with this concept traditionally and say: that is what artists do, and that is what engineers do ... But you can get beyond this concept. And the only escape route is a more comprehensive concept of art that is anthropological and that is taken seriously: that everyone is an artist, and that every person has a creative core” (Bueys, 1977)

This artwork was intended by Beuys to elucidate the relationship between art and society that sweeps through his work (Beuys, 2009). But in the context of *The Exception and the Rule* a passer-by is used as a mouthpiece for this text, calling into question whether art is in contact with people not usually in the position to access its ideas. While Naseem Mohammed did indeed agree with the text he read out, this is not revealed to the audience of the film who are held within the power dynamic between the reader and the camera for which the reading was staged. Underpinning this tension were dialogues that were concurrent in Pakistan at that time about the relevance of art in a dictatorship for the then President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf, had recently imposed a state of emergency that included a media blackout (Byers, 2007). This scene works on a process of exclusion in both content and structure to press home the idea that media is not an autonomous institution.

This is followed by an exposition of newspapers and wall chalkings. This form of political communication is frequently used in Karachi to expose ideas to the common man. Whole areas of city walls are covered in political slogans predominantly in Urdu. This is a replication of issues in the news transferred to the city streets that operate as both a text and an image. It is also a “media” outlet accessible to political parties outside of news and television. In this scene this architecture is agitated by an English voice reading a passage of text by George Perec about the act of writing (Perec, 1997). This text is reflective and passive and is read in the first person as a direct contradiction of the content-fuelled text inscribed on the walls. Situated in a café as if observing a situation from the outside, this highlights a notion proposed by Rabinow that “Most of the anthropologists time is spent sitting around waiting for informants, doing errands, drinking tea, taking genealogies, mediating fights, being pestered for rides, and vainly attempting small talk – all in someone else’s culture. The inadequacy of one’s comprehension is incessantly brought to the surface and publicly displayed. Interruptions and eruptions mock the fieldworker and his inquiry; more accurately, they may be said to inform his inquiry, to be an essential part of it.” (Rabinow, 1977 p15)

Nevertheless the exposition of writing as a way of thinking *I trace, I draw each letter, each word. I check the punctuation marks [pause] I stare attentively at a small notice, the price list, at a piece of iron work, a blind, the hexagonal yellow ashtray* also draws attention to the act of inscription of this graffiti. The question as to who drafted this graffiti is left unanswered.

INTERITLES AS PUNCTUATION: THIS FILM DOES NOT CREDIT ITS PARTICPANTS OR ITS SOURCES



A man stands in a public space facing the camera. He starts to describe his situation and what he can see: “We are standing here in a place called Gandhi Nagar. Since we set up the camera, and checked the light, the light is perfect, everything’s perfect so a lot of people have gathered around and everyone is wondering what we are doing right here in the middle of these small bylanes. And of all of them I think the kids are the most who are inquisitive and just wondering what I am saying and trying probably to understand. There’s this young guy with a checked shirt and blue short pants and he is trying to analyse, trying to see the relation between the camera and what I am trying to say. And there is another guy who just walked up and they are all trying to see what kind of shoot is happening, probably they are wondering whether it is a film shoot, or a serial or a college project or whatever. And I can see a huge guy standing right behind, he is wearing a yellow shirt and red pants and he looks pretty hefty, he looks like he has just got out of the gym. And on my left side just to the left of the camera in front of me is a small sewage gutter that’s passing by and there’s a lot of sewage in it and you can see the water just trickling by slowly. I mean probably this area would get flooded when there is rain. If you look behind me on my top right hand side you can see two pairs of pants that are hanging, one is a jean pant and one is a normal pant, the jean pant is probably you know hung out there for drying. Right now it is getting really hard to talk because the sunlight is just hitting me eyes so it is kind of totally blinding me out right now. There is another guy who has come, another kid rather who has come with a polka dot t-shirt and it has got orange polka dots and white polka dots, and he is wearing red slippers. And he is kind of shy and he is wondering and he’s smiling and he’s biting his lower lip ...

Camera roll ends, image cuts to black, but voice continues:

... and he’s just finished doing that and now he’s making faces, he’s really wondering what we are doing and I think somebody is calling him, he just went away, I think that was his sister who called him, and he’s gone, he has just gone away right now.

Cut to a blank card held in front of camera lens. The sounds of birds can be heard. After 22 seconds the card is removed revealing the view behind in black and white, in this case the harbour in Mumbai as crows fly across the frame. Cut to another card and the sound from inside a café that is removed to reveal a street corner. A new card follows this and then a view of the gate of India as a female voice sings an Indian folk song. A woman cleans the streets with a broom before the scene cuts to black.

In my original field notes the idea for this performance to camera came from *Performer / audience / mirror* by Dan Graham (Graham, 1977). In this work Graham stands in front of a mirror facing a seated audience. Graham then starts a continuous verbal description of what he can see and what he is doing (standing, moving, talking) in an attempt to create what he terms “a continuous temporal forward flow” (Graham, 1999 p124) In his performance the spectator becomes aware of his own perceptual process of sitting and looking. In *The Exception and the Rule* this strategy is sited for the camera. Nigel Colasco was asked to describe what he could see whilst facing the filmmakers. The result is a social commentary of what the camera cannot see. This is a process that Howes describes as *Exphrastic Ethnography* (Howes, 2007), or the use of one art medium to define and describe another. As suggested in Chapter 1, Howes’s proposition is that sensory practices can extend textual critique, an idea exemplified here by Nigel’s words being used within a film to communicate the construction of images in the mind’s eye. This is a sensory rhetorical device that draws attention to the limits of the frame, the politics of the frame and the layers of memory and

subjectivity within the frame. Nigel not only offers the audience information on what they cannot see, he also offers opinions on these observations mimicking the process of spectatorship of the audience itself: There's this young guy with a checked shirt and blue short pants and he is trying to analyse, trying to see the relation between the camera and what I am trying to say. And there is another guy who just walked up and they are all trying to see what kind of shoot is happening, probably they are wondering whether it is a film shoot, or a serial or a college project or whatever. And I can see a huge guy standing right behind, he is wearing a yellow shirt and red pants and he looks pretty hefty, he looks like he has just got out of the gym.

This combination of a sensorial and textual experience bridges categories of structural film and visual anthropology as quoted through Le Grice in Chapter 2: "My current concerns might be described as: first, identifying (through a cinematic practice) the conditions which the apparatus and available conceptions of film structure tend to produce; second, attempting to dislodge them by making them problematic rather than exploit them towards the end of aesthetic expression; and third, to raise the issue of the relationship of the cinematic work to reality... The questions then, of the choice of cinematic content, become primarily not what subjects are appropriate to the nature of film? But, in what arena is it possible for film to make a transformational mediation? (Le Grice, 2001 p196) While MacDougall is quoted in the same Chapter: "In many respects filming, unlike writing, precedes thinking, it registers the process of looking with a certain interest, a certain will. When we look, we are doing something more deliberate than seeing and yet more unguarded than thinking. We are putting ourselves in a sensory state that is at once one of vacancy and of heightened awareness" (MacDougall, 2005 p7).

This state of sensory awareness is further elaborated in the next sequence of the film where the representational quality of the film image is obscured by a card allowing the presence of the audio information in this sequence to consciously predominate. This was an idea that developed out of *The Autonomous Object?*, where I argued that the monochrome breaks from photography as a preserve of evidential authority and illusion by disturbing the viewer's predisposition to subconsciously collude with the raw realism of moving images. By applying sound to the monochrome, this scene transforms the materialist image object argument of *The Autonomous Object?* into a sonic sensorial immersion.

