Everything old is new again (and vice-versa): Documentary and transmedia activism in the analog age

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ABSTRACT

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Documentary and transmedia activism in the analog age

Kristi Kouchakji

Much has been said in recent years about the role of multiple media platforms in activist documentary filmmaking, about what the filmmaker's responsibilities in these projects are, and about what role the impact industry can or should play in activist filmmaking. While the late 20th and early 21st century proliferation of media forms, channels, and platforms does indeed present a challenge to activist filmmakers with regards to capturing public attention, questions of audience mobilization, filmmaker responsibility, and impact are as old as the genre itself.

This thesis aims to restore a historical consciousness to these contemporary debates. By examining twentieth-century documentaries as examples of transmedia activism in a pre-Facebook age, including, among others, *Ravished Armenia* (1919), *Borinage* (1934), *Salt of the Earth* (1954), *Harlan County, USA* (1976) and *Punk le vote* (2006), I wish to complicate the widely held notion that transmedia activism necessarily implies the use of social media. I place each project within its historical context, outlining the resultant challenges and ethical questions facing media makers while tracing a rough lineage of transmedia documentary activism. Ultimately, I argue that, while the explosion of digital and social media has made the use of multiple platforms essential to mobilizing audiences, recursive uses of and contributions to particular media ecologies through the use of multiple platforms has always been useful in this regard, and has been successfully executed many times prior to the development of an entire consulting industry based on the fetishisation of social media and data visualisation.

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I would like to begin by acknowledging that this work was produced by an uninvited guest on traditional and unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory (which has long been a place of meeting and exchange between nations), and is stored on and transmitted through infrastructure located on (and produced from) other unceded territories.

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*"One of the threads that created Tr*mp is this idea that billionaires are going to save us, that we can outsource our problems to benevolent billionaires (...) That's the benevolent billionaire mythology (...) whether it's Richard Branson's going to solve climate change with Michael Bloomberg, and Bill Gates is going to take education and hunger in Africa, and Bono's going to somehow help with all of it (...) this created the ground for D*n*ld Tr*mp. It is one of the roads that leads to Tr*mp. It's not the only one, but it's an important one, because it allowed it to somehow be a credible pitch to the American people that 'my only qualification for this job is that I'm really rich.' And that idea comes from somewhere. And Hillary and Bill Clinton are not spectators in this—the Clinton Foundation was ground zero of 'there is no problem that cannot be solved by bringing the right benevolent billionaire together with the right policy makers, blessed by A-list celebrities' (...) There are many forces that produce Tr*mp in this country, but I think one of them is the failure of neoliberal economics to tangibly improve lives for a lot of people."*

- Naomi Klein, *Politically Re-Active*, June 15 2017

"Note: This Return Receipt only acknowledges that the message was displayed on the recipient's computer. There is no guarantee that the recipient has read or understood the message contents."

- Ancient Outlook proverb

Introduction

Much has been said in recent years about the role of multiple media platforms in activist documentary filmmaking, about what the filmmaker's responsibilities in these projects are, and about what role the impact industry can or should play in activist filmmaking. While the late 20th and early 21st century proliferation of media forms, channels, and platforms does indeed present a challenge to activist filmmakers with regards to capturing public attention, questions of

audience mobilization, filmmaker responsibility, and impact are as old as (if not older than) the genre itself.

This thesis aims to restore a historical consciousness to these contemporary debates. By examining twentieth-century documentaries as examples of transmedia activism in a pre-Facebook age, including, among others, *Ravished Armenia* (1919), *Borinage* (1934), *Salt of the Earth* (1954), *Harlan County, USA* (1976) and *Punk le vote* (2006), I wish to complicate the widely held notion that transmedia activism necessarily implies the use of social media. By placing each project within its historical context, and outlining the resultant challenges and ethical questions facing media makers, I will thus also trace a rough lineage of transmedia documentary activism prior to the advent of social media.

I argue that, while the explosion of digital and social media has made the use of multiple platforms essential to garnering attention and mobilizing audiences, recursive uses of and contributions to particular media ecologies through the use of multiple platforms has always been useful in this regard, and has been successfully executed many times prior to the development of an entire consulting industry based on the fetishisation of social media and data visualisation. Moreover, I argue that social media metrics are indices only that a number of people have activated a particular function embedded within a social media site, and provide little to no understanding of what the purpose of activating that function is, who is doing so, whether they have engaged with the media artefact or social issue subject to the function in any significant way, or how it is being received and understood by others who are, one way or another, witness to whatever action the function produces. By analysing the ways in which the projects under consideration in this thesis themselves incorporated multiple platforms within their media ecologies as long ago as 1919, I aim to demonstrate that transmedia documentary

activism is literally older than both social media and the documentary genre itself. Rather, what is new is that the means by which many people access most aspects of such activist campaigns are now easily quantified, resulting in the goalposts having moved with regards to producers' understandings of return on investment and the role of the filmmaker, and a concurrent narrowing in our understandings of the terms "transmedia" and "impact."

"Impact": You keep using that word, I do not think it means what you think it means

While debates about the ability of film to effect social change are as old as the medium itself, this more contemporary set of issues was brought to the fore through a series of reports, white papers, and public discussions on a listserv made up primarily of documentary scholars and practitioners. A 2005 report on social change effected by documentary, produced by an independent media research firm for the National Film Board of Canada, essentially argued that no one methodology, set of criteria, or understanding of impact could possibly be applied to every film, and that each project needs to be evaluated in a contextually appropriate way.[1] This somewhat more balanced approach seems to be unique to a context in which public funding remains (to some degree) available to filmmakers, and where, despite a gradual shift to the right and a prevailing atmosphere of neoliberal austerity politics, activist or social-issue documentaries are still seen as essential enough to nation-building to be worth maintaining a public agency best

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[1] Erin Research Inc., "Breaking New Ground: A Framework for Measuring the Social Impact of Canadian Documentaries." Report presented to the NFB, 2005. Print.

[2] The Fledgling Fund, "Who We Are," http://www.thefledglingfund.org/who-we-are/

[3] Diana Barrett and Sheila Leddy, "Assessing Creative Media's Impact," The Fledgling Fund:

known for such works. In the much larger American context, however, where such documentaries are more often than not funded via private, non-profit, or corporate foundation investments (and increasingly through crowdfunding), all indications are that impact is understood and measured through the lens of social media metrics, viewership figures, and other easily quantified and visualised data. A 2008 white paper co-written by the founder of The Fledgling Fund, a private fund established to support socially oriented media projects,[2] argues strongly in favour of using quantifiable data in assessing a film's potential impact, despite also acknowledging that some impact is not quantifiable and occurs over a longer time frame than a film's formal outreach campaign may allow for.[3] While the authors are careful to make disclaimers about wishing to avoid wholesale technological determinism and data-dependence, their approach nonetheless privileges film as the driving force of social movements, and quantified data as evidence of a film's effectiveness. In addition to commodifying activist media projects by evaluating their success through a numerical, return on investment framework (not surprising, given that The Fledgling Fund's founder, Diana Barrett, came to this work after a long career at the Harvard Business School),[4] this erases the work already being done by activists

[2] The Fledgling Fund, "Who We Are," http://www.thefledglingfund.org/who-we-are/

[3] Diana Barrett and Sheila Leddy, "Assessing Creative Media's Impact," The Fledgling Fund: 2008. 14-18.

[4] It is at this point that my research took an unexpected and somewhat ironic detour into the world of publicly funded 1980s educational television: Googling "Diana Barrett net worth" for further information on her background and subjective position returns a multitude of results for Bob Vila, her husband and host of PBS's *This Old House*. Infuriatingly, even results tagged as

and other socially engaged artists around whichever issue the project addresses, making the authors' assertion that having a good sense of the state of the movement is key to a successful outreach campaign[5] seem like lip service to this work.

Six years on, in 2014, Toronto's Hot Docs documentary film festival released an industry report addressed to filmmakers, producers, and funders, written by Patricia Finneran, an impact industry insider, in consultation with Hot Docs. This report is clear and concise, and defines buzzwords particular to the impact industry, as well as impact itself. Finneran writes that in this context, impact means "social and cultural change that has been driven by a documentary film and its associated campaign strategy."[6] "Impact space," by extension, is the sector of industry dealing with creating the campaign strategy that drives this change, led by an impact producer.[7] Where this report becomes problematic is, first, in considering an orchestrated campaign strategy as inextricable from a film in producing impact, and in thinking of impact as a product to be manufactured by a trained worker operating within an industry, thereby reducing social and cultural change—as well as the nuances of human experiences—to being the result of capitalist processes, more suitable to commodity marketing than cultural dissemination within the capitalist framework, and implying that they would not otherwise exist. This, too, erases the work of multitudes of grassroots activists, frequently working in resistance to capitalism, without

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being about Barrett focus instead on Vila's net worth and career, mentioning Barrett only in passing if at all.

[5] Barrett and Leddy, 14.

[6] Patricia Finneran, "Documentary Impact: Social Change Through Storytelling," Toronto: Hot Docs, 2014. 4.

[7] Finneran, 3.

whose affective labour there would be no movement for an impact industry to capitalise on in this way.

The report is also problematic in terms of its methodology. Arguing that campaigns need to be in line with the film's tone and message as well as the target audience in order to create maximum impact, Finneran provides five somewhat superficial case studies of films that had tangible, identifiable, and/or quantifiable outcomes as a result of an impact campaign associated with them. Each case study begins with a brief synopsis of the film and its impact campaign, followed by a list of key outcomes, data visualizations where quantifiable results are provided, and a summary of what, in Finneran's opinion, led to the campaign's success. Where this methodology is flawed is twofold: First, as Patricia Aufderheide pointed out in a 2016 publication in response to this report,[8] it is very hard to quantify the nuances of human experience, which Finneran acknowledges up front[9] and then proceeds to attempt regardless. Second, two of the five case studies are campaigns on which Finneran acted as the impact producer.[10] Given that the document here is presented as being a report on behalf of the Hot Docs festival, and that Finneran's dual roles as both the report's author and the impact producer on two of five case studies held up as successful according to the criteria established in the report

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[8] Patricia Aufderheide, "Conversations about Impact in Documentary: Beyond Fear and Loathing," *CineAction* January 2016: 33-38. It should be specifically acknowledged that the conference presentation which led to this article served as a springboard in the earliest stages of this thesis.

[9] Finneran, 5.

[10] Finneran, 16, 25.

only become evident in literally reading the fine print,[11] this calls into question not only the methodological validity of the superficial, data-driven approach, but also the validity of the case studies chosen[12] and the operating definition of "success" underpinning the analyses presented. This conflict of interest is a prime example of how capital and self-interest actually operate within the impact industry and (ironically) impact which films get made, as well as *how* they are made, marketed, and evaluated. This, in turn, is also indicative of how foundations and private funders use impact assessment tools to limit radical possibility and redirect activist energies to upholding systems of oppression through replication, an idea to which I will return later in this chapter.

The release of the Hot Docs report unleashed a debate on the Visible Evidence listserv (a mailing list for documentary scholars and practitioners, who meet once a year to share their work). Initially circulated by Christopher Pavsek of Simon Fraser University,[13] with a note indicating that there had been some previous discussion of impact on the listserv,[14] the Hot Docs

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[11] Finneran, 2.

[12] Finneran's case studies are, in order: *Bully* (2012, Lee Hirsch)*, Tales From the Organ Trade* (2013, Ric Esther Bienstock)*, Herman's House* (2013, Anghad Singh Bhalla)*, The Invisible War* (2012, Kirby Dick)*,* and *How to Survive a Plague* (2012, David France)*.* Finneran is listed as being a campaign strategist on *Bully* and *How to Survive a Plague.*

[13] Christopher Pavsek, "Documentary Impact: Social Change Through Storytelling," post on Visible Evidence listserv, August 17 2014.

[14] The listserv archive on list.indiana.edu is missing fifteen consecutive months of posts from 2012-2013. Having reviewed literally all other post titles archived prior to August 2014 and run

report led to a brief but lively debate on the listerv. Highlights of this discussion include Bill Nichols[15] and Chuck Kleinhans[16] pointing out the dangers in quantifying impact, particularly with regards to the filmmaker's freedom to approach topics and subjects as they see fit, and Brian Winston responding by effectively saying that not having a specific, tangible impact goal leads to consciousness raising, sarcastically adding: "whoopee—that works! I am now so conscious of Indonesia that it hurts—but not that I think any of Oppenheimer's murderous pals are hurting."[17]

Winston's comment, implying that Joshua Oppenheimer's 2012 film *The Act of Killing* was ultimately ineffective and perhaps even harmful for lack of "measurable outcome"[18] may have seemed like a good idea at the time, but it points to a flaw in the understanding of impact that underpins both the broader impact measurement debate and Anglophone North Atlantic debate around *The Act of Killing*: That impact is not only something that should be quantifiable and, ideally, graphically rendered in soft, pleasing colours to make funders feel good when they look at it, but also that it should represent primarily the effects of a film on Anglophone North

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numerous keyword searches to scan the body of all posts in the archive, it is my conclusion that the discussion Pavsek refers to took place during these lost months.

[15] Bill Nichols, "Re: ['VisEv'] 'Documentary Impact: Social Change Through Storytelling'," post on Visible Evidence listserv, August 18 2014.

[16] Chuck Kleinhans, "Re: ['VisEv'] 'Documentary Impact: Social Change Through Storytelling'," post on Visible Evidence listserv, August 18 2014.

[17] Brian Winston, "Re: ['VisEv'] 'Documentary Impact: Social Change Through Storytelling'," post on Visible Evidence listserv, August 18 2014.

[18] Winston, post on Visible evidence listserv, August 18 2014.