[subtitles without voice] Today I have decided to sit still | But my eye is drawn to the man on the balcony | who takes out his phone and takes my picture | and I take this as a sign to start filming | Raj points out things he would film | The young children on the street |

Images of street corner in Mumbai cut in, the camera stays in one position throughout the sequence, observing people as they pass through the frame.

| The street wallas looking out for the police | The amount of men | I notice that as we have sat here | 15 people have needed to get past to enter the doorway we are blocking | but only two have asked what we are doing | Raj agrees to operate the sound recorder

Sound turns on. The images of people continue until they are interrupted by an intertitle: TO THE WOMAN WITH

THE MOBILE PHONE. YOU WILL SIMULATE NORMAL WALKING BUT YOU WILL BE CONSCIOUS THAT FROM THIS DAY FORWARD I HAVE TAKEN POSSESSION OF EVERY THIRD STEP THAT YOU TAKE. IT IS NOT NECESSARY FOR YOU TO OBSESS YOURSELF WITH THIS

The images return with a woman on a mobile phone. A man checks through his papers, people carry their deliveries as the subtitles appear | Off camera Raj introduces me to Amit, who is also a filmmaker | Amit says he has been laughing at me | But he still asks if he can try out my camera

The scene cuts to Pakistan. A woman is standing in the middle of the street. After a period waiting she claps her hand above her hand. This action is repeated in 5 other locations with different sonic and architectural forms and scales.

‘Sitting still’ is a looking and listening exercise used by structural filmmaker James Benning to teach his students how to make films. The students are given a camera, but no film stock; instead Benning asks them to look (not film) with a heightened state of awareness in a manner already quoted from by MacDougall in this Chapter. In *The Exception and the Rule* this scene begins with a similar intention Today I have decided to sit still but instead the filmmaker is drawn into filming But my eye is drawn to the man on the balcony | who takes out his phone and takes my picture | and I take this as a sign to start filming, implying that the filming of the filmmaker is inadvertently responsible for the images we are now watching by the filmmaker. This is a small detail within this work that throughout consistently complicates the source of the camera gaze. However the sustained contemporary potency and strategy of an observational approach to filmmaking (and looking) in this scene is sustained in the roll of film that unfolds. The issues embedded in this approach are discussed in a recent article on *Rethinking Observational Cinema* (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2009)

“Observation is not a straightforward or everyday way of looking at the world. It involves the cultivation of a special kind of attention. But what is this form of attention and how is it learned? We begin by looking at the pedagogical practice of Herb Di Gioia ... (who) encouraged filmmakers to encompass the camera and/or microphone physically and to move in synchrony with their subjects. Di Gioia also insisted that the filmmaker should never speak unless spoken to, challenging the assumption that intellectual inquiry involving people must be speech-driven. The question of human relationships lay at the heart of the filmmaker’s emerging practice. In the absence of familiar modes of engagement defined by language, filmmakers had to develop awareness of other kinds of communication between themselves and their subjects, linked to gestures, looks, movement, shape, silence and so on. To attend to the world observationally meant to shift attention towards one’s body and to move with and around one’s subjects, allowing one’s body in action or repose to become part of filmic space” (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2009 p542)

This scene subtly highlights key issues faced by anthropologists working in this genre, including, in particular, how the filmmaker’s body becomes part of the filmic space. This is an issue that can be further broken down into a series of pragmatic considerations set out by Grimshaw. Extracted from their text these questions include: whether to interact with their subjects? | I notice that as we have sat here only two [people] have asked what we are doing what information to look for and follow? Raj points out things he would film | The young children on the street | The street wallas looking out for the police | The amount of men how to position

oneself? 15 people have needed to get past to enter the doorway we are blocking whether to abandon a shooting script? whether the filmmaking should unfold over time with no guarantee of what the final piece will look like? at what point to turn the camera on? I take this as a sign to start filming when to pan? when to zoom? and when to speak? “In order to be an active observer and yet to hold back from directing, the observational filmmaker had to attend closely to the give and take of the filmmaking encounter in all its different facets, acknowledging the complex dynamic of authorship and collaboration, observation and imagination that constituted the work itself” (Grimshaw, 2009 p543).

In contrast in a surprising and awkward intertitle, *The Exception and the Rule* interrupts this observational flow and reinforces the patterns of control in all filmmaking, including observational cinema: **TO THE WOMAN WITH THE MOBILE PHONE. YOU WILL SIMULATE NORMAL WALKING BUT YOU WILL BE CONSCIOUS THAT FROM THIS DAY FORWARD I HAVE TAKEN POSSESSION OF EVERY THIRD STEP THAT YOU TAKE. IT IS NOT NECESSARY FOR YOU TO OBSESS YOURSELF WITH THIS.** This intertitle was inspired by *Man with a movie camera* (Vertov, 1929), a film discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis in which Vertov uses a series of freeze frames to halt the illusion of movement and to deconstruct the artifice of cinema. Rather than using a freeze frame, *The Exception and the Rule* employs a textual equivalent appropriated from Orders & Co., who sent a letter to Pacheco Areco, President of Uruguay, in 1971 ordering him to do things he could not help doing so as to expose the dictator to dictatorship “5<sup>th</sup> of November you will simulate normal walking but you will be conscious that for this day Orders & Co. have taken possession of every third step you take. It is not necessary to obsess yourself with this” (Lippard, 1973 p xiii). Thus the film director becomes the dictator in a pattern of language that firmly positions the final possession of images with the filmmaker whilst simultaneously halting the momentum of the film’s movement. The woman that is answering her mobile phone after this intertitle does indeed disappear on her third step.

In a further contrast to the model of observational cinema the next scene in which Adeela Suleman claps two pieces of wood together above her head is a performance choreographed for the camera. This performance was a result of discussions around the issue of *The Body, Social Space and the Aesthetic of Resistance*, instigated in Karachi in collaboration with local artists VASL. These public talks grew into actions where we proposed improvised situations that would disrupt the alignment of public space. In these discussions it was presented to us that strict space boundaries divide Muslim society into two sub-universes: the universe of men (the Umma, the world of religion and power) and the universe of women (the domestic world of sexuality and the family).

But it was also agreed that this is not a rule, it is an improvisation between those who hold authority and those who do not and thus our discussion group began to ask how women might reclaim this space. How women might imitate, accelerate and "own" an encounter in these spaces.

In all two performances were documented on video and an extract from one became this scene within *The Exception and the Rule*. This action by artist Adeela Suleman invited the gaze. Her clothing in some of the scenarios is subtly inappropriate, but her claiming of the space through a simple action comments on her physical in/visibility<sup>49</sup> This was an action originally performed in the structural film *30 Sound Situations* (Wasko, 1975) in Poland. Wasko's ironic medial refraction designed to make a superfluous part of the film (the clapper board) the theme of the work becomes a radical intervention in society when resituated in Pakistan and performed by a woman in a public space.

Over the last two scenes of the clapping performance the Urdu voice of Raj Kumar begins with English subtitles:

The accusation is often brought against us that | “You want to make films for the working class | But they don't understand a thing that you make” | But a worker who buys a small camera | and films his vacation | Is making a political film | At least that's what I call a political film | It so happens that he is allowed to film | his vacation | But he is not allowed to film his work |

INTERTITLE: A PHOTOGRAPH OF A FACTORY TELLS YOU NOTHING ABOUT THE PEOPLE INSIDE IT.

[CUT TO] Children in the street face the camera and obscure the view.

If I show up | an informer | a filmmaker | with my right to work as a filmmaker | There is hardly anywhere I am allowed to shoot | Why? | because we live under the reign of private property |

Cut to Black and white triple exposure shot of people trying to cross the street, the sound is of temple bells

I don't have the right to film in a train station | or in a museum | factory or airport | What about my right to work? | There is always this danger of stagnation | becoming self righteous, dogmatic | moralistic | No longer laughing | As if the poor or the working class don't laugh | Did you know that the Senegalese novelist and filmmaker | Sembene Ousmane | once complained to French filmmaker Jean Rouch | You observe us like insects | The exploiter never tells the exploited | how he is exploiting him

This voiceover text apparently extends the geo-political barriers described earlier in the film to private property and commerce. There is hardly anywhere I am allowed to shoot | Why? | because we live under the reign of private property. In so doing this text proposes a contradictory set of statements in order to create a position of ambiguity for the audience where meaning is almost (but not quite) grasped. Thus it cites barriers to filming: If I show up | an informer | a filmmaker | with my right to work as a filmmaker | There is hardly anywhere I am allowed to shoot alongside the acknowledgment that more people than ever can now create images by accessing cheap film technology. But a worker who buys a small camera | and films his vacation | Is making a political film | At least that's what I call a political film | This is a return to an earlier statement in this film: If all art is political | how can you make a 'Political' film? situated in the local everyday rather than the political divide between India and Pakistan that opened the film I don't have the right to film in a train station | or in a museum |

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<sup>49</sup> Months later a press release *Women to reclaim public spaces* replicated issues we were discussing “The Talibans have created terror through slaughtering of people, bomb blasts, kidnappings, and deconstruction of properties which has led to severe restrictions on women, and displacements of thousands of people from their homes. It seems their militancy has encouraged some men and women in some urban centres of Pakistan to admonish and threaten women in their mode of dress and their presence in public spaces, this is a deliberate strategy to purge public spaces of women's presence” (WAF 2009 press release)

factory or airport. This repetition of language and ideas in *The Exception and the Rule* is used here to infer that there is a link between local and global systems whilst also embodying Augé's warning of a global crisis predicated by a present day confusion over reality and image (Augé, 1999). This is the other reason why Marcel Schwierin describes this work as a "non documentary" (Schwierin, 2009 p1), a "colonisation by fiction" (Augé, 1999 p6) that sets up an ambiguous relationship between the viewer and the image. Thus embedded in the structure of this scene, a fictional character (Raj Kumar) presents his struggle with reality and identity. This fictional character who is presented as a real person becomes a manifestation of Augé's argument that the contemporary difficulty in the distinction between what is real and what is fiction produces in our relating to each other a series of equally fictional selves that are increasingly incapable of setting our reality and identity within an effective relation to others. From this perspective *The Exception and the Rule* can be argued as the elucidation into film of Augé's vision of humanity caught in a proffered game of mirrors deprived of the category of the real through the creation of a fiction film that uses a factual vernacular.

Thus the quotation from Sembene Ousmane *You observe us like insects | The exploiter never tells the exploited | how he is exploiting him* is a variation on the idea proposed by Augé and cited in Chapter 2: "To put it in a nutshell, we all have the feeling that we are being colonised but we don't exactly know who by; the enemy is not easily identifiable" (Augé, 1999 p6). This voiceover is proposed over black and white material of people crossing the road in Mumbai. Thus artifice is added to this scene using a simple in camera triple exposure to accentuate what is a daily issue in one of the most congested cities in the world.

Black and white footage of children living in a slum. The sounds of bells change rhythm to sound like alarm bells. The children pose before the camera and ask to have their picture taken. The film footage is inter-cut with colour digital photographs. The children stare down the camera lens and hold its gaze.

The scene cuts to documentation of the Wagah border between India and Pakistan. The word INTERMISSION sits in the middle of the images throughout the roll of film as crowds chant slogans in favour of their country of origin. This is followed by images of a political demonstration at first glance an angry Islamic mob. At closer observation signs can be read in the crowd: BE INDIAN. BUY INDIAN GOODS ONLY. The location of this rally is more ambiguous. Meanwhile the sound has changed into Urdu speech manipulated into a set of resonant frequencies. The cut up sentence emerges into *Tasvire kashke bana sakta lekin nahi bana saka* as the images emerge into a set of street scenes in colour.

As *The Exception and the Rule* approaches its "INTERMISSION", so images that directly relate to an ethnographic field site, partition and political protest are used. The images of children living in slums is a clear recognisable motif from an important area of traditional anthropological fieldwork highlighting human poverty (Schenk, 2001, Bisai et al., 2009, Lobo and Das, 2001), while the Wagah Border is both a historical battleground site and a daily symbolic ritual where the gates between India and Pakistan are briefly open and then closed. The political protest rally is a familiar image in current news broadcasts in Pakistan and around the world complicated by mutual responsibilities for the war in Afghanistan, the war on terror and war in Iraq. These images represent an opportunity in *The Exception and the Rule* to consider

the relationship between anthropology as a study of real events and issues (what can be seen) and anthropology as a study of how reality is being constructed (how we see). In a screening at the London Film Festival on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2009 this issue caused furious arguments between audience members, revealing that this audience had two very different ideas of what is a valid subject for anthropology. For audience members concerned with “reality”, *The Exception and the Rule* was not anthropology, nor was it of value. It did not tell us more about a people or a subject in the terms that they would recognise. Scenes were not contextualised, the ceremony at the Wagah border was not a true account of events over time, whereas the political protest is abstracted into variations on a flicker structure destroying its continuity and content. In contrast other members of the audience argued that the film was important precisely because it exposed and destabilised the power relations of images. That we cannot consider what we see without considering the language in which we collude with representational images. This argument has run throughout this thesis, although the question remains as to how far the visual anthropologist will ever be let off the representational hook.

This was an issue addressed by Andrew Irving, the anthropologist respondent on this educational panel. His argument represents an attempt to bridge this divide and is transcribed directly from my personal unpublished audio recording of this event:

“Well whilst I was watching this film I was wondering what kinds of questions it was trying to ask the audience. This is a film I think which has quite a significant tension within it as it is constructed in such a way that it addresses the audience. But it is also addressing the discipline of anthropology as well. As Brad has articulated there is a history of anthropology and film in which both have gone in different ways. And we can also say that perhaps anthropology IS still stuck in a realist paradigm. But I think we can go back beyond the history that Brad is referring to back to anthropology as it was emerging in the late 1800’s. Kant when he introduced the idea of anthropology and philosophy came up with 4 fundamental questions. One is What can I know? Two is What should I do? Three is What can I hope for? and Four is What is a human being? So this is a type of Kantian anthropology and he said the first question can be answered in philosophy or metaphysics and it is a question about the limits of perception and so forth. The second question What should I do? is answered in ethics and politics, the third question What can I hope for? is answered in theology and religion. The fourth question What is a human being? is answered in anthropology though Kant also said that all these things can actually be answered in anthropology and this film for me is trying to address that type of anthropology. This is not the anthropology where the anthropologist goes to a place, the field zone, to see what the people think etc I think it is trying to get to more fundamental existential questions. So it has a sort of existential question, but it claims to be a political film and I think there is a tension in that and it is quite an interesting tension. In that when I was watching it I felt the film was about the instability of the past in some ways, it is about memory, it is about claims to the past, you talk about history and there is obviously a difference between history and perceptions of the past and this is a contested political domain, and it is also part of what it means to be a human being. It is also about the uncertainty of the future, what’s going to happen, I think showing the political protest is trying to show a different kind of future in itself, in an indirect way trying to create a different kind of future for the world. These are both existential and political questions in that they bring in time and space, so you have an idea here of being in space, how one can move in space and how one is allowed to move in space. Because to a certain extent how you move is who you are”. (Irving 2009 October 25<sup>th</sup> unpublished audio recording)

It is the contention of *The Exception and the Rule* that this film does indeed address “reality” in the terms used by the opposing audience members in this work. The film is an existential exercise and an exposition of the audiences multiple realities brought by them to the cinema space. This is an exposition of Bifocality argued by Marcus in his six strategies for how cinema can extend textual analysis. Bifocality is connections that allow one to construct difference in full recognition of the already constituted relationship between observer and observed. The idea is that the field subject is as embedded in modernity as the fieldworker, thus creating an ambiguity as to who is living with whom and how this is happening. *The Exception and the Rule* already assumes that the audience has a fully constituted relationship with Pakistan through images that have been constantly repeated in news headlines. Benazir Bhutto’s assassination, the Mumbai Attacks, The Marriott Bombing, 9/11, the invasion of Afghanistan, the destruction of the Buddhist statues by Taliban troops, the plight of poor people living in slums, the continued tensions between India and Pakistan. It is these images that are a primary target of this film. *The Exception and the Rule* asks how these issues are being experienced in the everyday within a film language that continuously implicates, alienates and involves either the filmmaker or the audience within its image power relations. This idea was picked up in the press release for this film written by the International Documentary Film festival Amsterdam:

“How should one go about making a political film? This question was first raised just a few decades after the birth of cinematography, and it is still an important driving factor for a small group of film artists and activists who are aware of their medium. *The Exception and the Rule* is a conversation with Karachi, Pakistan’s largest city. Using small filmic interventions in everyday life, it highlights the unrest and suppression that is disrupting Pakistani society, but does not provide explanations. These confident filmmakers place themselves at the centre of the discussion” (IDFA 2009)

In placing the filmmaker (and the image) at the centre of discussion, the audience inevitably encounters their own relationship with images. As discussed through Le Grice in Chapter 1, this is the structural conceit that both the filmmaker and the spectator have a position within a film that is also subject to historical determination. This is the complex mixture of a process of objectification, the distance between the self and what is beyond the self also argued in Chapter 1. It is Le Grice’s desire that this be aggravated in the film experience, as it is one of cinema’s fundamental problematics. Judging from this early audience reaction to *The Exception and the Rule*, this is still a contentious issue.

The camera exposure stops down revealing the rooftops of Karachi and an empty street. A man lies by the side of the road.

On sound the Urdu Voice becomes a language lesson. The Urdu voice is followed by an English voice struggling to repeat the Urdu sentences.

A man stands in a half built building, a newspaper headline, a pillar of smoke in the distance and then up close.

Underneath the language lesson resonant frequencies return gradually revealing the phrase *Tasvire kashke bana sakta*



*lekin nahi bana saka*

The camera drives through the streets of Karachi. A bull awaits Eid, a camel is in distress. Inside a factory people are making military boots as the Urdu voice breaks into English “Images I wish I had filmed but couldn’t - *Tasvire kashke bana sakta lekin nahi bana saka*” Then in both English and Urdu the following previous Urdu phrases are now translated: *Hasan’s wedding, Sitting on the bus in Sadder with Auj and not moving, The boat trip to Manora, The dinner at Khalid’s,*

Images cut to a car park that gradually reveals itself to be in London

*Meeting an elderly couple at the bus stop, The woman at the bus stop who realised she had forgotten something, Sitting in the car with Sohail and smoking Marlboro’s, Watching Dostana at the local Cineplex, The morning of the Mumbai attacks, The call to prayer*

The resonant frequencies under these clear phrases becomes more legible as ‘Images I wish I had filmed but couldn’t’. This develops into a mantra as the film cuts to black “Images, Images, Images, Images”

*The Exception and the Rule* changes direction following the intermission creating a cinematic reversal of Grimshaw’s textual experiment in *The Ethnographer’s Eye* (Grimshaw, 2001). As discussed in Chapter 2, Grimshaw maps two different ways of seeing with two halves of her book contrasting different cinematic principles ascribed to a literary style. In the first half of the book she describes her approach as unashamedly speculative. It is inspired by a modernist vision. “Taking up Marcus’s challenge I use montage to disrupt the conventional categories by which anthropology has come to be defined and confined ... It enables me to explore a series of imaginative connections and offers new perspectives on the history of twentieth century anthropology, I use vision here to illuminate the past, suggesting rather than arguing for the recognition that contrasting interpretations of the anthropological task comprise the modern discipline” (Grimshaw, 2001 p11). In the second half of her book Grimshaw employs “the cinematic opposite of montage” – the *mise-en-scène*. In this way she is able to move from the panorama/scope to close-up/detail. The case study or *mise-en-scène* “foregrounds relationships within a particular camera frame ... the motif of ‘continuous space’ is suggestive of a different kind of interpretative approach, one which validates context or ‘situated knowledge’ (Grimshaw, 2001 p12).

In *The Exception and the Rule* these strategies are reversed and the *mise-en-scène* constitutes the first half of the film while montage constitutes the second. In my own terms I have come to refer to this as a gap between the brain and the body in so far as the *mise-en-scène* in this particular work is designed to provoke representational questions, while the montage and soundscape post INTERMISSION are designed to create a physical and sensorial feeling that directly implicate the limitations of vision. The repeated sentence *Images I wish I had filmed but couldn’t* talks about the images that escaped capture but which are the fabric of living in the everyday: *The woman at the bus stop who realised she had forgotten something, Sitting in the car with*

*Sohail and smoking Marlboro's, Watching Dostana at the local Cineplex, The morning of the Mumbai attacks, The call to prayer.* This is an exploration of *Exphrastic Ethnography* (Howes, 2007) or the use of one art medium to define and describe another. Though in this case this is a combination of Howes's proposition that sensory practices can extend textual critique fused with Marcus's notion of simultaneity that asks whether ethnography can release itself from its explanatory attachment to the fully articulated argument as a narrative device. Simultaneity offers the possibility of thought experiments whereby the ethnographer poses possibilities – the roads not taken and repressed possibilities documentable on the margins of culture studied. This I argued earlier in this thesis is a difficult concept to illustrate with one cinematic example precisely because it is also a problematic that stretches to the framework in which film is read ie. a critique of the viewing site of film itself. This goes beyond the space in which the film is experienced, to the philosophical context in which the film is viewed. A question as to where film language ends and where it extends into other forms. An emphasis away from arguments within a work to the manner in which people experience and understand the world including how language is a limit in this process.

And this finally is where the fusion of structural film and experimental ethnography has led me, epitomised by the sardonic mantra “*Images, Images, Images, Images*”. This is the ideological decision not to do something in favour of doing something else, a return to MacDougall's contention quoted earlier that “we ignore the images that could have been, but weren't. In most cases we have no conception of what they might be” (MacDougall 1975 p122). This is the idea that in a world saturated with image we must change the debate to also consider the implications of our un/conscious decision to take one action over another, to consume one image over another.

This also represents my future body of work, bringing to an end this particular context of my research and looking to the future. This new work is called *The Museum of Non Participation*. As a context it has grown to both embrace and intertwine *The Exception and the Rule*. While it was my original intention in this thesis to argue Davies's contention as to whether a thesis could end without an authoritative conclusion, this thesis has reached a conclusion, though excitingly for me, this is with the creation of a whole new body of work that extends onwards the invitation, questions, paradoxes and forms of resistance with which I set out 4 years ago.

**Conclusion: The Museum of Non Participation.**

**INTERIOR .Intecta. 23 Große Ulrichsstraße GROUND FLOOR, HALLE GERMANY – A THREE STORY INDUSTRIAL DESIGN HOUSE DATING FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY – EMPTY SINCE 1989, IN DISSREPAIR (VIRTUALLY UNHEATED) WITH TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT – BRICK WALLS, PEELING PAINT, LARGE COLUMNS, THREE FLOORS OF HEIGHT WITH DIAGONAL STAIRWAY. DARK FLOOR, DAMP WITH PATCHED GREY AND BLACK STAINS. 6.00 PM AMBIENT LIGHT FROM EXTERIOR AND EMERGENCY LIGHT SOURCES INSIDE. A BULB HANGS FROM CEILING ABOVE LECTURN.**

In the space are two performers; two plinths with beamers, one domestic table with slide projector and one small floor plinth with slide projector no.2. Two freestanding projector screens and one screen fixed to the wall. A protest banner is folded at the far end. A small long case is closed in front of this. A chair with a tape recorder sits next to a column and a 16mm projector sits diagonally on a plinth.