Atlantic audiences (or, alternatively, position an Anglophone North American filmmaker as having somehow "saved" people from some kind of horrendous-to-us situation), and that consciousness raising does not count as impact. I have taken up these misconceptions as they specifically apply to *The Act of Killing* elsewhere,[19] and in any event it is far too rich a discussion to include in this work without seriously derailing from my intention here. Without going too far down that path, I will, however, briefly point out that the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council [UK]) impact report filed on behalf of the research cluster from which *The Act of Killing* sprang positions impact as, in this case, having two components: impact on eurowestern cultural life, and impact on Indonesian civil society. In both cases, impact is demonstrated to the funder via a brief discourse analysis drawn from mainstream media coverage of the film's reception in both cultural contexts, and numerical metrics are used in contextually appropriate ways: Box office figures from the UK and North America are used to bolster the project's financial responsibility to a UK public funding agency, while the number of screenings organised in Indonesia and rough estimates of attendance (where available) are qualified as an indication of the film's potential in opening honest discussion of a moment in Indonesian history that has been subject to 50 years of propaganda and taboo. In addition, the discussion about the film's reception in Indonesia includes information about how the film's producers partnered with local human rights activists to ensure the film could be screened in safety, given its overtly political nature (indeed, as I have argued previously, it is likely that this approach included a

[19] See also: "*The Act of Killing*: Liberal porn or daring activism?," *Art Threat*, February 10 2014; and "Activism in action: Screening *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* in the West," *Participations* (2017, forthcoming).

sanctioned form of piracy to ensure the film's distribution in Indonesia).[20] In this sense, the report positions *The Act of Killing* as a case study in how returning to the essentials of film form and screening practices can themselves be impact-generating activism with no real need for a dedicated impact producer or other such consultant to be attached to the project at the outset (an idea to which we will return in several case studies in this work). In other words, widespread consciousness-raising undertaken by *The Act of Killing* both changed the discursive circumstances within which Indonesian human rights activists have been operating, and introduced a new set of concepts to scholarly and cultural discourse around the documentary genre within the Anglophone documentary world—both impacts worth noting, and yet not quantifiable in any meaningful way.[21]

The contrary idea, that consciousness-raising and other immeasurable effects of a film or media-based activist campaign are not worthy of being considered in an examination of what impact can (and does) mean, ultimately contributes to the ongoing perception, created by funders and foundations, that impact is tangible, quantifiable, and so on. As I will demonstrate with two of my case studies, this leads to work that ultimately reinforces the capitalist, neoliberal status quo. As Andrea Smith (Cherokee) of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence explains, using the Ford Foundation as her primary example, many of the foundations currently underwriting non-profit work (including cross-platform activist media projects) exist primarily to generate tax deductions and public goodwill for the corporations and/or billionaires they

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[20] See also: "The Act of Piracy: Accessing *The Act of Killing* in Indonesia," *Film Matters* 6.1 (Spring 2016): 5-11.

[21] Genocide and Genre Project, "Genocide and Genre Impact Assessment Report," University of Westminster, 2014.

represent, many of which are ultimately responsible for the very conditions and structures of oppression that activist groups work in resistance to.[22] With that in mind, it then becomes in the foundations' best interests to divert activist energies away from working to realize radical possibilities that threaten the status quo, and this is best accomplished by professionalizing social movements via the requirements of grant writing, impact assessments, and so on. In this sense, then, not only is the current emphasis on measurable outcomes at best meaningless, since numbers of clicks, shares, Facebook likes, and so on can really only at most point to the geographic spread of a media fragment through human networks, and cannot demonstrate that anyone has understood and internalised any ideas that may be contained or connected to that fragment, or that they have acted on that idea in the short term (or will in the long term).

The idea of a media fragment being circulated as part of a cross-platform (or wholly online) activist project is taken up by Alexandra Juhasz in her article "Ceding the Activist Digital Documentary."[23] Juhasz here ultimately argues that for online activism to be in any way effective, it must be somehow connected to a space or action that one can inhabit in the offline world. Juhasz uses Occupy Wall Street as an example of what she means by this, in that Zuccotti Park provided a space not just for the spectacle of protest but for the offline connections and conversations activism intends to take place without ultimately being complicit in the capitalist

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[22] Andrea Smith (Cherokee), "Introduction: The Revolution Will Not Be Funded," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: beyond the non-profit industrial complex*, eds. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007). 1-18.

[23] Alexandra Juhasz, "Ceding the Activist Digital Documentary," in *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices, and Discourses*, eds. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). 33-49.

system the movement is in resistance to (as, many argue, happens when activism unfolds solely over corporate-owned platforms who then claim ownership of and copyright over all material circulating on these platforms). In this sense, Juhasz's ideas fit well with Merlyna Lim's notion of the cyberurban, in that activist spectacles need to be both organized and disseminated in order to fulfill their function as spectacle, and to disseminate their own media output in some way. Lim writes:

> Alternative imaginaries become possible not merely through the availability and use of social media, nor through access to less controlled physical sites alone, but because activists can manipulate the power projected in space by effectively navigating between material and immaterial realms. Alternating between the materiality and immateriality of cyberurban space, the imaginaries of social movements find their place to start and gestate before developing and spreading to wider arenas.[24]

In other words, online tools can be used to cope with offline challenges and to build momentum towards changing and challenging dominant power structures in both realms, and vice-versa.

Moreover, what we see online is only a fragment of the work being done by social activists, whether as part of a grassroots campaign or an orchestrated social impact campaign associated with a funded media projects. Juhasz argues that what we see online, particularly with regards to tweets, likes, shares, re-posts, and so on, constitute what Grierson noted as fragments of everyday life that may point to but do not communicate any larger meaning. Juhasz argues that the act of aggregating these fragments into a bigger picture ultimately serves the owners of the platform(s) on which this aggregation takes place, and still does not communicate any larger meaning—for this to take place, she argues that some kind of longform cultural output that exists

[24] Merlyna Lim, "A Cyber-Urban Space Odyssey: The Spatiality of Contemporary Social Movement," *New Geographies* 7: 2015, 120.

in the offline world is required.[25] With that said, I argue that these fragments, while they may not themselves contain any larger meaning, can nonetheless point to or be a point of entry to a larger narrative that unifies these fragments in some way (although, admittedly, there is no guarantee that someone circulating such a fragment has actually engaged with any other idea or piece of media it may point to). Moreover, I argue that the neoliberal funding model described above essentially requires that activist documentary lend itself to this kind of fragmentation in order to be permitted to exist in the first place, which has the side effect of distracting the filmmaker from their advocacy work and involvement with any grassroots movement in order to either become or hire a social media specialist.

This implicit change in the role of the filmmaker is itself a secondary impact of filmmaking with the aim of producing funder-pleasing impact-related data. In her essay "Spinning a Collaborative Web: Documentary Projects in the Digital Arena," Elizabeth Coffman argues that impact applies not only to audiences but also to documentary subjects and makers as well in the sense that they are impacted and affected by participation in the documentary's making.[26] While Coffman is here making a case for the idea that transparency in production is part of how audiences will evaluate a documentary going forward, writing that "the public will also judge documentary projects on the transformative nature of what happens before, during and

[25] Juhasz, 43.

[26] Elizabeth Coffman, "Spinning a Collaborative Web: Documentary Projects in the Digital Arena," in *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices, and Discourses*, eds. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). 113.

after production,"[27] I argue first that the public would almost certainly also judge a documentary based on its funding source and the true motivations and practices of its funder were such information more transparently available, and second, that the operating definition of "impact" in all of these discussions is an implicitly positive one, when impact can also be negative or counter to the goals of a particular movement.

Coffman ultimately uses the idea that nothing circulates in a cinematic or cultural vacuum, along with Bruno Latour's actor network theory and Henry Jenkins's argument that participatory media amounts to a new folk culture, to argue that definitions and evaluations of impact and authorship must be expanded to account for this new paradigm. Coffman states that, within that new framework, the most successful documentaries are those that are transparent about their production processes, demonstrating impact (and participatory inclusiveness) within the authorial team.[28] While Coffman herself draws on Jane Gaines's theory of political mimesis in making her arguments about the continued effectiveness of activist documentary in a digital environment,[29] I wish to develop these ideas further within the context of the impact debate.

In "Political Mimesis," Gaines states that the question of how films lead audiences to take action is fraught with myriad other questions, which all foreshadow current debates around impact (and thus demonstrating that such questions are hardly new and unique to the digital environment): "What constitutes action? How do we measure that action? What are the signs of

[27] Coffman, 113.

[28] Coffman, 119.

[29] Coffman, 109.

political consciousness?" [30] Gaines's answer to the first question at least lies partly in her conception of political mimesis, which she states is essentially the relationship between the bodies on screen and the bodies in seats, within which the effectiveness of committed documentary is produced, writing: "we still need to think the body in relation to films that make audience members want to kick and yell, films that make them want to do something *because of the conditions in the world of the audience*."[31] Gaines also writes that filmmakers "use images of bodies in struggle *because they want audiences to carry on that same struggle* (…) The whole rationale behind documenting political battles on film, as opposed to producing written records, is to make struggle visceral, to go beyond the abstractly intellectual to produce a bodily swelling."[32] In hindsight, this evokes Juhasz's argument about fragments of information needing to be united by a master narrative in order to have meaning and impact—in other words, it's one thing to see a retweeted headline about a tragedy of some kind, but quite another to see a feature documentary about it, featuring people on screen who function as points of identification for audience members.

Taken with Coffman's argument about transparency in production being an integral part of a documentary's success in the current media environment (and, by extension, within current neoliberal funding models and evaluative frameworks), as well as Juhasz's argument that one of the three problems with internet-based activism as she sees it is "its formal imperative to

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[30] Jane Gaines, "Political Mimesis," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, eds. Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 89.

[31] Gaines, 90. Emphasis hers.

[32] Gaines, 91.Emphasis hers.

recursive, regressive loops into and about itself, and one's self [sic],"[33] I argue that it is entirely possible that the activist documentary projects engaging the approach that Coffman describes are successful because viewers—and by "viewers," I also include prospective funders reviewing any research footage, trailers, or other fragments submitted alongside funding proposals—are experiencing an embodied identification with the filmmakers or other perceived authorial figure, and thus see themselves as having contributed to the cause portrayed through the simple act of circulating or recommending the fragment in some way. In other words, overemphasising "authorial participation" and social media metrics in evaluating the success or impact of a media-based activist project, thus positioning these as essential to a project's viability and fundability, may well be reifying the perception that activist uses of social media constitute an echo chamber of insincere performances of allyship,[34] and positioning the *perception* of impact as more important than any actual impact (not entirely impossible, given the ultimate raison d'être for so many foundations, as discussed above). In this sense, Juhasz's argument that some kind of larger, unifying narrative that ties these fragments up, communicating greater meaning and

[33] Juhasz, 42.

[34] "Allyship" is commonly understood as the relation in which an outsider to a marginalized group works in solidarity with that group, usually from a more privileged perspective. In its genuine form, it is a state of being and doing rather than of saying. Claiming allyship for oneself, rather than simply doing the work (including the work of discerning when to listen and when to amplify) and allowing those within the community one is working alongside to determine who is or is not an ally, is taken as a sign that one's motives are, at best, questionable. Useful resources for further learning on this include The Anti-Oppression Network (https://theantioppressionnetwork.com) and the Guide to Allyship (guidetoallyship.com).

providing points of identification for more appropriate affective reactions which can then be mobilized to effect change becomes all the more vital.

Transmedia?[35]

Loosely defined, "transmedia" indicates a storytelling approach in which a narrative unfolds over several different platforms, each serving as a point of entry to the primary narrative. Filtering this through Juhasz's argument about fragments of things needing to be unified by a master narrative in order for their full meaning to be communicated, I argue that, while the explosion of digital and social media has made the use of these platforms essential to garnering attention and mobilizing audiences, recursive uses of and contributions to particular media ecologies through the use of multiple platforms has always been useful in this regard, and has been successfully executed many times prior to the development of social media and an entire consulting industry based on the fetishisation of social media and data visualisation.

Activist and media scholar Sasha Costanza-Chock writes in *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement* that transmedia activism includes a movement's entire media ecology, from posters and handbills to street theatre, online

[35] Number one FAQ about this thesis at dinner parties: "Transmedia? You mean like, media about trans people?," usually accompanied by a lengthy recitation of the names of all the trans people (real or fictional) the speaker can think of. Due to this confusion, I have begun using "cross-platform activism" more frequently, although this requires nearly as much explanation, and a better term is urgently needed.

presences, and moving image media.[36] Costanza-Chock further argues that such a holistic approach to media within a participatory, horizontally organized production paradigm (as opposed to a top-down hierarchical structure) is essential to both strengthening and expanding activist movements. Such an approach creates a space for understanding the media ecologies of social movements predating the internet by expanding how the term transmedia is commonly understood, while also shifting discursive emphasis from technological possibilities to activist media ecologies themselves. Costanza-Chock writes that our current cultural obsession with the technological aspects of new media "can also make it difficult to understand how social movement media practices actually work. It can also obscure innovative new cross-platform strategies that movements develop to gain access to broader visibility in a complex media ecology."[37] I argue that this may well be exactly what best serves the interests of the corporations and billionaires behind many of the foundations responsible for both funding activist projects and over-emphasising the use of new media in determining who gets funding. The shift in emphasis engendered by an understanding of transmedia activism as inclusive of a movement's entire cultural and discursive output thus becomes a more productive framework for understanding transmedia activism, and for establishing a more complete historical context in which to situate current transmedia activist projects.

Leshu Torchin's understanding of witnessing as a field of cultural production, outlined in *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet*, approaches transmedia activism from an audience-engagement perspective. Torchin argues that activist

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[36] Sasha Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 9.

[37] Costanza-Chock, 13.

media relies on narrative and character to generate affect, and is heavily context-dependent in terms of mobilising that affect. Emphasising exhibition circumstances as a prime ground for mobilising audiences, Torchin understands transmedia as a term that implies multiplicity, as well as consideration of the various factors influencing audience responses, including exhibition or experiential context.[38] While her starting point may be the opposite of Costanza-Chock's, examining transmedia activism from an outsider perspective, Torchin's emphasis on the multiple nature of transmedial work as well as on exhibition context and audience response also creates space for understanding transmedia activism across a variety of non-digital platforms.

Marc Steinberg's work provides a theoretical framework for tying the two strands of thought—that transmedia work includes an organization's entire media ecology, with the multiplicity that implies, and that narrative, character, and experiential context influence audience response—together. While Steinberg's focus is on what he refers to as a media mix,[39] his case study of Kadowka Media Works provides a useful way of thinking about these issues, and of delineating the difference between transmedia storytelling and simple media convergence, as well as the ways in which these models interact with capital. By detailing the differing approaches of two consecutive heads of Kadowka through the lens of an oedipal 3+1 model and Deleuze and Guattari's 4+*n* model, Steinberg demonstrates that having, for example, a film, its soundtrack, and a novelization of its script effectively repeating the same experience in different forms fits into a 3+1 model where shared advertising or cross-promotion is the +1 tying them

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[38] Leshu Torchin, *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 17.

[39] Marc Steinberg, "Character, World, Consumption," in *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 171.

together. By contrast, the 4+*n* model allows for the creation of a narrative world which proliferates across a wider variety of platforms, providing multiple points of entry to that narrative world rather than simple repetition of narrative in various media forms.[40] While the former seems more overtly tied to capital in the sense that it is blatantly reselling the same narrative experience in multiple forms, Steinberg rightly points out that the greater connectivity and open-endedness of the latter allows for a greater conglomeration of capital.[41] While there is an analogy to be made with the impact industry's emphasis on applying quantitative metrics to a project's social and cultural capital as a means of generating economic capital, this also allows for a way of understanding how different kinds of capital are generated by and circulated within transmedia activist projects. In other words, understanding transmedia through a non-hierarchical, open-ended lens allows for a way of understanding how Torchin and Costanza-Chock's ideas operate simultaneously, and how different kinds of capital operate within transmedia activist projects. Moreover, this understanding also points to ways in which ideas commonly associated with new media, social media, and other such things with built-in quantifiable capabilities, can retroactively be applied to projects from the pre-social media era in order to develop a broader understanding of transmedia activism's potential.

Think of them as "vintage": Adding historical consciousness to the mix

This thesis takes up transmedia activist works predating the widespread adoption of digital media, ranging from a silent film on the Armenian genocide to a project that generated a social

[40] Steinberg, 175.

[41] Steinberg, 175.

media platform before the advent of Facebook. Reviewing the current literature on transmedia activism and documentary impact, as previously discussed in this chapter, reveals a fixation—particularly on the part of funders—with social media and other online metrics, thereby conflating reach with effectiveness, transmedia activism with online activism, and transmediality itself with online and digital platforms. By examining twentieth-century projects as examples of transmedia activism in a pre-digital or pre-social media age, I wish to complicate the widely held notion that transmedia activism necessarily implies the use of the internet, establish a more useful understanding of transmedia approaches to activism, and begin to trace a historical lineage of transmedia activism. Further, by examining projects not normally associated with current understandings of transmedia storytelling, I aim to make clear the ways in which connectivity and capital (social, cultural, and economic) have always operated within transmedia activism.

Finally, the issues of the filmmaker's role and responsibilities are at the heart of any attempt at answering the questions raised in thinking through all the ideas raised previously in this chapter. In the case studies that follow, I will argue that filmmakers can be held responsible for the impact of their work within reason, and within an operating definition of "impact" that looks beyond quantifiable outcomes to consider the human element(s). By this, I mean that filmmakers can (and very much should) be held responsible for the ways in which they approach their topics, and treat or present their subjects. I also argue that media makers embarking on projects that go beyond their films to provide a service of some kind, particularly to marginalized populations, can (and, again, should) be held responsible for ensuring that some kind of self-sustaining mechanism be in place so that should the project suddenly find itself without public funding or private sponsorship, there is no interruption in service. I further argue that while filmmakers, producers, or distribution and promotion agents can be held responsible for the

content within films, as well as their production methods, publicity campaigns, and (to some extent) screening contexts, it is wholly unreasonable to expect filmmakers to assume responsibility for generating what amounts to metrics of interest largely to corporate-backed foundations. In other words, filmmakers can and should be held responsible for maximizing the direct human impact of their films through method, representation, screening context, and community outreach, but their films and related projects cannot and should not become the cinematic equivalent of clickbait. To do so would be exploitative of and condescending to the films' subjects and audiences, as well as any previous activism these films may draw on. It would also demand of the committed or activist filmmaker that their activism become secondary to generating clicks, page views, re-tweets, and other easily visualized data, and this ultimately in the service of upholding a status quo in which the systemic injustices their films address are the result of policies designed to benefit the same entities behind the foundations which fund these projects (as discussed above).

This raises two questions: First, whether a film or other media object can be said to be truly activist when their activism is implicit, hidden behind a celebration of an organization's history or activities, and when their calls to action often rely on racial or religious superiority and are limited to neoliberal appeals to individual donors rather than agitating for broader, systemic change. Second, it raises the question of whether relying on neoliberal do-good impulses and reinforcing a specific worldview in the process is necessarily the best way to engage with and mobilize audiences. I argue here that the answer to both of these questions is no, for the simple reason that these conditions ultimately serve to perpetuate injustices and worsen social conditions in the long run, while reifying the neoliberal, white-supremacist status quo.

In this sense, ultimately, I argue that our current understanding of impact (as outlined above) has become so limited to the definitions of impact set up by the consulting industry that most stands to benefit from it that other ways of thinking about impact have been lost. It is in this newly restrictive definition of impact that questions arise about the role of filmmakers and their responsibilities, and in the involvement of consultants and new kinds of producers—namely, "impact producers"—that the sense of the word "filmmaker" also begins to lose its shape. By focusing on twentieth-century projects that centre on films that (for the most part) draw on pre-existing activist output, I aim to restore a more useful understanding of impact in a transmedia activism context while exploring the question of how activist filmmakers have approached such projects in the past.

The projects under consideration in this thesis deal with a range of issues, and used differing transmedia approaches to work towards their activist goals. *Ravished Armenia* (aka *Auction of Souls*, 1919, Oscar Apfel), a silent re-enactment of survivor testimony intended to raise awareness of the Armenian genocide as well as funds for the Near East Relief organization, used unconventional, and, as we will see in chapter one, highly problematic, transmedia approaches to generating interest in the film and thus its awareness- and fund-raising goals. Chapter two takes up a loose collection of media dealing with miners' rights: *Misère au Borinage* (1933, Henri Storck and Joris Ivens) served as a reframing of previous strike actions and a call to action with regards to contemporaneous working conditions in Belgian coal mines. *Salt of the Earth* (1954, Howard Biberman) uses dramatized re-enactment and pseudo-neo-realist casting, as well as a targeted screening series, to unpack ideas about how front line activism can be more effective. *Harlan County, USA* (1976, Barbara Kopple) deals with similar themes and tactics, documenting a strike in action as well as the revival of labour-rights and grassroots

activist song in the process. Finally, chapter three begins with Daniel Cross's Street trilogy (*Danny Boy* [1993], *The Street* [1996], and *S.P.I.T.: Squeegee Punks in Traffic* [2002]), which combine activism with cinéma vérité interventionism, culminating in the creation of a social networking platform for, about, and in part *by* Canada's homeless communities. Cross's exploration of the question of voice and authorial inclusivity also gave rise to Éric "Roach" Denis's career as an activist filmmaker following his experience as the protagonist in *S.P.I.T.* Roach's subsequent films, *RoachTrip, Punk le vote,* and *Les Tickets* represent a different, and arguably more effective, approach to activist documentary, as will be argued in the second half of chapter three.

What these projects have in common is the idea that "media" is not limited to moving image media, and that "transmedia" is not limited to adaptations of content to suit various platforms, but rather that questionable exhibition hijinks and hybridity, street theatre, song, signage, publicly performed direct action, and other (often participatory) communication formats have been equally valid media platforms through which to bear witness to, make arguments about, and raise awareness of ongoing narratives of injustice. These projects also all display different, but no less equally valuable, kinds of impact, all of which are vital to the films' places in documentary history, and none of which would be considered "impact" by metrics-driven standards. Through analysis of these case studies, I will ultimately argue that a project which stems from pre-existing activism or grassroots thought, which models actions that can be easily duplicated by viewers or otherwise points to some kind of solution to the issues presented, and which in some way appeals to the nuances and fundamentals of human experience—which cannot be reasonably quantified—is likely to have greater and more meaningful impact in the long run that one produced by outside consultants and media-makers working on contract.

There's no such thing as bad publicity: Using stunts to sell a genocide film

Introduction

Ravished Armenia or *Auction of Souls* (1919, Oscar Apfel, USA) was made with the intention of creating widespread awareness of the Armenian genocide and raising funds for Near East Relief. Now operating as the Near East Foundation, the organisation was founded in 1915 under the name "American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief," at the recommendation of the US Ambassador to Turkey, and was incorporated as Near East Relief in 1919 with former US President William Howard Taft as its director.[42] The geographic detail in this name change reflected the organisation's work not only in Armenia and Syria, but in the region more broadly thought of as the Middle East, as well as in Greece. In 1930, the organization was renamed to "Near East Foundation,"[43] which reflected a shift in the group's work from primarily offering support to refugees and displaced persons in refugee camps, to working for what the group sees as more proactive responses to local issues.

Ravished Armenia is based on the memoirs of Aurora Mardiganian, a survivor of the Armenian genocide, which were originally serialized in major American newspapers before being released in book form, and then adapted to the screen. Shot on location on a Santa Monica

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[42] Brigette C. Kamsler, Kristen Leigh Southworth, and Amy Meverden, "Finding Aid for Near East Relief Committee Records, 1904-1950," (New York: Columbia University Library, 2013), 2.

[43] Kamsler et al, 2.

beach,[44] featuring Mardiganian herself and using Armenian refugees as extras in re-creating the events recounted in the book,[45] the film version of Mardiganian's memoirs features a main storyline about a white American teacher who is chased into the desert alongside her Armenian charges, witness to torture, murder, and general brutality along the way, with a human trafficking subplot and heavy emphasis on sexual violence. The film was also released under the title *Auction of Souls*, ostensibly to avoid confusion with the book while also appealing to Christian righteousness and, at the same time, playing on Orientalist fantasies of slave markets and harems.[46] The marketing for the film went to great lengths to emphasize its basis in historical truth as well as its approval by political and military leaders, clergy, and others held up as arbiters of truth and good taste.[47] At the same time, however, publicity materials also played up the rape and torture of Armenian women as well as Mardiganian's involvement in the filmmaking and exhibition processes, and while in release, local exhibitors' publicity ploys became increasingly outlandish, relying on a combination of Orientalism, voyeurism, and moral righteousness to increase ticket sales. Further, the film itself, according to both the film's reviews and the script reprinted in Anthony Slide's study of the film, positioned an American woman as

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[44] Anthony Slide, *Ravished Armenia and the Story of Aurora Mardiganian* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 15.

[45] "8,000 Armenians in Selig Spectacle," *The Moving Picture World*, January 25, 1919, 473.

[46] Leshu Torchin, Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 50.

[47] "Little Theatres as Well as Big Ones Are Cashing in on 'Auction of Souls'," Ad, *Motion Picture News*, July 5 1919, 267.

the main character in a fictional narrative interwoven with Mardiganian's memoirs, in an attempt to increase American audience identification with victims of Turkish aggression.

Leshu Torchin has extensively reviewed how witnessing and testimony function as a call to action in relation to *Ravished Armenia*, drawing on the film's publicity material and live prologue in so doing.[48] With this chapter, I aim to delve further into the ways in which these materials generated and leveraged audience affect, and how this informs the Near East Foundation's current media practices. By examining a project not normally associated with current understandings of transmedia storytelling, this chapter serves as a case study of the ways in which connectivity and capital (social, cultural, and economic) operate within transmedia activism. It should be noted that the film itself will not be analyzed in this chapter, given that it was initially printed on nitrate stock and only a few fragments of the original remain. According to Slide, the film presently circulating online under the title *Ravished Armenia* consists of only those few fragments cut together with stock footage, newsreel footage, and other cinematic odds and ends to make a documentary of a genocide otherwise undocumented in moving images, and labeled as *Ravished Armenia*,[49] despite the vast difference between this and the original film. Slide's book by the same name includes a copy of the original film's shooting script with the rescued and recycled scenes in bold for reader/viewer comparison. Torchin's work, however, refers to specific reel numbers, indicating either that a complete copy may be in existence, or that her analysis is based on what Slide speculates is an assemblage of sorts. An analytical

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[48] Leshu Torchin, "To Acquaint America with Ravished Armenia," in *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 21-60.

[49] Slide, Ravished Armenia, 29.

comparison of both works, while a fascinating research project, is beyond the scope of this thesis; as such, this chapter focuses on what paratextual elements are readily available for empirical review.

Ravished Armenia: The book, the film, the sideshow

The Film

Despite its release several years before the conceptualisation of documentary as a film genre, with no observational or actuality footage to be recycled into the telling of Mardiganian's story, and replete with fictionalized elements, the film was nonetheless billed as an "authenticated photographic record of historical fact" by the *Washington Post*.[50] It is worth noting here that while *Variety* did review *Ravished Armenia* as a film, exploring the truth-value of re-enactments, calling the film's usefulness as activism into question and erasing Near East Relief's role in its production entirely,[51] major mainstream media publications took a different tack in their coverage of the film. The *New York Times* in particular treated early screenings of *Ravished Armenia* as social events,[52] including a list of society figures—President Taft among them—in attendance,[53] even when such items were included in the paper's entertainment section or at the end of film industry gossip columns. In the lead-up to the film's public release, the *Washington*

[50] "Plays and Players at the Theatres This Week and Next," *The Washington Post*, July 6, 1919, L4.

[51] Sime, "Ravished Armenia" (review), *Variety*, Feb. 28 1919, 59.

[52] "'Ravished Armenia' in Film," *The New York Times*, Feb. 15 1919, 4.

[53] "Written on the Screen: Armenian Atrocities," *The New York Times*, Feb. 16 1919, 44.

Post published a major feature article on the genocide and Near East Relief's work.[54] This article positioned the Foundation as the film's producer and creative force; Mrs. Harriman, chair of Near East Relief's National Motion Picture Committee, as its spokesperson and Aurora's saviour; and the Turks, Islam in general, and the Sheikh ul-Islam in particular as forces of evil to be countered by such acts of moral righteousness as attending showings of *Ravished Armenia* and, in the process, making donations to Near East Relief. The *New York Times* followed this coverage with write-ups and smaller articles emphasizing the film's endorsement by Christian clergy and society figures alike, [55] thereby underscoring the moral imperative laid out in earlier articles. The *Washington Post*'s later (and more limited) coverage took a similar turn, primarily emphasizing the humanitarian intentions behind the film's production, in one small write-up calling on viewers to identify directly with the Armenians portrayed on-screen,[56] and in another, focusing mainly on Mardiganian's presence at a screening as well as the gendered aspects of the torture presented in the film.[57]

This type of coverage served to create a framework in which the intervention of white, Christian Americans was positioned as a moral imperative for a white, Christian American audience. The film's portrayal of individual white, Christian Americans as saviours can thus be understood as an appeal to the same audience through the process of mimesis. As Jane Gaines writes, films that move audiences to want to take action do so by making a connection between

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[54] Howard M. Owen, "The Man who Incited the Armenian Massacres," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 26 1919, SM2.

[55] "Appeals for Near East," *The New York Times*, Feb. 21 1919, 24.

[56] "At the Local Theatres," *The Washington Post*, July 7 1919, 5.

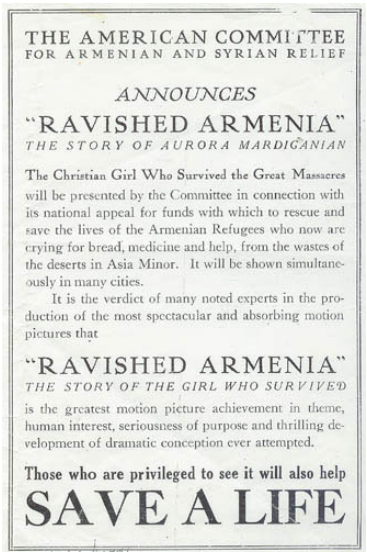
[57] "John Peter Toohey, Author," *The Washington Post*, June 22 1919, A3.

viewers and conditions they understand as being part of their world,[58] and that filmmakers "use images of bodies in struggle *because they want audiences to carry on that same struggle* (…) The whole rationale behind documenting political battles on film, as opposed to producing written records, is to make struggle visceral, to go beyond the abstractly intellectual to produce a bodily swelling."[59] By drawing on written media coverage—"the abstractly intellectual," however sensationalised it may have been—which portrayed the Turks and Muslim people as specific enemies to what is considered right and good by a white, Christian American audience, and then inserting white, Christian American characters—and particularly a woman in a helping profession—as the film's heroes, the makers of *Ravished Armenia* leveraged this media coverage to presumably produce a mimetic reaction in which American viewers would be moved to support Near East Relief's work.