**PERFORMER 1 (Female) is STANDING at lectern under bulb, which is ON**

**PERFORMER 2 (Male) is STANDING behind beamer 1 which faces stairs.**

**AT 6PM PERFORMER 1 ADDRESSES audience, PERFORMER 2 presses PLAY on BEAMER 1, an image of the NATIONAL GALLERY IN ISLAMABAD alongside a Pakistani LAWYER PROTESTING.**

PERFORMER 1 SPEAKS:

I want to take you back in time to Sept 2007; we are in Islamabad in Pakistan standing inside the National Art Gallery. It is the inaugural exhibition of modern and contemporary Pakistani Art. The diversity, originality and vibrancy is really exciting and the artists exhibiting include Rashid Rana, Adeela Suleman, Naiza Khan and Salima Hashmi and amongst the many curators is Quddus Mirza. We are standing in one of the many curated rooms of artwork, in this case related to the body and the nude. The image and the image of the body is already a contested space in Islamic culture, but as I cross from looking at one painting to another I pass a window in the architecture whereby I accidentally witness the Lawyers protest outside the Supreme Court building. The lawyers are being beaten by riot police in white shalwar chemises with pockets full of stones. I later found out that the lawyers were protesting against the Supreme Court ruling that paved the way for Musharraf's re-election. Standing inside the museum looking out at the image of the lawyers in a city where this museum now lies empty with no permanent collection and no more money for exhibitions, I think about contemporary art and the politics of human silence. In Karachi in a city where there are no museums, this is a moment for me when The Museum of non Participation came into being.

**PERFORMER 1 WALKS to the SLIDE PROJECTOR on the floor and TURNS IT ON sending out a white light. PERFORMER 1 then walks to BANNER at the end wall and opens it out. It**

**reads “THE MUSEUM OF NON PARTICPATION” in English and in Urdu.**

Meantime PERFORMER 2 WALKS to LECTURN and SPEAKS:

I want to take you back in time to Sept 2007. We are in Islamabad in Pakistan standing inside the National Art Gallery and it is the inaugural exhibition of modern and contemporary Pakistan Art. As I wind through the large expanses of the gallery there are paintings, installations and sculptural works. The diversity, originality and vibrancy is really exciting. On the top floor I find myself standing in a room with a guard at the door. There is a sign warning me that this room contains paintings of nudes and that I should not enter if I am likely to be offended. The image and the image of the body are a well known contested space in Islamic Culture, and as I cross from looking at one painting to another I am sure this is why the nudity in these works is actually very subtle. Between two paintings in this room there is a window that faces out onto the high court of Islamabad. As I stand there looking out I can see the Lawyers protest. They have been campaigning for weeks against President Musharraf’s suspension of the country’s top judge for alleged misuse of office. My friend, a prominent lawyer activist, stands next to me looking out. He looks deeply troubled and I ask him what he thinks of events as they unfold in front of us. Later around the corner we visit a bookshop. The streets are completely normal and there are families wandering around the shopping arcade. My phone rings and our friends from Karachi are calling us. They are watching the riot on television” – (Extract from *What will the next revolution look like?* performance by Mirza and Butler. October 2009 Halle, Germany).

*The Museum of Non Participation* as a body of work extends my thesis question outside of film. *The Museum of Non Participation* itself was born of an image experience (described above) in the National Gallery of Islamabad that I failed to film *images I wish I had filmed but couldn’t* and over the course of two years has developed into a concept that exists as an actual image (exemplified below) and as the image of an imaginary museum without walls.

This museum seeks to position itself at the limits of language, where it is both a signifier of itself and a question as to the terms and conditions of experience with art. Articulated around “non participation”, this museum questions the boundaries of museums as both a physical experience and as a mental construct. *The Museum of Non Participation* draws attention to processes of inclusion and exclusion, the levels at which people experience in/exclusion, in/exclude themselves or are in/excluded by systems. This is a previously discussed structural principle of *The Exception and the Rule* discussed as ‘immersion levels’ in Chapter 4. Indeed I am still determining whether the *The Exception and the Rule* sits inside and/or outside *The Museum of Non Participation* as an exposition of language, image, exclusion and (non) participant observation. That is to say, it is difficult to determine the status of *The Exception and the Rule* within a museum “collection” that purposefully resists a definition of its own context. Further complexity is added to the *The Museum of Non Participation* because it is also a museum of “Bifocality” (Marcus, 1994) conceived and launched in Pakistan as a reversal of the West/East gaze evidenced in the western term “Museum”. It is impossible to translate *The Museum of non Participation* into Urdu without using terms borrowed from other languages. To do so is to roughly translate the concept as “Lataluki kha ajaib ghar’ or ‘The House of the Unexpected’.

As *The Museum of non Participation* is only now starting to emerge as a full body of work (it launched in Karachi in September 2008 and London in October 2009), this conclusion cannot tie up its ideas in final form. Instead what is proposed here is the evolution of *The Museum of non Participation* in order to determine where this new platform coincides with this thesis and *The Exception and the Rule*, whose last scenes were filmed as the museum was being launched in Pakistan. In this way it is an unresolved emerging argument running through this conclusion that the question *How can structural film expand the language of experimental ethnography?* implicates more than just film. In the face of the complex realities of late modernity Marcus's statement that textual categories are more easily achieved in a cinematic medium could also be reversed to consider the question as to where the cinematic medium begins and ends. Similarly given the complex layers of (non) participation involved in this work it is also an unresolved question as to where collaboration and authorship over this project begins and ends including my long term collaboration with Karen Mirza. Thus *The Museum of non Participation* presents itself as a potential subject for a post-doctoral work that extends my initial research question by expanding into new areas.



Wall chalking Karachi 2008

## The Evolution of the Museum of Non Participation

“Prayoga’ is a Sanskrit word, which loosely translates as ‘experiment’ but can also mean ‘representation’ and ‘practice’. Coined by film historian Amrit Gangar, the term ‘cinema of prayoga’ defines “the eternal quest, [the] continuing process in time and space” central to artists’ film and video” (Butler and Mirza, 2007 p1).

In tracking the evolution of the *Museum of non Participation* it is difficult to isolate a single starting point. But the *Experimenta* Film festival in Mumbai in which I collaborated from 2003 to 2007 was my first encounter with making images in India. The *Experimenta* film festival (Heredia, 2003-2008) platformed Indian experimental films that challenged the dominant western film avant-garde. The resulting United Kingdom tour, *The Cinema of Prayoga* (Butler and Mirza, 2007), premiered this work using an Indian term ‘Prayoga’<sup>50</sup>. Both film language and linguistic language were a critical issue at the centre of this project. Indeed my initial impetus to embark on this thesis resulted from these subtle challenges to my own practice, including test shoots for *The Autonomous Object?* and camera observations that would later inform *The Exception and the Rule*.

While *The Museum of Non Participation* emerged from being in contact with Pakistan, I had already had an extensive relationship with India. This was also an influence on *The Exception and the Rule*. Consequently, this initial physical and psychological crossing of the contested border referenced in *The Exception and the Rule* was an experience that I personally related back to the many friends and families I met who were separated since partition: Last year I tried to go to Mumbai | I wrote to the embassy in Delhi | I asked them for | permission | to film in the North or in Mumbai | It took 8 months for them to turn me down. On arrival in Karachi the many familiar cultural scenes and settings I had experienced in India were juxtaposed to the pervasive and daily geopolitical ruptures in Pakistan. In reaction to this I personally began to recognise similar geopolitical ruptures in the United Kingdom in the gradual erosion of British civil liberties, including the right to film the police. As already stated, this led to the contention in *The Exception and the Rule* that everyday movements are all saturated in geopolitics if one cares to look. If all art is political | How can you make a “Political’ film? and the decision to follow policeman in Mumbai **RAJ HAS BEEN CHOOSING A POLICEMAN AT RANDOM, IN THE STREET, EVERYDAY AND THEN FOLLOWING THEM WHEREVER THEY GO. HOWEVER LONG OR FAR THEY TRAVEL** Certainly on my return to London I felt far more politicised, having experienced Pakistan’s war trauma firsthand. I sought in *The Museum of non Participation* in London to provoke debate around history, psyche, economics, migration, the war on