[58] Jane Gaines, "Political Mimesis," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed. Michael Renov, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 90.

[59] Gaines, 91.

While the overall lack of critical discussion about *Ravished Armenia* in mainstream publications is due in part to reviewers not wishing to detract from the social good it was intended to produce,[60] the coverage the film was given points to the spectacle created around the film being seen as more worthy of coverage as philanthropic social events than the actual film, particularly at screenings and events where Mardiganian herself was said to be present. Moreover, despite the lack of widespread critical engagement with the film as a film, an advertisement produced by Near East Relief claims that "many noted experts in the production of the most spectacular and absorbing motion pictures" have said of *Ravished Armenia* that it "is the greatest motion picture achievement in theme, human interest, seriousness of purpose and thrilling development of dramatic conception ever attempted," before concluding in large block letters that "Those who are privileged to see it will also help SAVE A LIFE."[61] While this is not unusual for Near East Relief's visual media of the era—among other examples, a poster from 1918 depicts a huddled child swathed in darkness, and boldly proclaims "GIVE OR WE PERISH"[62]—the effect of this ad is to frame seeing the film as a direct act of solidarity with immediate


THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE
FOR ARMENIAN AND SYRIAN RELIEF

ANNOUNCES

"RAVISHED ARMENIA"
THE STORY OF AURORA MARDIGANIAN

The Christian Girl Who Survived the Great Massacres will be presented by the Committee in connection with its national appeal for funds with which to rescue and save the lives of the Armenian Refugees who now are crying for bread, medicine and help, from the wastes of the deserts in Asia Minor. It will be shown simultaneously in many cities.

It is the verdict of many noted experts in the production of the most spectacular and absorbing motion pictures that

"RAVISHED ARMENIA"
THE STORY OF THE GIRL WHO SURVIVED

is the greatest motion picture achievement in theme, human interest, seriousness of purpose and thrilling development of dramatic conception ever attempted.

Those who are privileged to see it will also help

SAVE A LIFE

Figure 1: "SAVE A LIFE" ad, image via Near East Foundation digital archive

[60] Slide, Ravished Armenia, 21.

[61] Near East Foundation Archive, visual matter, neareastmuseum.com/archives

[62] Ibid

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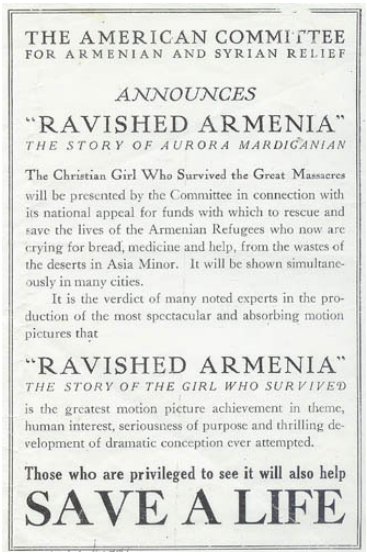
THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE
FOR ARMENIAN AND SYRIAN RELIEF

ANNOUNCES

"RAVISHED ARMENIA"

THE STORY OF AURORA MARDIGANIAN

The Christian Girl Who Survived the Great Massacres

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Figure 1: "SAVE A LIFE" ad, image via Near East Foundation digital archive

[60] Slide, Ravished Armenia, 21.

[61] Near East Foundation Archive, visual matter, neareastmuseum.com/archives

[62] Ibid

impact, appealing to viewers' sense of moral righteousness in order to generate donations via box office receipts, while simultaneously tying the film and its advertisements back into Near East Relief's visual media ecology.

The reliance on moral imperative in the film's marketing, as well as the creation of spectacle around the film as a secondary marketing strategy, bears further examination in this context. While commercial print ads for the film claim that, despite the fictionalized aspects, this is Mardiganian's own history being portrayed, the ads also make much of the fact that the film's New York premiere was a private screening held at the Plaza with admission set at $10 per head (roughly $140 in 2016)[63] as a fundraiser for Near East Relief, often referring to it with variations on "The picture originally shown at $10 a seat."[64] This draws on mainstream media coverage of the film as a social event by using price as an indication of exclusivity and intrinsic value, making attendance at future screenings—regardless of ticket price—an aspirational act contributing to the development of social or cultural capital. Further, by recalling earlier coverage of the film by using the reference to the Plaza fundraiser, this oft-repeated tagline also appealed to potential spectators' social consciences and sense of moral righteousness, perhaps explaining why it was used across nearly all forms of advertising for the film.

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[63] "Inflation Calculator," US Inflation Calculator, July 31 2016, http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/

[64] "The Greatest Picture Ever Shown/Here it is," ads, *Motion Picture News*, May 31, 1919, 3584.

Print ads for *Ravished Armenia* alternate between two modes of address, clearly destined for two distinct audiences. The first positions Mardiganian as the only Christian woman to have survived the atrocities, and generally features longer blocks of text citing clergy, judges, and other moral authorities (i.e., white Christian male colonial authority figures) as having deemed the film to be morally worthy despite the outrages depicted.[65] While larger, and therefore pricier, versions of these ads appear in trade publications, smaller versions of them with more concise texts appear in mainstream publications like the *Times* and the *Post*, usually a day or two after the film's being mentioned in entertainment listings or towards the end of the film's run at a given theatre. According to Torchin, these types of ads drew on a more general context of media portrayals of Armenian persecution being framed specifically as Christian persecution, thus leveraging religious affinity to draw audiences to screenings, while turning such news coverage into part of Near East Relief's media ecology over and above coverage focused on the film and its production or gala screenings.[66] The second type of advertisement, seen more often in trade publications, plays heavily on the more outrageous aspects of the atrocities depicted in the film, refers to the film as spectacular, and sometimes features line art of a nearly-nude woman in bondage.[67] In Minneapolis, the latter was alleged to


EXHIBITORS HERALD AND MOTOGRAPHY

MONEY-MAKING ATTRACTIONS

Aurora Mardiganian, sole survivor of half a million Armenian Christian girls, escaped to America after two years in Turkish harems and Kurdish slave raiders. She re-enacts her unspeakable experiences in the film. Her story is supplemented by the official reports of Commissioner Lord Bryce and Ambassador Morgenthau.

Never a Film Like It!

See it and you will understand why it is playing to capacity everywhere—in little theatres and big ones.

AUCTION of SOULS

From H. L. Gates' Sensational Book, "RAVISHED ARMENIA"

Though extremely sensational this picture has everywhere enlisted the sympathy and support of the best people, including churches.

See It and You'll Book It

Ask any exhibitor who has run it.

Figure 2: "Never a Film Like It!", image via Exhibitors Herald and Motography, July 12, 1919: 8.

[65] "Never a Film Like It!," ad, *Exhibitors Herald and Motography*, July 12, 1919: 8.

[66] Torchin, Creating the Witness, 44-52.

[67] "Greatest," 3584.

be too much for a local women's group, who protested the film being shown at all. Naturally, the press coverage of these protests drew even more attention to the film than mere print advertising would have done, and the local exhibitor was credited with having staged it as "one of the most successful works of exhibitor showmanship" ever seen in Minneapolis.[68]

The Sideshow

Creating social controversy over the film or positioning its viewing as essential to building or maintaining one's social capital were not the only tactics used to garner media attention, increase attendance at screenings of *Ravished Armenia*, and, by extension, increase donations to Near East Relief. While the film's initial screening in New York was an invitation-only fundraiser, thereby setting the preconditions for these two strategies, the film was then put into general release and interested theatre owners were advised by every industry publication to engage in publicity stunts of all kinds to increase attendance, in addition to partnerships with local Near East Relief chapters, who themselves undertook publicity work through philanthropic outreach campaigns.[69] Exhibitors' tactics went far beyond staging protests outside their theatres, with media coverage describing a live prelude featuring elaborate stage sets, live camels, Mardiganian herself,[70] and, in a case of extreme Orientalism, belly dancers.[71]

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[68] "Protest Only Stirs Up a City to Throng Auction of Souls." *Motion Picture News*. July 5 1919, 318.

[69] Torchin, Creating the Witness, 56

[70] "Film Star Only Got $15 Per," *The Billboard* 33.11: March 12 1921, 82.

[71] "Sets Pace for California Exhibitors," *Motion Picture News*, January 10, 1920, 603.

Figure 3: Preshow belly dancer; image via Motion Picture News, January 10, 1920: 603.

Further, every screening of the film, regardless of other publicity stunts, included a scripted, live prologue performed by local actors between the film's opening titles and the first scene of the film itself. The script for the prologue, also reprinted in Slide's work, includes costume and lighting notes as well as stage directions, ensuring consistent reproduction at every performance and in every venue, in an attempt to ensure a consistent reading of the film by every audience, and a consistent affective—and financially lucrative—response. This prologue, which called directly on audience members to donate to Near East Relief, features an embodied, implicitly masculine America as the Christian saviour of an embodied, explicitly female, literally ravished Armenia, along with a hefty dose of Islamophobia.[72] As Benedetta Guerzoni points out in her study of the film, such gendered imagery in both the prologue and print advertising for the film draws on a longer tradition of representations of Armenia embodied in devout Christian women, and further to that, of Armenian women as victims, and particularly victims of sexual violence.[73] Guerzoni also points out that to US audiences in particular, "representation(s) of violence against women (were) often a

[72] Slide, Ravished Armenia, 273.

[73] Benedetta Guerzoni, "A Christian Harem: *Ravished Armenia* and the Representation of the Armenian Woman in the International Press," in *Mass Media and the Genocide of the Armenians: One Hundred Years of Uncertain Representation*, eds. Joceline Chabot, Richard Godin, Stefanie Kappler, and Sylvia Kasparian (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 55.

manifestation of the fears of white society."[74] As such, the gendered aspects of the spectacle and visual material surrounding the film can be said to call upon two different audiences, with the same end result (donations to Near East Relief via box office receipts): The first, those whose moral or religious outrage (or racial fears) are provoked by such imagery, epitomized by clerical endorsements and screenings reserved for women only; and the second, those who find such imagery titillating, in an extreme example of what Torchin might call "inappropriate affect,"[75] epitomized by the use of live belly dancers as pre-show entertainment.

This ensemble of tactics to attract audiences and mobilize them to specific actions calls to mind Torchin's argument that transmedia activism is based on multiplicity and reproducibility, as well as her argument that successful transmedia activism takes into account exhibition context and mobilizes audience affect in the moment.[76] By drawing on news coverage of the atrocities to advertise the film, inserting a white, American, Christian woman into the scenario as a main character and point of identification for an American viewer, and by literally presenting those same viewers with both a woman embodying Armenia in the live prologue as well as, in major cities, Mardiganian herself (or a convincing look-alike), while hewing to a predetermined script about America's role as Christian saviour of souls.

That Mardiganian was said to be present at many screenings, although court records would reveal that, in fact, there were seven different women posing as Mardiganian to fulfill contracts with exhibitors (and later research would reveal that this was also due partly to

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[74] Ibid., 52.

[75] Torchin, Creating the Witness, 11.

[76] Torchin, Creating the Witness, 17.

exhaustion on Mardiganian's part),[77] and that she featured heavily in the film's promotional material, brings to mind Marc Steinberg's discussion of the role of a character in transmedia storytelling. Steinberg writes that transmedia storytelling, by being fragmented across several platforms, "quite naturally [prompts] a divergence of narrative worlds."[78] Steinberg goes on to argue that these divergent worlds can be regulated by a character, which exists as "an entity that both permits a series to diverge (allowing transmedia development) and holds things together (allowing these divergent series to be read, despite their incongruities, as existing within a larger, yet unitary world)."[79] Steinberg further defines the role of character in this operation as:

> (…) a concrete thing and an abstract something that travels between things, holding converging and diverging series together. The character cannot be reduced to any one of its incarnations but must be defined both by its material incarnations and by the ways that it exceeds them (…) the character allows for the communication of media, object, and consumer series. It is an abstract technology of relation, a connector that is both actual or embodied and virtual or abstract.[80]

In other words, Steinberg argues that character can be the common point of entry to a larger narrative from any one of a number of cultural fragments in circulation. I argue that this idea can be mapped onto *Ravished Armenia* by thinking of the two strands of advertising for the film (one more conservative, and the other which appeals more directly to the prurient), as well as Near East Relief's own public relations work, serialized memoirs, Mardiganian's in-person

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[77] Slide, 25.

[78] Marc Steinberg, "Character, World, Consumption," in *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Character in Japan*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 188.

[79] Steinberg, 190.

[80] Steinberg, 194.

appearances and her serialized memoirs, and the live prologue as divergent narratives which all hinge around the idea of Aurora Mardiganian as *the* Armenian woman to be saved (or ravished, as the case may be) by white, Christian Americans. Moreover, that stand-ins for Mardiganian were eventually hired to ensure a more easily reproduced audience experience in multiple locations, sometimes simultaneously, point to the film's promoters thinking of Mardiganian more as the fictionalized version of herself she was asked to portray in the film, and that the figure of Armenia in the prologue arguably represents, than as the real, live, genocide survivor and refugee that she was.

Thus, the film's producers—including Near East Relief—engaged in a form of transmedia spectacle-making designed to generate and leverage audience affect from a variety of perspectives for both additional donations to Near East Relief and word-of-mouth publicity for future screenings and fundraising activities. Further, exhibitors' additional spectacles accompanying screenings of the film heightened the emotional stakes by playing up more exotic perceptions of Turkey and Armenia, thereby underscoring the sense of peril at the hands of the foreign Other inherent in both the prologue and the film itself (as well as in the film's advertising campaign and the contemporaneous media coverage of both the film and the atrocities as a general news item, as previously discussed), presumably in an attempt to further predispose audiences to contribute to fundraising efforts.

A lack of firm box office numbers reported in trade publications at the time raises the question of whether exhibitors' claims of large attendance figures are themselves part of the media ecology around *Ravished Armenia*. While some exhibitors submitted photographs of crowds clamouring to be admitted to screenings, these are only indexical of a large crowd outside a theatre, not of any actual admission figures, foreshadowing today's problem of relying

Figure 4: A crowd in Dayton; image via Exhibitors Herald, January 31, 1920: 90.

on metrics as an indication of impact.[81] Further, many exhibitors' claims to have broken their own attendance records were printed in articles lauding the publicity stunts mounted around the film. Where the truth value of these statements and photos is strengthened is, instead, in very short exhibitor-submitted reports from small towns, printed under headings like "What the Picture Did For Me." While a few of these report solid box office business, usually as a result of a promotional or publicity campaign of some kind, others report slower sales and an unpopular reception, with comments such as "Picture excellent, but leaves too terrible an impression. Not a picture for children,"[82] and "Drew a big house, but very few liked it."[83] The latter are mainly situated in smaller towns, likely with smaller budgets for generating their own publicity through costly sideshows, staged protests, and so on. That many of these also cite the film's dark nature as the reason for its unpopularity serves to reaffirm others' decisions to exploit the more prurient aspects of the film and create a spectacle around it, despite its sober subject matter. One exhibitor went so far as to write in to a trade publication to advise other small exhibitors to advertise higher ticket prices for the film, as a way of evoking the prestige around the film's gala premiere in order to generate excitement and thus larger audiences without needing to engage in any further spectacle-making.[84] Ultimately, in the

[81] "Dayton Liked It," photo, *Exhibitors Herald*, January 31, 1920, 90.

[82] "What the Picture Did For Me," *Exhibitors Herald*, May 1 1920, 79.

[83] "What the Picture Did For Me," *Exhibitors Herald*, May 29 1920, 75

[84] "What the Picture Did For Me," *Exhibitors Herald*, April 10 1920, 69.

absence of any clear box office figures, and in the absence of any serious criticism or mainstream press coverage of audience response to the film rather than publicity around it, available evidence suggests only that the public responded to exploitative stunts designed to bring them into the theatre, and that word-of-mouth where these stunts were absent was likely to have been less than positive.

Despite this, however, Slide states that the film raised $117 million (roughly $2.4 billion in 2016)[85] for Near East Relief,[86] far more than the $30 million goal indicated in the film's humanitarian-oriented advertising. Further, Torchin writes that Near East Relief, inspired by *Ravished Armenia*'s success, continued to produce shorter films in collaboration with media outlets wanting access to field sites where the organization performed its relief work.[87] Now known as the Near East Foundation, the organization's outreach efforts are largely centered around online platforms, and include short, high-quality videos of individuals benefitting from the Foundation's economic development-based programs, as well as bits of quantified data identified on their website as "Our Impact."[88] The case studies featured on the organizations' website and other channels are all situated in locations that have been the object of news coverage in recent years, and all focus on issues that have also received a great deal of media

[85] "Inflation Calculator," July 31, 2016.

[86] Slide, Ravished Armenia, 28.

[87] Torchin, Creating the Witness, 57.

[88] "What We Do," Near East Foundation, July 31, 2016, www.neareast.org. It is also perhaps worth noting that the Foundation's annual reports, all available online, repeat these case studies in static "print" form, accompanied by a heavy dose of the kinds of data visualization endemic in impact reports and favoured by funders.

attention: Israeli-Palestinian co-operation, climate change, women's economic enfranchisement, etc.

Ravished Armenia: 2nd ed., revised and updated for the web

Based on this, it would seem that the Foundation's approach to visual media has simply evolved from their post-*Ravished Armenia* activity, embracing the current trend favouring data visualization in the process. However, the final paragraph of Slide's acknowledgements includes an exhortation to the reader to donate to the Foundation, complete with donation information and the Foundation's mailing address.[89] In addition, the book includes a full reprint of both the original, serialized print version of *Ravished Armenia*, as well as the screenplay and Near East Relief's Prologue, along with many production stills, advertisements, and related fundraising materials; the Foreword was written by prominent Armenian-Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan, echoing Near East Relief's use of celebrity endorsement through a series of short films featuring Jackie Coogan engaging in relief work on their behalf;[90] and the publication date of the second edition of Slide's work coincides with a time when news coverage of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide was beginning to ramp up. Taken together, this all supports an argument that Slide's work has itself become a key part of the Near East Foundation's own media ecology around *Ravished Armenia*, adding the same kind of moral (and in this case academic) authority to the work as earlier endorsements from clergy, military leaders, ambassadors, and so on.[91]

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[89] Slide, Ravished Armenia, ix-x.

[90] Torchin, Creating the Witness, 58

[91] It is worth noting here that Turkish persecution of Armenians began in the mid-19th century, with massacres occurring from 1894-96, in 1909, and again in 1915 and 1916, with mass

Curiously, however, all incarnations of the book, as well as any links to the extant version of *Ravished Armenia*, are absent from the NEF's website, and nor is there any mention of the film on the organization's autobiographical timeline. This may well be due to the racial undercurrents and over-sexualisation of the violence in the film, or to the NER's arguably abusive treatment of Aurora, who, after being asked to relive and recount her trauma ad nauseam, was sent to a convent school, where she became suicidal and ran away, while Henry and Eleanor Gates, the former the film's screenwriter and the latter Aurora's legal guardian, hired seven look-alikes to travel to screenings in Aurora's place, and pocketed all monies owing to Aurora to boot—arguably, an example of negative impact within an authorial team.[92] Regardless, that the film has been mostly lost, and the current version in circulation online is an assemblage of fragments of *Ravished Armenia* and various newsreel segments,[93] compiled and

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incarcerations continuing until the 1920s. It is the massacres of 1915 and 1916 that are referred to as "the Armenian genocide." It is also worth noting that, a century later, conditions for people thought to be Muslim in the US (and increasingly in Canada and the UK) echo what Chabot et al write of the conditions sparking these massacres: "The Great War contributed to the radicalization of the politics of the CUP, a key faction of the Young Turks that was in government in Constantinople. (…) The turning point, however, was the defeat of the Third Ottoman Army by the Russians at Sarikamish between December 1914 and January 1915. This defeat marked an important step in the radicalization of the Young Turks in power. *The Armenian population was accused of betrayal and held responsible for the defeat*." (emphasis mine; Chabot et al., *Mass Media and the Genocide of the Armenians,* 2-3).

[92] Slide, *Ravished Armenia*, 24-7.

[93] Slide, Ravished Armenia, 29.

restored by the Armenian Genocide Resource Centre, is the most likely explanation for its absence from the Near East Foundation website (if not a satisfactory explanation for its absence from the Foundation's historical timeline). *Ravished Armenia* does, however, show up in the Foundation's digital archive. Examples of print ads for the film are readily available using the simple keyword "armenia," and *Ravished Armenia* is briefly discussed as a successful fundraising campaign drawing on the visual iconography of Near East Relief's earlier campaigns in a short documentary about the latter, titled *Lest They Perish*, and posted to the Foundation's Vimeo and Facebook pages.

Equally curious is the seeming absence of contemporary celebrity spokespeople for the Near East Foundation. *Ravished Armenia*—the book, the film, and the sideshow—all made Aurora Mardiganian a prominent figure, for better or for worse, and much of Near East Relief's credibility as well as the film's publicity and advertising rested on its association with powerful public figures and socialites. Following this project, Near East Relief collaborated with child star Jackie Coogan to organise a food drive in which cans of milk were accepted as admission to his films. While there are still some well-known names involved with the Foundation—in addition to Egoyan's contributions to Slide's work, Queen Noor of Jordan sits on the Foundation's President's Council,[94] and both Amal Clooney and her husband lead initiatives for two of the Foundation's partners[95]—their participation is kept surprisingly low-key given that the Foundation's primary outreach efforts remain moving image and other visual media created as part of fundraising campaigns, and that fundraising is their sole call to action. In particular,

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[94] Near East Foundation, "Board of Directors," neareast.org/who-we-are/board-of-directors/

[95] Aurora Prize, "100 Lives Launches the 'Amal Clooney Scholarship'," auroraprize.com/en/aurora/detail/8897/100-lives-launches-amal-clooney-scholarship

videos celebrating the Foundation's current projects feature the individuals who directly benefit from these projects, in a bid to encourage viewers to participate financially, and are the primary media immediately available on the Foundation's website. It is worth noting here that The Foundation's Facebook page, meanwhile, is mainly used as a platform for sharing photos of and links to things associated with their projects, as well as keeping potential donors apprised of the Foundation's proximity to power by posting updates from White House events. While the Clooneys' images do appear in some of these photos, they are nearly never named in the Foundation's posts, only in the occasional headline of media coverage being shared.[96] Further, while Kim Kardashian made (long and awkward) headlines in September 2016 for taking out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* denouncing a Turkish group of Armenian genocide deniers,[97] and also a year prior for visiting Armenia on what was marked as the hundredth anniversary of the genocide and devoting several episodes of her TV show to this,[98] she is not mentioned once on any of the Foundation's online properties.

[96] "Near East Foundation," *Facebook*, https://www.facebook.com/neareastfoundation/

[97] Maya Oppenheim, "Kim Kardashian condemns Wall Street Journal for denying Armenian 'genocide' in New York Times advert," *The Independent*, independent.co.uk, Sept. 20 2016.

[98] Tim Walker, "Kim Kardashian in Armenia: Reality TV star and family's trip to Yerevan raises eyebrows – and global awareness of genocide," *The Independent*, independent.co.uk, April 14 2015.

Conclusion

This comes full circle with the news of an upcoming documentary about the Foundation's history, to be narrated by Victor Garber,[99] and whose sole creative force appears to be the Executive Producer, a private individual described as having a professional life in finance—in other words, the title of Executive Producer, the function of director, and overall control of the film have been given to a very generous donor.[100] By comparison, a 2017 Hollywood film titled *The Promise*, set in Constantinople in 1915 and also featuring a white American (this time male) as saviour, also lists a prominent Armenian-American non-professional with ties to another Armenian non-profit organization as a producer, alongside an Academy Award-winning director and a slew of other filmmaking professionals.[101] In the age of crowdfunding activist

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[99] They Shall Not Perish, "Cast," theyshallnotperish.com/cast/

[100] They Shall Not Perish, "Crew," theyshallnotperish.com/crew/

[101] The Promise, "Cast & Crew," http://thepromise.movie/about. It is worth noting that this film is also a fundraiser for various unnamed non-profits "fighting genocide and injustice around the world," according to the social impact part of the film's site. It is also worth noting that according to both *The Independent* and *Deadline*, Armenian genocide deniers launched a campaign that saw the film receive over 55,000 one-star reviews on IMDb, mostly from men located in Turkey, after only three public screenings at the Toronto International Film Festival (see: Christopher Hooton, "Christian Bale Armenian Genocide film gets 55,126 1-star ratings on IMDb off just three public screenings," *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/the-promise-film-christian-bale-armenian-genocide-imdb-turkey-oscar-isaac-a7378881.html; and Anita Busch, "Kirk Kerkorian's Legacy: A Mainstream Feature About

documentaries, it is not unusual to give producer credits to non-professionals, nor is it unusual for first-time filmmakers to turn to crowdfunding, particularly for activist filmmaking. However, taken with the Foundation's continual linking of itself with those who hold social and/or political power, in 1919 as much as today, it does raise the question of whether such solely privately-financed films can be said to be activist works when their activism is implicit, serves private (or corporate) agendas, is hidden behind a celebration of an organization's history or activities, and when that organization's calls to action remain limited to neoliberal appeals to individual donors rather than agitating for broader, systemic changes.

This question is intensified when looking at the projects represented on the Foundation's website, and thinking about Andrea Smith (Cherokee's) writings on the non-profit industrial complex[102]: That the Foundation's main projects at the moment are focused on microeconomic development certainly looks nice on the surface, in that it allows for the production of videos and other media showing potential donors an actual human who has tangibly benefited from previous donations. In an era where rumours about how much money actually goes into programs or services offered by non-profit organisations abound (Susan G. Komen being the prime example), demonstrating this kind of direct impact on individuals is a savvy public relations move, and also constitutes a simultaneously brilliant but very narrow means of demonstrating impact. (That the Near East Foundation actually receives more than three times as much from government funding

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The Armenian Genocide," *Deadline Hollywood*, http://deadline.com/2016/09/kirk-kerkorian-legacy-movie-about-the-armenian-genocide-1201813837/).

[102] Andrea Smith (Cherokee), "Introduction: The Revolution Will Not Be Funded," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: beyond the non-profit industrial complex*, eds. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), 1-18.

as from private donors[103] raises the question of how government funding agencies are measuring impact—a question best suited to a longer project.) The projects described in these videos tend towards solutions that see individuals in unstable regions supported in some kind of entrepreneurial project as a way of making their lives more tolerable under the present socio-political circumstances they are experiencing—in other words, the Foundation has (ironically) returned to relief work, albeit by a different name. Perhaps best exemplified by a project in which a Palestinian olive mill engineer is placed in economic partnership with an Israeli olive farmer ("An Olive Peace"),[104] these projects, by offering their beneficiaries the promise of a marginally better life *right now*, effectively shift those beneficiaries' energies away from imagining and working towards more radical possible futures, while giving the Foundation permission to continue addressing only the effects of injustice rather than the injustice itself. In that sense, these projects serve as a microeconomic version of the dynamic Smith describes in unpacking how foundations ultimately serve to redirect activist energies into upholding capitalist-colonial status quos. Finally, by presenting these projects, which focus on individuals, as actually being a solution to the problem, the Foundation essentially sends a message that larger social or structural injustices are best solved through individual coping mechanisms rather than through any actual social or structural change.

This raises the questions of whether activism is always necessarily left wing, must always be focused on systemic change rather than individual relief, and can never serve private, corporate, or state interests. While activism is most often associated with the left within the

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[103] Charity Navigator, https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=search.summary&orgid=5993

[104] Near East Foundation, neareast.org

specific academic sphere of film and media studies, it is helpful to remember that ultimately activism as a concept refers primarily to people speaking out for or taking action to enact what they believe is the right and just way of being (we need look no further than the notion of a "men's rights activist" to fully grasp that this can go both ways). Clearly, this is not the only uncomfortable question raised about activist tactics and methodologies in this chapter. While considering the Near East Foundation's use of visual and online media today in context with *Ravished Armenia*, as well as its efforts to maintain ties to and participate in dominant power structures, the question arises as to whether relying on neoliberal do-good impulses—in which individuals are positioned as the best and only solution to a structural problem—to reinforce a specific vision of morality and solicit donations in the process is necessarily the best way to engage with and mobilize audiences, regardless of political perspective. Asking this question risks bringing into question the role of the filmmaker, the ways impact can be defined and measured (or if it can at all), and how activism can be defined and whether it is always necessarily morally unimpeachable. In the next chapter, I will explore the first three of these questions through a series of films and related media dealing with workers', and specifically miners', rights.

"At last, an honest movie about American [and Belgian] working people"[105]

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have discussed how the makers of *Ravished Armenia* used a fictional narrative and imagery that leveraged media coverage of the Armenian genocide, religious and racial affinities, and misogyny and prurient titillation, to issue a direct request for donations from private individuals to a private foundation in order to address a humanitarian disaster resulting from systemic oppression itself based on race, religion, and gender. I will now turn to three projects which, moving in chronological order, progress from re-enactment and reassemblage to direct cinema, and from explicit calls for systemic change to direct actions that also ask the viewer to think in broader terms. In other words, where *Ravished Armenia* created an experience of spectatorship that drew explicitly on previous media coverage of the events portrayed to generate or heighten viewer affect, leaving viewers feeling as though by buying a ticket and seeing the film, their work has been done, the films considered in this chapter do almost the opposite—by using an increasingly intimate mode of observation and implicitly drawing on related media, they ask the viewer to consider a variety of actions they might undertake to support broader systemic changes.