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50 “Cinema of Prayoga: The loosely equivalent word for the English ‘experiment’ in Sanskrit is ‘prayoga’ which has several different connotations, including design, contrivance, device, plan; application, employment (esp. of drugs and magic); use, practice, experiment (opp. theory), exhibition (of dance), representation (of a drama), a piece to be represented, recitation, delivery; prayōgātisaya (in drama) is ‘excess of representation’ while prayōgārtha means ‘having a sense of prayoga’. If we deconstruct the word Prayoga, we get Pra+Yoga, where the prefix ‘pra’ in a way is an engine. As a prefix to verbs, it means ‘forward’, ‘forth’, ‘in front’, ‘onward’, ‘before’. In other words, it carries the sense of vanguard. With adjectives, it means ‘very’, ‘excessively’; and with nouns, whether derived from verbs or not, it is used in various senses including, commencement; power, intensity, source or origin, completion, perfectness, excellence, purity, etc., depending on what noun it is prefixed to. Among its many interpretations, yoga also means uniting, combination, contact, touch, employment, application, use, charm, spell, incantation, magic, magical art, substance, deep and abstract meditation, concentration of mind, contemplation of the Supreme Spirit, which in Yoga philosophy is defined as cittavritinirodha. Yoga is the system of philosophy established by Patanjali. As stated before, I would like to propose prayoga as a better alternative to English experiment-al” (Gangar 2007 p24)

terror and the conflict in Afghanistan, to name just a few. This personal awakening is only subtly referenced in *The Exception and the Rule* by the film both starting and ending in Brixton “Images, Images, Images, Images.

In order to start to communicate the multi-layered complexities and contradictions of these ideas *The Museum of non Participation* introduces itself in its press release by using an image metaphor of ‘accidentally witnessing the Pakistani lawyers protest from inside the National gallery’. This sets out the desire of this project to debate the relationship between art and politics. In reality this event did indeed happen exactly as described; but this experience did not directly lead to *The Museum of non Participation*. This was conceived back in the United Kingdom a few weeks after the first trip to Pakistan. Nevertheless, this experience has come to symbolise the multiplicity of my experiences in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad because it carries a powerful defining sense of being both inside a contested space and looking outside at a contested space. Greater complexity in this observation was added to *The Museum of non Participation* performance in Halle entitled *What will the next revolution look like?* (quoted above) by the two different descriptions of the same event, including a reference to Augé’s image saturation: *The streets are completely normal and there are families wandering around the shopping arcade. My phone rings and our friends from Karachi are calling us. They are watching the riot on television.* Indeed though it is still early in my experience of working with these ideas in other media than film, I perceive a subtle difference in my approach to both contexts. *The Exception and the Rule* desires that the viewer experience and question an already established un/conscious relationship with film in order to question the viewer’s media relationship to images, whereas *The Museum of non Participation* creates real and imagined contested spaces in order to explore the terms and conditions of un/connectivity. The extreme subtlety of this distinction is evident in the notion that film can also be argued as an imagined contested space and that *The Museum of non Participation* asks the viewer to experience politics of representation.

### **The House of the Unexpected**

“These people are the actors. There is no possibility of escape.

In fact the spectators have no choice. They are obliged violently to participate” (Katzenstein & Giunta 2004 p299)

A second tension within *The Museum of non Participation* is that it is also a response to a commissioning opportunity. When this arrived *The Exception and the Rule* was nearly complete, for I had just returned from my first trip to Karachi and had already had two field trips to India. These dialogues were with Artangel, an organisation known for ambitious and spectacular art projects, including *Kuba* (Ataman, 2005) *Seven Walks* (Alys, 2005) and *House* (Whiteread, 1995) [www.artangel.org.uk](http://www.artangel.org.uk) Within this context the curator Rachel Anderson was proposing a new curatorial strand, *Artangel Interaction*, with emphasis placed on process and participation. The commission offered the opportunity to challenge practice within a privileged art institution with the terms ‘process’ and ‘participation’ left open for discussion and

interpretation. It was in entering a dialogue about these terms, having recently returned from Karachi, that *The Museum of non Participation* emerged, including its clear critique of the commissioning body which the project benefited.



Once vocalised, this term *The Museum of non Participation* seemed to sit at the edge of comprehension. Words inadequately defined its paradoxical claim and as such it closely fitted the journey to Pakistan recently undertaken<sup>51</sup>. This included the initial observations that [i] in the absence of a museum of modern of art in Karachi the city itself becomes the museum [ii] language was a crucial immersive and exclusionary boundary line in non/participation. This not only included Urdu/English language, but also the politic of image language and media as argued throughout this thesis. Over time this grew into four themes launched on a blog space for private dialogue with invitees in

preparation for debates to be held publicly in Karachi. My thesis research question was directly addressed in the topic *Image control and authority*.



Image control and authority

The architecture of destruction

The Body, the Social Space and the Aesthetic of Resistance

The Museum of non Participation



As these themes were being formalised, a second structure was put into operation in collaboration with VASL artists collective in Pakistan [www.vasl.org](http://www.vasl.org) This was a request for a headquarters space in Karachi in which we could hold events, discussions and public gatherings. Simultaneously, a free language class was established in Bethnal Green for English speakers wishing to learn Urdu alongside Urdu speakers wishing to learn English. This was the start of a two-year dialogue with Urdu speakers that directly influenced *The Exception and the Rule*, which ends in a language lesson *images I wish I had filmed but couldn't* voiced by our Urdu teacher, Hasan Navid Sheik.

On the return trip to Karachi several structures and interactions were already in place. The goal was to complete *The Exception and the Rule* and to explore the concept of *The Museum of non Participation* in practice. The strategy was to work within local structures in Karachi whilst remaining physically safe, a notion reinforced in the third week of our stay by the Mumbai attacks. Despite

<sup>51</sup> As our close friend Faisal stated to us in talking about Pakistan 'Do not try to rationalise, the non rational'



the increased local and global tensions filming for *The Exception and the Rule* was completed and simultaneously *The Museum of non Participation* launched activity in Karachi. In one of the final blog discussions of this period the museum actions in Karachi were recorded as follows:

### ***The Museum of non Participation actions and interventions Karachi***

[I] Front page recreation of an Urdu / English newspaper made in collaboration with local printers about the Museum of non Participation as a concept. This was distributed beyond the boundary walls in wealthy elite areas of Karachi through local tandoor wallah's, using the paper to wrap their rotis and naan bread.

[ii] Six Protest/Advertising Banners of *The Museum of Non Participation* were made in English and Urdu employing subtly different translations of the concept into Urdu. These were used as flash protests in different areas and photographed. These were also used to start local dialogue.

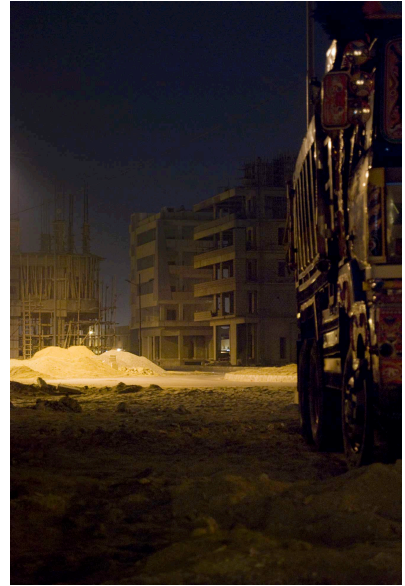
[iii] Two wall chalkings of *The Museum of Non Participation* in English and Urdu in collaboration with local wall painters sited amidst local political graffiti and advertisements. A third contested wall chalking at a boundary wall between Defense and Parsi colony is under discussion with authorities; our attempts to gain permission to chalk the permanent building site of the half-abandoned Hyatt Hotel were refused.