Beginning with Joris Ivens's 1934 *Misère au Borinage*, an agitprop-style portrait of life in and around a Belgian coal mine, this chapter will explore the ways in which activist filmmakers across three generations have sought to drum up support for striking miners, drawing

[105] Taken from the tagline on the poster for *Salt of the Earth*

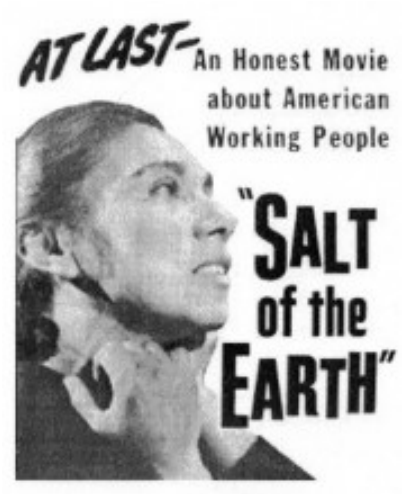

Figure 5: Poster for Salt of the Earth; image via interferencearchive.org

on and contributing to left-wing cultural output in the process. Tracing a through line from *Borinage* to the fictionalized melodrama of *Salt of the Earth* (1954, Herbert Biberman), written by blacklisted Hollywood screenwriters, produced by the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter workers, and cast largely with the miners whose lives the film reflects, to Barbara Kopple's life-imitates-art *Harlan County, USA* (1976), I will examine the films' respective representative modes and their (presumed) effects on the viewer, as well as their uses of or connections to the activist media ecologies to which they belong. As a post script, I will briefly examine a short series of videos about Harlan County produced by AJ+ (Al-Jazeera's online, social media-oriented platform) towards the end of 2016, with an eye to contextualizing the more common perceptions of miners in present-day, mainstream, middle-class eurowestern cultures, and the conflicting ideologies such perceptions serve.

Ultimately, I will argue that these three films, as well as the AJ+ videos, can be situated on a continuum of leftist transmedia examining the living and working conditions of a labour force essential to the rise of modernized society and consumer culture, but ultimately erased from it, hugely marginalized, and used as political pawns.

Borinage

Ivens's 1934 film, best described as newsreel-style agitprop, includes not only scenes filmed specifically for *Borinage*, but also footage recycled from actual newsreels, and, in certain

exhibition circumstances, reels from Ivens's own previous works. Filmed in ten days during which coal miners in Belgium's Borinage region found themselves evicted from their homes by their employer-cum-landlord,[106] the urgency of the situation demanded an equal level of urgency in producing and releasing the film. Described as having been "filmed in secret under what appear to be almost combat circumstances,"[107] the sequences shot in a company housing estate follow the visit of a doctor to the workers' homes in order to demonstrate the health consequences of poverty. These consequences are illustrated here through images of makeshift bedding, dirty and underfed children, and a sick baby. Based on the doctor's own writings, this sequence serves not so much as a filmic adaptation of these writings as an augmentation of them: As with *Ravished Armenia*, discussed previously, it is one thing to read about conditions requiring outside attention and aid, but quite another to see them up on screen. The differences between the two films lie in their approach and their intent. While *Borinage* also includes several re-enactments, and documentary sequences (notably, the one featuring the doctor's visit) were subject to some light mise-en-scène in order to avoid any poetic contingencies that would potentially romanticize the families' living conditions,[108] the film's purpose was to stoke a desire for systemic change among viewers. Ivens wrote of his intentions for the film:

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[106] Thomas Waugh, *The Conscience of Cinema*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 176.

[107] Richard Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, 2nd ed., (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1992), 116.

[108] Waugh, *Conscience*, 181-2.

> Our job was to penetrate the deeper guilt of an economic situation which permits such terrible circumstances – and we had to do this without slogans and big words. […] I wanted the spectators of the finished film to want to do more than send these workers money.[109]

In other words, the purpose of the narrative constructed in *Borinage*, and its reliance on real-life people and places, is to move viewers to shift their political perspectives in the hopes of shifting the dominant political ideology within Belgian society at the time. While this goal is made explicit in the film's final title card, which calls for a wholesale rejection of capitalism in favour of socialism, by focusing on the everyday details of the miners' living conditions, the film provides viewers a natural point of identification from which political mimesis can begin.

Ivens's aesthetic approach in *Borinage* is to use what he calls "severe and unorthodox" camera angles[110] in filming individuals or families, aiming to eradicate any accidental beauty that could generate an idealization or romanticisation of the situations portrayed. The ironic result of this is that, in hindsight, many of these shots (particularly those featuring evicted families' possessions loaded onto trailers and mothers with their children) evoke the contemporaneous work of American Depression-era documentary photographers working for the Farm Security Administration (Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, etc.), whose work was allegedly manipulated to amplify both the poetics of the image (a concept which Ivens rejected here) and the degree of misery portrayed therein in order to provoke a specific reaction in the viewer and, by extension, generate widespread public support for left-wing social and economic policies. Reinforcing this link between *Borinage* and contemporaneous American political media is Ivens's use, in the opening montage of the film, of American newsreel footage of unsold milk being spilled and of

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[109] Qtd. in Waugh, *Conscience*, 175.

[110] Qtd. in Waugh, *Conscience*, 182.

striking steelworkers in Ambridge, Pennsylvania being attacked and beaten by police, followed by a montage of the Borinage region and its miners at work. This use of footage from both contexts draws a clear connection between the US and Belgium, Ambridge and Borinage, upholding the claim in the film's introductory and closing titles that the situations depicted are both a symptom and result of a "crisis in the capitalist world," the solution to which is "socialism and dictatorship of the proletariat." This direct appeal to the viewer's social conscience coupled with an explicitly presented alternative to the structures of oppression creating the situations portrayed is a marked contrast to the racialised, gendered, and neoliberal approach of *Ravished Armenia* (in which solutions are located in individual donations to private foundations), and to the appeals presented in the other films to be discussed in this chapter.

While the film's leftist perspective is made explicit in the call for total socialism in the film's closing titles, it is also spelled out in *Borinage*'s climax, featuring a recreation of a march held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx. Footage of other marches in *Borinage* is taken from newsreels of the corresponding events,[111] thereby appropriating media coverage of leftist activity into the Popular Front's burgeoning media ecology through its inclusion here. In this final sequence, as people march through the streets, carrying a large portrait of Marx, in an absurdly and ironically ornate frame, at the front of the procession, others watching from their front stoops and on street corners are swept up in the celebratory solidarity on display, and join in the march themselves. According to Waugh, this recreation-turned-reality ended in

Figure 6: "A demonstration on the 50th anniversary of Karl Marx's death"; frame grab from Borinage

unfilmed police beatings for all, "more than compensated for by the new feeling of solidarity generated by the event."[112] While recreating this march can be seen as an attempt to fill a gap, whether with regards to quantity or quality of observational source material, that the recreation turned into a spontaneous demonstration in its own right, culminating in (unseen) police violence, transforms re-enactment and re-assembly into an immersive direct cinema-style moment (or, as Waugh puts it, a moment in which "the genre of the demonstration film was set in motion."[113]) In other words, despite the careful attempt to craft a very specific call for "dictatorship of the people" by controlling, re-mixing, and re-staging images and events, contingency ultimately provided Ivens with the most effective and affective and moment in the film. Moreover, by positioning this sequence of individuals (semi-)spontaneously marching together for the good of the whole at the end of the film, following up-close examination of conditions in the mining settlement and followed by an explicit call for the end of capitalism, this particular sequence serves as an exemplar of how viewers might take more direct action in response to either the conditions portrayed in the film or to oppressive conditions in their own communities that they understand as being the result of a capitalist system lacking in humanity. This serves as a prime example of what Gaines means when she writes that filmmakers "use images of bodies in struggle *because they want audiences to carry on that same struggle*."[114] Thinking about this in terms of the film's original screening contexts in Belgium, by showing people who could well be the viewers' neighbours, if not also the viewers themselves—what

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[112] Waugh, 188.

[113] Waugh, *Conscience*, 188.

[114] Jane Gaines, "Political Mimesis," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, eds. Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 91.

Gaines calls an "aesthetic of similarity"[115]—united in resistance, in a specific, local, familiar, place, *Borinage* uses affective mimesis to also inculcate in viewers a sense of tangible possibility of what could be and how it is within the viewer's power to make it happen.

The importance of the order of these images, particularly in relation to their content and composition, cannot be overstated. Coming on the heels of intimate, human portraits of the living conditions in mining settlements, presented by the doctor whose published writings *Borinage* is said to be based on,[116] the sequence featuring a spontaneous demonstration functions as both a cathartic reaction to the deprivations shown in the settlement and a call to action. The first act of the film is heavy on action-filled newsreel segments as well as re-enactments of violent clashes between miners and police, with wide shots featuring large crowds, dynamic movements within the frame, and comparatively quick editing. The second act, by contrast, focuses on not more than a few individuals at a time, featuring many close-ups of sick and/or dirty children, lingering shots of housing conditions, and examples of day-to-day acts of solidarity between individuals and families. This slower pace, as well as the focus on individual stories as representative of an entire population (rather than on that population as a whole), gives the viewer both a human point of identification on screen, as well as the time for that identification to be made and for the viewer to then connect conditions on-screen with whatever precarity may be present in their own life, or conversely, to recognize the relative privileges they may enjoy. This identification and connection has the potential to raise support for the miners through a

Figure 7: Frame grab from Borinage

"there but for the grace of [deity]"-style response on viewers' parts. Further, positioned as it is following a segment featuring striking miners—protesting the conditions seen in this middle sequence—being brutalized by police and/or private security, this segment takes what could be seen as "poverty porn" precisely for its affective possibilities and turns it into a rationale for supporting miners, and understanding (para)state violence as oppression rather than the maintenance of public order.

According to Simon Dell, press images used by the French Popular Front in the early 1930s relied on the anonymity of the agency photographer for their status as "objective" journalism rather than self-produced images of the spectacle created by these actions, and an emphasis on crowds and masses for their value to the Front as images of solidarity.[117] Dell argues that such images become a "site of exchange" for viewers, who, because of the images' contingency as well as anonymity and seeming neutrality the images' circulation through press agencies affords, are free to interpret the images any way they like, thereby exercising their own agency in response to what Dell implies is "genuine" in these images.[118] It is true that all images, presented on their own, with no attached text or context, could indeed be open for viewers to negotiate their own meanings through visual analysis and their own biases alone. However, their inclusion in any kind of larger document or publication alone imbues them with an implied framework through which viewers will begin that negotiation.

While Dell uses images taken at early 1930s Popular Front rallies as a case study, mapping his argument onto *Borinage* serves to draw out the ways in which context produces

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[117] Simon Dell, *The Image of the Popular Front*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 35-40.

[118] Dell, 9-10.

interpretative frameworks, regardless of the contingency or "objective" neutrality of the source images themselves. In other words, the newsreel footage of violent strikebreaking actions included in *Borinage* can, if presented on its own, be read a number of ways depending on the viewer's own biases, as can footage of children living in extreme poverty or of a Marx memorial procession. When such sequences are placed end-to-end, however, even without intertitles explicitly framing the images in a particular way, there emerges an implied narrative of problem-effects-solution in which the "effects" segment generates an affective response that the "solution" end of the arc seeks to mobilize by literally showing the viewer one possible outlet for that affect. The intertitles in *Borinage*, and particularly the final title card, make causal connections between these segments and ensure that individual images are interpreted through a specific framework, thereby ensuring that a specific message is conveyed at a point when mimetic/affective reactions are at their peak. However, thinking through the specific sequencing of these images shows that even without the explicit instructions for interpretation offered by the intertitles, the images are sequenced in a way intended to provoke a specific response—that is, support not just for Belgian miners but for socialism as a socio-political paradigm—by giving viewers multiple points of individual identification within the general presentation of (para)state violence and "misery in the Borinage" (to quote the film's French title), so that subsequent support for such ideas, or for political parties campaigning on these ideas, is understood by the same viewer as an individual expression of solidarity with the oppressed and resistance to capitalism.

In addition, that the film is structured in this way made it simple for *Borinage* to be reworked for Soviet audiences by adding footage showing happy, healthy, and secure Russian

workers, thereby giving the film a dual use as Soviet propaganda.[119] Doing this changes the affective outcome in the sense that, when shown to Soviet audiences, the end result would have been (ostensibly) to generate or consolidate support for the dominant social order, rather than to call for resistance to it as in the Belgian context. This kind of de-/re-contextualizing to meet specific, local political aims speaks in a way to Torchin's argument that successful activist films make the most of their exhibition context to mobilize audience affect,[120] or, as Waugh puts it, "Local issues from elsewhere are filtered through lenses specific to the local reception context (…) and on this basis global dialogue and alliances are formed."[121] In the case of *Borinage*'s multiple reception contexts and radical "filtering through specific lenses" by way of adding actual footage to the film, it becomes clear that differing desired outcomes in specific local contexts required different affective reactions to be provoked, and as such a different

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[119] Waugh, *Conscience*, 192. Comparing Waugh's writing on *Borinage* to Barsam's, it would seem as though Barsam, writing in 1992, is basing his analysis of the film on this Soviet version, given his description of the film as a comparison between Russian and Belgian miners (Barsam 116). This is supported by Waugh's explanation, in his 2016 writing, that the integral original version was not widely available again until the 2008 restoration of Ivens's work for a DVD box set (Waugh, *Conscience*, 192). In this way, *Borinage* offers an additional lesson: that of the importance of reading film scholarship with an awareness of the circumstances and historical context of the writing itself.

[120] Leshu Torchin, *Creating the Witness*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 17.

[121] Thomas Waugh, *The Right to Play Oneself*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 279.

interpretative framework imposed on largely the same material, but all ostensibly in service of the same larger political ideal, or the formation of a larger "global dialogue and alliance."

While an in-depth study of the film's uses and impacts in a variety of local contexts would be interesting, it is beyond the scope of this project, and so we return now to *Borinage*'s original, primary intentions—to improve conditions in the Borinage mining region, and to generate public support for socialism. According to Waugh, Ivens claimed that *Borinage* did result in some degree of improvement in labour conditions,[122] and so, in that sense, the film did achieve some degree of its most immediate goal. However, that market capitalism remains the dominant economic paradigm in Belgium (as in much of the world), and that the same ideals advanced in the US were perceived as a threat to national security and sparked the first Red Scare, (to say nothing of twentieth-century Russian history), all raise questions about how effective it would be fair to say the film ultimately was in advancing the socialist cause. Taking into account the Depression-era context of the film's production, as well as its re-purposing within a Soviet context, an improvement in Belgian mining conditions is only one of many possible impacts of *Borinage*. This, of course, again raises the questions of the filmmaker's role and responsibilities in undertaking such projects, and of how impact can be measured or defined, as well as the additional question of whether a specific outcome needs to be explicitly intentional and desired on the filmmaker's part in order for it to be ascribed to the film—while *Borinage* did allegedly result in some kind of systemic change affecting its subjects in a (presumably) positive way, history shows that its re-editing by the Soviet propaganda machine in order to use it to gaslight viewers into reaffirming support for the status quo is, in hindsight, arguably not a desirable outcome. Moreover, that the film was, according to Waugh, not very widely seen in

[122] Waugh, *Conscience*, 191.

Europe,[123] for which its broader socialist message was intended, nor even in Belgium itself, but that the systemic changes improving the lot of miners in the Borinage resulted from Emile Vandervelde, a Belgian Social-Democratic politician seeing the film and subsequently influenced parliamentary debate about conditions in Borinage,[124] rather than from public screenings to larger audiences speaks to the importance of having a realistic and actionable goal, and being able to proceed with well-targeted screenings based on that goal, in order to effect actual, material change directly benefitting a film's subjects.

With that said, there is an argument to be made that in overlooking the health problems caused by the reliance on coal as a primary energy source, to say nothing of the geologic unsustainability of coal mining in the region,[125] Ivens has overlooked equally urgent and compelling issues in favour of advancing a particular political argument that need not (and indeed, should not) exclude these more nuanced concerns. In Ivens's defence, *Borinage* was produced at the behest of a loose coalition of workers' groups and revolutionary artists' groups, and funded by "an elderly capitalist who was repenting of a lifetime of class exploitation."[126] As such, it is conceivable that anything seen as extraneous to its principal argument was deemed not worthy of inclusion. Waugh and Barsam also both point out that the film was produced in a hurry, with Waugh including an anecdote about Henri Storck—Ivens's collaborator on the

[123] Waugh, *Conscience*, 191.

[124] Joris Ivens, "Borinage," *Revue Belge du Cinéma* 6-7 (hiver 1983-printems 1984): 36.

[125] Bert Hogenkamp, "Borinage," *Revue Belge du Cinéma* 6-7 (hiver 1983-printemps 1984): 22.

[126] Waugh, *Conscience*, 175.

film—expressing unease at the speed with which the film was made and the number of things consequently overlooked in its making.[127]

While, as the film makes clear, the urgency of the situation in Borinage demanded urgency in the filmmaking process, and while *Borinage* did (allegedly) result in some degree of improvement in its subjects' lives, the Popular Front as a transnational movement did ultimately fail to achieve its larger aims. As we will see in the following two case studies, the American response to the Popular Front's ideas created conditions entirely antithetical to those promoted by the Front, with—ironically—miners, mining communities, and filmmakers in particular suffering for it.

Salt of the Earth

In the American context, the pro-labour movement from the 1930s on amplified right-wing fears generated by the protection of labour unions under Roosevelt's 1933 New Deal, leading to a moral panic about Communism known as the Red Scare. While the systemic, institutionalized effects of such fear—including the infamous House Committee on Un-American Activities—were temporarily suspended during the Second World War in order to strengthen a strategic alliance with the USSR, the interwar Depression era in the US had been marked by violent strike-breaking activities, as seen in the 1933 newsreel footage of violent attacks on striking Pennsylvania steel workers included in the first act of *Borinage*. Twenty years on, with WWII over and the Red Scare at its height, industrial working conditions and anti-union sentiments had both returned to their volatile pre-war states. This is embodied by the 1954 film *Salt of the Earth*,

[127] Waugh, *Conscience*, 191.

a neorealist-esque labour rights melodrama written by blacklisted Hollywood screenwriters, cast almost entirely with the striking zinc miners whose story is depicted on-screen, and co-produced by the (allegedly Communist-led) International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers. The film essentially re-enacts the most salient moments of a violent 1953 strike at the Empire zinc mine in New Mexico, in which the community's women began picketing the mines after a court injunction forbade miners from doing so, on the assumptions that since the women were not employed as miners they were still in a legal position to picket, that women picketing would call attention to the broader impact working and living conditions have on everyone in the community, and that even police and private strike-breakers, all men, would not be publicly violent towards women (as they had when the men were picketing).

The deep involvement of blacklisted screenwriters with the film points to a commitment to worker solidarity and social and economic justice in very real and material ways. Both through its narrative explicitness and through the film's production history, *Salt* is, alongside *Borinage*, a key example of putting one's talent directly in the service of solidarity with the very people socialist ideals are meant to lift up, rather than allegedly hiding messages in mainstream films while continuing to uphold a system those messages work against (or by doing so while writing under a pseudonym). In particular, that the blacklisted Hollywood workers, including the film's director, Herbert Biberman, worked under their own names on this film, and in open collaboration with a major union suspected of being under Communist leadership, at a time when many of their colleagues chose to work under pseudonyms on mainstream Hollywood fare, speaks directly to this form of solidarity in praxis.

Based on the true story of a strike in New Mexico zinc mine, with violence on the part of both law enforcement and private strikebreakers, *Salt of the Earth* also displays living conditions

and health concerns remarkably similar to those portrayed in *Borinage*. While *Salt of the Earth* is classified as a fiction feature, and generally relies on classical Hollywood narrative and editing conventions, its nuanced depiction of labour organizing as well as navigating race and gender dynamics in such a context made it a useful part of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers' (Mine-Mill) media ecology. This depiction also resulted in the film not being screened in mainstream theatres to a general audience, following an intense fear campaign that, ironically, included a projectionists' union forbidding its members from working in any theatre that agreed to screen it.[128]

Salt of the Earth thus took on new life as a union film, screened mainly in union halls, accompanied by union members who had participated in both the actual strike and the film's production, particularly women.[129] According to labour historian Ron Verzuh, the union's local 480, in Trail, British Columbia, was one such site. Verzuh states that not only was the suspicion of organized labour in the 1950s not limited to the US, but that the closer a Canadian unionized worksite was to the US border, the more likely it was to come under close scrutiny, and that Trail—roughly a 20-minute drive from the US border—was also the site of a great deal of union and social justice organizing.[130] To that end, Local 480 also sponsored a now-infamous series of concerts by Soviet sympathizer and civil rights activist Paul Robeson,[131] thereby cementing the

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[128] Ellen R. Baker, *On Strike and on Film*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2207), 235.

[129] Michael Wilson and Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt, *Salt of the Earth*, (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1978), 143.

[130] Ron Verzuh, "Remembering *Salt*," *Labour/Le Travail* 76, Fall (2015): 170-5.

[131] Verzuh, 177.

local's reputation as social agitators, and the Mine-Mill's reputation as agitators who understood how to use performance media to inspire others to action.

Many of the major participants in the film have since written that their intention from the outset was to make a film demonstrating for union members the possibilities that come from sustained resistance and true solidarity within a community, with the lead actor (also the president of the local which made the film) writing:

> [This picture] shows what we can do when we organize and we and Anglo workers organize together (…) For a hundred years our employers gave played up the big lie that we Mexicans are 'naturally inferior' and 'different,' in order to justify paying us less and separating us from our brothers. *Salt of the Earth* helps to expose that lie (…) In making this picture we've shown again that no attacks or falsehoods can break our Union spirit, our willingness to work for what's right. We hope our picture will lead the way for other unions to do the same thing.[132]

Finally, that the film's production was marked by violence, arson, and deportations[133] adds a layer of struggle-overcome to its message, particularly when presented by union members who were there and whose stories are portrayed on-screen.

The film's casting further reinforces this message. According to Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt's oral production history, the film was primarily cast with members of the mining community portrayed, and the newly elected local president, Juan Chacón, was cast in the lead male role.[134] The lead female role was given to Rosaura Revueltas, a prominent Mexican actress,

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[132] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 180-2.

[133] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 130-2.

[134] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 129. Rosenfelt also recounts that this led to several local tensions, as spouses were not necessarily cast as married to each other, and that producers had a very hard

whose participation in the film led to her being deported before shooting wrapped, leading to several of her scenes being shot in Mexico or with body doubles.[135] Revueltas's character, Esperanza, is actually the film's main character, and she provides first-person narration throughout.[136] Michael Wilson, the film's screenwriter, states in Rosenfelt's history that he had from the outset seen the community's women as the film's protagonists, based on what he had observed firsthand during and immediately after the strike.[137] Circumventing legal restrictions on picketing, minimizing state violence, and calling attention to the broader ways in which labour policy impacts an entire community by having the women in the community take over the picket lines had proved to be an effective activist strategy on multiple fronts.[138] By translating this into a narrative film with many characters/performers that the film's primary intended viewers would

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time filling the roles of police and strikebreakers, with miners stating they were concerned the roles would follow them in real life (129, 177-8).

[135] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 132.

[136] That, even at the time of this writing in 2017, having a Latinx woman (or any woman of colour) as the lead character in a film, and having it narrated by her and in the first person, is *still* unusual enough to be worth pointing out is beyond comprehension.

[137] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 107.

[138] Interestingly, according to Hogenkamp, the women in the Borin region had done the same twenty years earlier (15). Why this was not included in Ivens's film is a mystery, but based on the overall tone of *Borinage*'s depiction of daily life in mining communities, women portrayed in any way other than as helpless victims of mining companies may well have run counter to the film's argument about family life and, from the filmmakers' perspective (white men working in the 1930s), have lessened its mimetic impact.

naturally identify with, and then showing those people enacting these strategies with some degree of success, the film itself becomes a how-to for entire communities without being as explicitly instructive as *Borinage*. In other words, by providing points of affective identification, and then *showing* ideologically-rooted actions and their results rather than *telling* an ideology with no practical indication as to how it might be implemented, *Salt of the Earth* is arguably more effective in terms of mass audience mobilization via political mimesis. Moreover, the contextualization of screenings of *Salt* with presentations and discussions led by the women community leaders who inspired the film ultimately reinforced the idea that the events portrayed, despite their fictionalized presentation, are nonetheless an example of how other communities might organize a resistance in similar circumstances. This also calls to mind Torchin's arguments with regards to screening context being an ideal moment for audience mobilization,[139] along with Elizabeth Coffman's argument that the most successful projects are those which can demonstrate impact on the authorial team,[140] and Kate Nash and John Corner's statement that "Forum screenings, in which [the film] is followed by a Q and A or discussion, and community screenings are a key tactic" in ensuring the success of an activist media project.[141] This

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[139] Torchin, 17.

[140] Elizabeth Coffman, "Spinning a Collaborative Web: Documentary Projects in the Digital Arena," in *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices, and Discourses*, eds. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 113.

[141] Kate Nash and John Corner, "Strategic impact documentary: Contexts of production and social intervention." *European Journal of Communication* (2016), 236.

heightened potential for lasting impact in communities the film was screened in becomes all the more important in light of the film's demonstration of how feminist and anti-racist interventions ultimately led to a stronger community and more successful resistance—interventions which the existence of "Bernie bros"[142] and the centring of white voices of resistance in mainstream media[143] amply demonstrate are still sorely needed within current leftist movements.

Salt of the Earth does this work partly through demonstrating a real-life example in which valuing women and people of colour as equal participants in and leaders of the community strengthened that community immeasurably, but also through explicitly didactic dialogue between the film's characters. This is in large part due to the collaborative screenwriting process described by Wilson, in which his initial treatment and each subsequent draft of the screenplay were read by community members who would provide feedback and request changes they felt would more closely reflect their reality. According to Rosenfelt, this collaboration was also intended to make film as a medium more accessible while "providing a deliberate model for

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[142] See, for example, Amanda Marcotte, "Bernie Bros out of control: Explosion of misogynist rage at Nevada's Dem chairwoman reflects terribly on Sanders' dwindling campaign," *Salon*, May 17 2016, http://www.salon.com/2016/05/17/bernie_bros_out_of_control_explosion_of_misogynist_rage_at_nevadas_dem_chairwoman_reflects_terribly_on_sanders_dwindling_campaign/

[143] See, for an example of tone and perspective as much as content, Farah Stockman, "Women's March on Washington Opens Contentious Dialogues About Race," *The New York Times*, January 9 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/09/us/womens-march-on-washington-opens-contentious-dialogues-about-race.html?_r=0

collectivity in the production of a work of art."[144] Moreover, anything that could be misinterpreted to reinforce stereotypes about Mexican workers in particular was excised, regardless of any truth it may have held about any individual situation, in the interests of ensuring a fair depiction not just of the community in question but of the Latinx community as a whole, thus reinforcing the film's value as a how-to for diverse union locals.[145] Further, according to both Wilson and Chacón, a committee made up of community members continued to oversee the film's production, stopping shooting when they saw something that did not ring true and taking steps to correct it,[146] almost foreshadowing the participatory film and video movement emblematized by the NFB's *Challenge for Change* program launched in the next decade, as well as Coffman's argument about transformative and participatory media-making processes being more effective.[147] Thus, what we see in *Salt of the Earth* has, down to the last detail, been vetted by those whose lived experiences were being represented to ensure it was what they felt was accurate. In this sense, then, while it is impossible to ever recuperate one's own subjectivity in a moment once that moment has passed, it is reasonable to assume that, while it may not have originally been expressed in precisely the words used by Wilson in the screenplay, the film's dialogue rings true enough to enough individuals' recollections to have passed committee and community muster. This, if nothing else, indicates that the film's dialogue is reflective of the community's collective memory of the events and discussions portrayed, or at least how they wish for those collective memories to be communicated.

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[144] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 126-7.

[145] Baker, 196.

[146] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 130, 182.

[147] Coffman, 113.

Figure 8: The women vote to join the picket line. Frame grab from Salt of the Earth.

This becomes of prime importance to the film's mission when considering the ways in which race and gender within an oppressive capitalist structure are discussed. Women's leadership of the strike forms the film's main plot line. The union hall confrontation in which the men recognize that they can no longer be alone on the strike's front lines and that community-wide resistance is necessary (albeit with a tone of desperation belying residual injuries to their masculinity in so doing) is a major climactic moment in the film. The debate enacted in it, which results in the men supporting the women by a narrow margin, is certainly instructive for other (predominately male) union-centred audiences.

There are three other explicitly didactic moments that stand out in the film, another in a patriarchal household and the other in a heavily masculinized setting (a bar), culminating in a third discussion in a mixed setting. The first is an early scene in the film in which Esperanza (played by Revueltas) tells her husband, Ramón (played by Chacón) that their radio, purchased on credit, is at risk of being repossessed after they have missed a payment on it. While Ramón's immediate response[148] both speaks to and is dismissive of the traditional gender roles that will later be challenged, his second comment points more directly to the easy credit of the post-war boom years ultimately functioning as a structure of economic oppression: "'No money down. Easy term payments.' I tell you something: this instalment plan, it's the curse of the working

[148] "It isn't right, she says. Was it right that we bought this… this instrument? But you had to have it, didn't you? It was so nice to listen to." (Wilson and Rosenfelt, 8).