[iv] Two intervention/performances held at Sunday Bazaar in collaboration with booksellers. Participants would arrange a time to meet and seemingly pick up books at random and start reading them out loud to passers-by.

[v] 3 forums for invited participants from different backgrounds (lawyers, artists, social activists, architects, photographers) on the topics: *Image control and authority*, *The Museum of non Participation* and the *Architecture of Destruction*". Each event took on a different form and context. From these forums a collection of individuals in Karachi have volunteered to work on the project.

[vi] A performance to camera by Adeela Suleman entitled "sound scenarios" created out of debate on *The Body, the Social Space and the Aesthetic of Resistance*. Adeela faces the camera in public and becomes a human clapperboard, drawing further attention to her status as the subject of the camera gaze.

[vii] One group walk around the city led by revered photographer Arif Mahmood (In a city with few pavements).



[viii] One radio show made in collaboration with students and teachers from the Ida Riu school for the blind about how they negotiate and map the city using sound. Combined with sounds recorded in Karachi, this programme is to be edited and broadcast back to Karachi on local radio.

[ix] A series of slides and photographs for exhibition. It is also likely that over the next few months paintings, drawings, engravings and prints will be worked up in the studio by Mirza and Butler. One clear series from Defence Phase 8 articulates the concept *The architecture of destruction*.

[x] A 38 minute film *The Exception and the Rule* linking everyday issues in Karachi and India with the living conditions of people in London. This film has had a test screening in Karachi.

[xi] An hour-long artist intervention by Karen Mirza critiquing *The Indian Highway exhibition* at The Serpentine Gallery the same day the Gaza Protest was being held locally at the Israeli embassy.

[xii] An English/Urdu language class held in Bethnal Green and run by a local Pakistani shop owner in response to our advertisement. This course is free and puts those wishing to learn English alongside those wishing to learn Urdu in the same class. This class at a community centre in Oxford House has moved to the local Pakistani Barber shop in March 2009. We also plan a one off performance / intervention by situating the class in front of the Guernica tapestry at the Whitechapel gallery.



## **The Museum of non Participation: London**

“Karen Mirza and Brad Butler conceived *The Museum of non Participation* in 2007 when - during the Pakistani Lawyers movement in Islamabad - they viewed the protests and subsequent state violence from a window in The National Art Gallery. Since then they have pursued ideas connected to their position that day - through conversation, images, activities and narratives following strands of dialogue to different people, places and contexts.

Working in Karachi with artists’ collective VASL, Mirza and Butler animated a space at the Pakistani Arts Council in December 2008; this open space became a location to work through ideas with (non) participants and a base from which they conducted interventions outside in the streets of the city.

This project has variously taken the form of a film, *The Exception and the Rule*, an Urdu/English language exchange, street interventions, a radio show, performances and a special newspaper supplement developed in collaboration with Pakistan’s leading International newspaper *The Daily Jang*.

An English/Urdu language exchange, held weekly in Bethnal Green for the past year, led Mirza and Butler to a place behind the Barbers shop on Bethnal Green Road. There, for a period of 4 weeks, *The Museum of non Participation* invites you to explore the materials and images generated by the project. The Museum presents a free programme of activities, talks and workshops as well as offering a space for spontaneous discussion, intervention and activity.

*The Museum of Non Participation* raises questions about resistance and the choice and consequence of action versus inaction. The strictures of conflict, class and monetary divisions within a globalised world provoke engagement with the problems of participating or not participating in such a system, whether in Karachi, London or elsewhere. *The Museum of non Participation* examines how our lives in one space have implications on the other” (Anderson, 2009)

Using local distribution networks to intervene in the public sphere in Karachi, including tandoor wallahs’s, booksellers, wall chalking and a radio station, was an interpretation of using the city itself as a museum site. Nevertheless in London, a city with many museums, it was obvious that the same distribution networks conducted in Karachi would not work in London, with its long history of radical public art projects. At the same time, this second trip to Karachi reinforced my personal experience that many of the struggles, inequalities and relationships to art/life being played out in Karachi are connected to London albeit played out far more publicly in Karachi. On its return to London *The Museum of non Participation* therefore presented an opportunity to look at the way that art is being talked about, produced and displayed. An opportunity to think about the interconnectedness of things, our un/conscious life choices and the relationship between art and the everyday framed around people’s current relationship with Pakistan. This resulted in three initiatives in October 2009: [i] the creation of a *Museum of non Participation* newspaper of which 9000 were sent out as a supplement with the Daily Jang newspaper in the Unnited Kingdom (this is submitted as part of this thesis) [ii] the occupation of a temporary headquarters space behind Yaseen’s Pakistani Barbers shop on Bethnal Green Road (a walkthrough of this space is submitted as part of this thesis) and [iii] a daily programme of debates and events (programme submitted as part of this thesis). Inside this temporary space the viewer could find *The Exception and the Rule* on a monitor, documentation

of performances from Karachi, *The Museum of non Participation* newspaper intervention, a sound work, slides, newspaper cuttings from local and international newspapers, a programme of events and a library of books, many of which informed this thesis:

September 2009 standing on the street on Bethnal Green Road, searching for a sign amongst many signs looking for confirmation that I have arrived at my destination. I am standing outside a brightly painted shop front with an image of a large comb and scissors. Above the window the sign says “Yaseen's barbers” - below the window is the logo of *The Museum of Non Participation*. Inside I see the barbers at work cutting hair. It is a south asian dominated male space. Today there are two customers sitting in the chair and a couple of elderly gentlemen waiting patiently for their turn. I step over the threshold and cross through towards the back of the shop, they acknowledge my presence and continue to cut hair. I reach a door that has three signs on it, staff only, an image of a white male from an eighties style hair magazine and in orange vinyl lettering.... “This way to the Museum of non Participation” ..... and I now enter a yard. Washing hangs on a makeshift line, there is a kitchen hob on a workbench and a fridge. Opposite is a neon sign *The Museum of Non Participation* in English and in Urdu. My ears tune in to the sound coming from 4 speakers in the space. It is a language class in English, Urdu and Hebrew that I will later connect is a variation of the soundtrack of *The Exception and the Rule - Images I wish I had filmed but couldn't*. A list of images ... *Hasan's wedding, Sitting on the bus in Sadler with Auj and not moving, The boat trip to Manora, The dinner at Khalid's..,*”

Inside the *Museum of non Participation* headquarters the newspaper supplement includes articles 'On Language as Violence' and 'What comprises a boundary?', both rewritten from earlier drafts of this thesis. Collaborators and participants in *The Exception and the Rule* are also represented, including Adeela Suleman, who performed the sound scenarios performances that appear in the film, Auj Khan who provides the Urdu voiceover and Naiza Khan who facilitated several shooting scenarios. Influences on the film accordingly find a different mode of articulation and distribution in the newspaper.

The museum headquarters invites me to explore the materials generated by the project. I can read it both as an exhibition space and a performative space a site of production and display. There are discrete individual artworks on display. Crossing the threshold and immediately on the left hand side of the wall is a display of newspapers. A substantial table central in the space serves as a collective meeting place, a library and a projection surface on which slides of images, text, articles and newspaper clippings rotate. On the right hand side of the space is a low shelf with a television slide projector with images of Karachi that I advance myself. Next to the monitor are three folders filled with articles, newspaper clippings and printed matter, Above these hangs a framed artwork *Disturbances Pre-Planned*. This is a list of newspaper articles from the folders:

Dread hangs on city walls,  
Policy shifts not war,  
The worst riots since partition,  
Domestic implications of a conflict,  
Mumbai massacre fallout hits Karachi  
Another 40 Nato supply vehicles torched in Peshawar,  
Total ban on carrying of arms during Eid,  
This city doesn't treat us like human beings,

War in subcontinent actually between capitalists, workers,  
Land mafia destroying Karachi from within,  
Saudi religious police allows screening of some films  
Unlawful high-rises being built in Bath Island,  
The joys of power outages in winter.”

Towards the back of the space are two television monitors one is facing in to the space creating a comfortable viewing space for 2 or more people to watch the film *The Exception and the Rule* and on the opposite wall is a flat screen displaying documentation of performance interventions in Karachi and London. From the table I pick up a programme of events in both English and Urdu that covers a wide range of topics, perspectives and voices including events titled: *On Language as violence, Writing the City, On collections, Future Imaginary, Flat Earth, The architecture of destruction, Miss B's Salon behind the Salon, the South Asian Women's Collective, Mushaira (women only) Writing and activism workshop (women only), Introductory and intermediate Language Classes* and a reminder that Tuesday is a women's only day in the museum.

### **Epilogue: How can structural film expand the language of experimental ethnography?**

Though this thesis presents *The Museum of non Participation* as its “conclusion”, the final question addressed here in the epilogue is whether this conclusion is a satisfactory answer to my research question?

It is my argument throughout this thesis that this research question itself should be seen as a point of departure into a process of theory / practice. This is in keeping with the ambition of this thesis set out in chapter 1, that structural film theory is also an opportunity to think about how these filmic principles could be applied to my own research text. For this reason, I have also argued that the thesis structure should act as a documentation of its own ideas developing ‘in time’. This is not only a structural principle (that the viewer experience the problems of representation with the filmmaker or author) but it has also been an investigation of where ‘I’, ‘the author’, claim authority over you ‘the reader’. As argued in chapter 1, the authority in commercial cinema is reinforced by the extreme economic imbalance between the spectator and the film production. And so it is that I have spent 4 years on this research question, when this document itself might take only a few days to read. This is an argument quoted in chapter 1 by MacDougall, who stated in the context of anthropology, that “the precision of the photographic image leads to an uncritical faith in the camera's power to capture, not the images of events, but the events themselves” (MacDougall, 1975 p123). This is an idea repeated by Le Grice: “The spectator tends, unwittingly or complicitly, to take up a posture conditioned by this implicit authority. Psychological relations are both determined and reinforced within the terms of this authority relation, and spectator and film-maker are equally subject to their effects” (Le Grice, 2001 p197).

This has led me, in seeking to write this epilogue, to set one of the critical judgements in the appraisal of this research at the discretion of the recipients or spectators of this artwork. In these terms, this practice does seem to be experiencing certain clear successes. *The Exception and the Rule* has since October 2009 screened in over 18 major international festivals winning the festival award at The Chicago Experimental Film Festival. Broadly the film has screened across categories from Documentary Film Festivals

(Amsterdam, London, Paris) to Museums (Pompidou Centre, CCA Geneva, Casa Encendida, Vivid, Tate Britain) to Experimental film festivals (The Museum of non Participation, La Jeune Collectif, Arab Shorts, Chicago, New York) to recent interest from Anthropology festivals (Cairo, Poland). The film itself has also been reviewed in such a manner as to indicate that the themes of this thesis are being gathered in the film's reception. Thus Sharpe writes: "Using film, video, found footage and photography, *The Exception and the Rule* throws its own site, narrative and production into question, particularly through use of direct (though unacknowledged) citations, its ambiguous application of fictional elements, and through a use of text and spoken English or Urdu. Though micro-repetitions of sounds or words become an aggravating aural presence within the film, there is never a point of repetition or return within its wider framework; one cannot resume contact with a place, a person or a scene that has been previously witnessed. Though *The Exception and the Rule* begins and ends in London, this concluding site of return is transformed by a shift in visual content and filmic handling. In addition to a formal shift in this treatment of site, the scenes and images gathered in South Asia now inflict upon London and its translation into film" (Sharpe, 2010)

*The Museum of non Participation* can also be argued to be at the cutting edge of artistic discourse as set out at the forthcoming artistic agenda of Documenta 13 which include "participation and withdrawal as simultaneous modes of existence today, translation and untranslatability, and their negotiation, inclusion and exclusion, and their connectedness" (Press Release Documenta 13, 2010). *The Museum of non Participation* has also received reviews that reflect back its conflation of theory and practice, a direct ambition of this work: "Questioning the very foundations of their own practice, Mirza & Butler consciously include themselves in the problem that is the MNP. In fact they prefer to describe the MNP as an 'action' or 'gesture'. Following the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's observation that gesture occurs at the limits of language, the MNP can be seen as a symptom of an art language in crisis, whose precarious state is open rather than established, gestural rather than verbal. By 'an art language in crisis', I mean that the economic breakdown of the art industry that flourished post-1989, the paralysis of conventional artistic and theoretical strategies in the face of global politics which, combined with the crisis of the Left and the impotency of political activism, have given rise to numerous debates, thinktanks and conferences that have discussed the question of agency ('criticality' as a post-avant-garde placeholder), new paradigms (Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of the 'altermodern') and art practice in the so-called post-medium condition ('New Institutionalism'). Returning to Agamben and his notion of a 'politics of gesture' as a 'means without ends', it could be said that the MNP has turned art into gesture, in the sense of an incomplete act or movement whose destination is, as yet, outside form and language" (Zoller, 2010).

Invited to show this work at the Tate Britain within the context of research practice, the feedback from the audience was overwhelmingly positive. In particular the interest was in the change in emphasis from participation to non participation, and an interest in processes of incomprehension that are ubiquitous in everyday encounters. The lineage of the concept was linked that day with Debord and his attitude towards being actively lost in a film: "Something must be stated but time is lacking and we are not sure of having being understood. Before we have done, or said, what was necessary, we've already gone away. We've crossed the street. We've gone overseas. We can't go back" (Debord, 1961). This body of research has also

led to my leading of the 5 week workshop at the Tate Modern in May 2010: “Experimental Ethnography” which, based on this research, was oversubscribed three fold.

If the reception of this work is arguably the most concrete way of confirming that new ground has been uncovered by this research question, and that this research makes a contribution to new knowledge, my future work will be driven by different criteria. In a critical chapter in this thesis on Theory as Practice, I argue for the idea that *Theory be read as Practice and that Practice be read as Theory*. In this passage I suggest that the practice / theory praxis can be expressed in the idea that in very different ways both the structural filmmaker Peter Gidal and anthropologist Jean Rouch share the desire that the viewer *experience* problems of representation. That these two contrasting filmmakers ask the viewer to make theory, not just to consume it. It is in this vein that I wish to finally judge my thesis conclusion. To my mind, the experience of this research has acted like a funnel to this point. The research question has given me permission and a context to draw ideas together, and the result is an open-ended construct that sits both ‘in’ and ‘outside’ of film that also desires that the viewer make theory, not just consume it. In so far as *The Museum of non Participation* proposes this question, it is, in my opinion, a worthy result of this research. A museum without walls that speaks to what is consciously and unconsciously ‘unseen’, an idea which strikes to the heart of visual anthropology and structural film wherever it is argued that these forms of expression privilege ‘vision’ and active ‘participation’ as central paradigms. This is a provocation to the viewer to experience the philosophical question as to what pre-exists processes of representation for themselves: to think about the consequences of inaction: to instil ‘non participation’ into debate without this being misread as a negation: a political act for what I intend as a future body of work where ‘non participation’ is in close contact with the ideas of Judith Butler quoted in chapter 1 of this thesis. That “to learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see is no easy matter”. (Judith Butler 2009 p100)

This research question has opened up a way that I might thematise my ‘forcible frame’ by opening my practice to a context of paradox and imagination that stays in touch with contemporary social and political issues. This is a way in which structural film does expand the language of experimental ethnography, by creating a way to reveal frames that restrict what is perceivable and, indeed, what could be. Indeed combining both disciplines has revealed to me that restrictions that I have normalised, have imposed constraints on what I can hear, read, see, feel and know. Interrogating this *not seeing* in the midst of seeing, this *not seeing that is the condition of seeing* represents the true conclusion of this thesis and its future possibilities.

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