Figure 9: "But you had to have it, didn't you?" Frame grab from Salt of the Earth

man."[149] With this comment, the film points out the ways in which credit, positioned as an easy way to attain the trappings of a middle-class lifestyle, ultimately keeps people in a perpetual state of dependency on continued employment and thus less likely to agitate for better wages or working conditions. The remainder of the scene, in which Ramón explains to Esperanza that the union must prioritize issues in the interest of preserving jobs at all, and that workplace safety takes precedence over community living conditions, bears this out.

The second such moment comes in the very next scene. Taking place in a bar, Ramón, his colleagues, and their union representative are discussing their workplace safety issues. While on one level this conversation is simple narrative exposition, it also directly addresses white union members and allies by pointing out that anti-Latinx discrimination in pay and working conditions is also a tool used to control white workers. As Ramón points out, this discrepancy affects non-white workers much more, making white workers who do not speak up ultimately complicit not only in their own oppression but also in a deeper structure of oppression towards non-white workers and communities. This is then followed by Ramón recounting the concrete, causal connections between lack of adequate pay, sanitation, and health care, and mechanisms of fear exploited by the employer to further control the workforce:

> "No sanitation. So my kids get sick. Does the company doctor wait? Twenty bucks. So we miss one payment on the radio I bought for my wife. Does the company store wait? 'Pay—or we take it away.' Why they in such a hurry, the bosses' store? They're trying to

[149] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 8.

> scare us, that's why—to make us afraid to move. To hang on to what we got—and like it!"[150]

This conversation produces an understanding not only of how mining companies' treatment of their workers ultimately impact an entire community, and of how mining issues are family and community issues (and vice-versa), but also of why people of colour must be centred in and leaders of resistance to these conditions—the differences in pay and conditions have an exponentially more devastating impact on the communities whose workers are paid less and where social infrastructure is more lacking, and any improvements in these things must begin here. This is also echoed in Chacón's own account of the film's production, included in Rosenfelt's production history and cited above. Moreover, Ellen R. Baker's study of Communist Party influences on the film indicates that Wilson's centering of women and people of colour in the script reflected not just what the community had experienced in real life, but his own departure from Party philosophy on the so-called "Woman Question" by reflecting race, gender, and class as intertwined and inseparable, rather than subjugating everything to class.[151]

The film's use as a union organizing and mobilizing film then takes on additional importance, given its basis in real-life events and the presence of those who were there at the majority of its screenings. In this way, the film becomes itself a part of the media ecology represented within it. By reproducing events under the direction of those who were actually there, and presumably also either reproducing or recycling original media such as banners and

[150] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 12.

[151] Baker, 197.

placards,[152] *Salt of the Earth*, at least in theory, reclaims representation of the events from a contemporaneous media environment informed by anti-Communist hysteria. Moreover, 63 years on, the film has come to be so closely associated with the real-life strike it fictionalizes that historical works, including Rosenfelt's production history, rely on stills from the film to illustrate their discussions, and leftist blogosphere coverage of the 2014 decertification of the union local portrayed in the film (the former Mine-Mill 890) uses a mix of film stills and images of a commemorative mural painted on the side of the rebuilt union hall—a mural which features

[152] Histories of the film, including Rosenfelt's, focus primarily on the political aspects of community participation in the film's production process, without discussing art direction and props in any way. While the listings for the Clinton Jencks Papers archive, held at the Arizona State University library, indicate that some original art or other documentation from the strike, or documentation of assistance with art direction in the making of *Salt*, may be found in these papers, they remain only accessible via in-person visits, which is beyond the scope of this project. The Global Non-Violent Action Database at Swarthmore also indicates that visual matter was created for the purposes of the strike itself, as can be reasonably expected, but the database entry fails to cite any sources in this regard, leading one to question whether access was granted to a union archive of some kind or whether this is an extrapolation based on the recreations in *Salt*.

Figure 10: Mural on the side of the former Mine-Mill 890 hall. Image via lajicarita.wordpress.com

Chacón and is identified as commemorating the film, rather than the strike.[153] (*The Denver Post*, to its credit, did manage to locate an archival image of what appears to be a strike action, but Chacón is misidentified in the caption, and, despite the poor quality of the image, it remains unclear whether it was a still taken on-set or a photo from the actual strike itself.)[154] In this way, *Salt of the Earth* goes beyond reclaiming imagery of the strike for the union's own purposes, but it has come to supplant this imagery and dominate the media ecology surrounding the strike.

With that said, it is not unreasonable that production histories of *Salt of the Earth* focused on community input on a political, rather than visual, level, given the film's intended purpose. As Baker points out (and as implicitly affirmed by Coffman's arguments), even the act of making the film itself became a form of activism, in that the degree of support offered by the community required the re-activation and re-valorization of the Ladies' Auxiliary (initially formed when the community's women voted to replace male picketers) within the community.[155] In this sense, the filmmaking process itself became an activist intervention with lasting, positive impact on the community represented, an impact which could presumably be replicated across communities in which the film was screened, particularly when presented by the women who

[153] David Correia, "Copper Giant Freeport-McMoRan Destroys Famous 'Salt of the Earth' Labor Union in Southern New Mexico," *La Jicarita*, Sept. 30 2014, lajicarita.wordpress.com

[154] The Denver Post, "N.M. miners' vote decertifies union," *The Denver Post*, Sept. 23 2014, denverpost.com

[155] Baker, 220-2.

played a large role in both the actual strike and the film's production (especially given the place of women, and particularly Latinx women and women of colour, in eurowestern society in the 1950s).

Based on the level of the community's attention to detail in the filmmaking process described in these production histories, it also becomes reasonable to assume that the placards and slogans used on the picket lines seen in the film are drawn in some way from the union local's own media ecology (as defined by Sasha Costanza-Chock),[156] whether that be original artefacts being reused in the film or simply new ones being re-created. Taken with the fact that the film was cast largely with the actual strikers themselves, and shot in situ, differentiating images of the strike from those re-created for the film becomes increasingly difficult. Moreover, given the importance the film would come to hold in the community's history, images taken from the film have come to supplant images of the real-life events that inspired the film. This kind of recursivity ultimately leads to a situation where the film, despite its official status as a fictionalized work, is nonetheless taken as a document of the strike,[157] which is in turn reinforced by having screenings of the film presented, and post-screening discussions led by, those who participated in both the historical event and its cinematic re-interpretation.

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[156] Sasha Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 9.

[157] In this way, *Salt of the Earth* also evokes Gaines's reading of Eisenstein's *Strike!* as a "sensual" documentary, replete with "images exhilarating to politicized viewers, who would interpret them as action against a common enemy, an enemy that assumes a variety of guises—a racist state, capitalist management, a bigoted group." (90-91).

These accounts also show that *Salt of the Earth*'s influence in the Southwestern US has remained strong in the past decades. One labour rights blog includes an entry that features many images of commemorative plaques at sites where the women in particular picketed and led other actions in New Mexico.[158] There is also a Salt of the Earth Labor College in Tucson, Arizona, founded in 1994—the 40th anniversary of the film's release. This college is a kind of "university of the streets," featuring several guest lectures per term, all from labour activists and union leaders, and all dealing with issues raised in the film as they continue to exist in contemporary contexts, as well as an annual screening of the film itself.[159] The same blog's coverage of College activities indicates that Anita Torrez, who travelled to union locals around North America with the film in the 1950s (including the screening held in Trail, BC), and who is now based in Tucson, attended one such screening in 2012.[160] As such, *Salt of the Earth*'s model of small-scale screenings in union or pro-labour contexts, accompanied by discussion leaders, may not be the most attention-getting tactic on a broad scale. Instead, as was the case with *Borinage*, targeted screenings to

Figure 11: A screening of Salt of the Earth at the Salt of the Earth Labor College. Image via hobodispatch.blogspot.com

[158] Richard Boren, "60th Anniversary of the classic film 'Salt of the Earth'," *The Hobo Dispatch*, Feb. 26 2014, hobodispatch.blogspot.ca

[159] Salt of the Earth Labor College, "Schedule," January 2017, saltearthlaborcollege.com/schedule

[160] Boren, "20th Anniversary of Salt of the Earth Labor College in Tucson, AZ," *The Hobo Dispatch*, Feb. 26 2014, http://hobodispatch.blogspot.ca/2014_02_01_archive.html

specific audiences have proven to be the most sustainable and effective tactic in terms of the film's ability to effect change. Moreover, in the political climate as it stands in early 2017, discussions around racism, sexism, workers' rights, and the rights of workers who are frequently Latinx migrants have taken on even greater urgency, particularly in the American Southwest. To that end, I argue that *Salt of the Earth* remains an essential work of activist (trans)media, not only for the arguments it presents, but because it demands to be seen in the context of smaller-scale community organizing that is more necessary than ever in an age of constant electronic surveillance, while simultaneously intervening in the same racism and sexism that leftist and resistance movements are not immune to and that frequently prevent their growth and stymie effectiveness.

Harlan County, USA

The emphasis in *Salt of the Earth* on the role of women in agitating for better conditions and building stronger and more just communities is picked up in Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, USA* (1976). However, the similarities between *Salt of the Earth* and *Harlan County, USA* go beyond the role of women in labour strikes, to an extent that were it not clear that Kopple's film is a mostly observational documentary, it could (theoretically) be positioned as a remake of *Salt of the Earth* in the political thriller genre. That there are, however, such similarities between the two, and that the living conditions shown in both films are not improved over those seen in *Borinage*, is an indication that rather than each film being a remake of the last, working and living conditions for miners under market capitalism are remade from one generation to the next, with very little variation in this repetition despite advances in society and technology.

In *Harlan County, USA*, Kopple essentially embedded herself and her crew with striking coal miners and their families in Harlan County, Kentucky, documenting violence and intimidation on the strike's front lines as well as the community's solidarity actions. Rather than recreating actions and violence as Ivens and Biberman did, however, Kopple and her crew eventually took part in the labour actions and experienced the same (para)state violence as the miners portrayed, taking the idea of committed documentary to a whole new level. It should also be noted that the strike documented by Koppple took place against the backdrop of the US oil crisis, thereby amplifying both the importance of coal as an energy source and, consequently, the disparity between the interests of capital and the well being of mining communities.[161] This tension is further amplified by the fact that many of those portrayed in Kopple's film are old enough to have survived the post-war Red Scare and accusations of Communism lobbed at trade unions and labour activists, and those from the oldest generation shown also held the 1931 Harlan strike—roughly contemporaneous with the Ambridge (1933) and Borinage (1932) strikes—in living memory, as exemplified by Florence Reece's reprise of her protest song written for the earlier strike, "Which Side Are You On?."[162]

Figure 12: Florence Reece leading "Which Side Are You On?" Frame grab from Harlan County, USA

[161] United Mine Workers representative Phil Sparks states in the film that oil companies at the time owned 70% of America's coal reserves, thus heightening the importance of coal to capital at that particular moment in time.

[162] John W. Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 60.

Much has been written about *Harlan County, USA*'s use of local music, particularly music written and/or performed by members of the community portrayed. While the importance of the film to preserving Appalachian folk music cannot be overstated, it is Reece's song that is of the greatest interest to this project, both for its direct interpellation of viewers and for its transgenerational and transgeneric importance. Reece reprises this song as a means of uniting the community at a union meeting. This of prime importance in that it forms a direct connection through time and space with both the previous strike—during which Reece first wrote the song—and the events portrayed in *Salt of the Earth*, in which women were also called upon to perform the emotional labour of uniting the community in a commitment to continuing acts of solidarity and resistance (climaxing with one woman making a moving speech at a community meeting). These parallels call attention to how little had really changed in the intervening decades, on many levels.

Moreover, that the camera in *Harlan County, USA* cuts from a head-and-shoulders close-up of Reece at the microphone, shot from a slightly low angle, to a pan of those in attendance looking up at her and singing along, not only demonstrates that "Which Side Are You On?" holds a great deal of local and historical significance, but it also implicitly positions the song as a labour hymn, with Reece as a congregation leader and therefore a moral authority figure. According to Alessandro Portelli's oral history of Harlan County, "Which Side Are You On?" and other songs of resistance stemming from the 1931 strike are set to "traditional gospel and ballad tunes," with Reece's song set to "Lay the Lilies Low," a Baptist hymn. According to Portelli, this stems from the fact that "Modernization and the mining industry had been dumped upon Harlan wholesale, so quickly that

Figure 13: The younger people in attendance also know all the lyrics. Frame grab from Harlan County, USA

there had been no time to forget the expressive powers of oral tradition."[163] In Gaines's discussion of political mimesis, she writes that song can also contribute to an embodied, affective response to political media, stating that "traditional solitary ballads" performed by political folk singers are a common device in documentary as they "reach audiences at the juncture of the physiological and the psychological [producing] not just affiliation but action."[164] In this way, "Which Side Are You On?" draws on a specific, local media ecology to heighten local engagement by appealing to oral and religious traditions as well as local labour history, and its use within *Harlan County, USA* serves to produce a mimetic reaction in non-local viewers, which is then mobilised by asking viewers to consider their position on labour rights in general.

Reece's rendition of the song is also mixed in on the film's soundtrack following a later scene where the women discuss safety concerns after one of their homes was shot at, thus highlighting the seriousness of what is at stake. Asking viewers to decide "which side [they are on]" immediately after a woman describes her home being shot at and expressing relief that no member of her family was in the yard at the time underlines the moral significance of any attempt at answering the question posed by the song. Prior to these uses of Reece's original performance, a male voice performing an acoustic cover of the song is used to introduce a sequence where miners protesting outside the New York Stock Exchange are questioned by an NYPD officer about their working conditions, with the officer ultimately concluding that the miners are indeed being taken advantage of and standing by while the protest continues (an act of solidarity unimaginable in the present day, and one wonders if the presence of a camera

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[163] Alessandro Portelli, *The Say in Harlan County: An Oral History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 235.

[164] Gaines, 92.

encouraged this or if it genuinely is a societal difference). Showing an agent of the state expressing support for the miners' position in this way thus reinforces the song's challenge to viewers—if even the police, representatives of law and order and imbued with moral authority (however undeserved this may be) support the miners' actions, then how can any reasonable viewer not do the same?

It is perhaps this moral question that has made "Which Side Are You On?" of such enduring importance to social justice movements in general, and workers' rights in particular. Not only do we see in *Harlan County, USA* that younger generations are familiar enough with the song to sing along with Reece in the union hall, but it has been covered numerous times by socially-conscious artists with mainstream followings, including Ani diFranco (in a challenge to the Obama administration), Natalie Merchant, the Dropkick Murphys, Billy Bragg (as resistance to Thatcherism), and of course, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. Further, the song has inspired a podcast, "Which Side," which describes itself as a "vegan anarchist social justice podcast,"[165] as well as the titles of a Ken Loach film about the art produced during the 1984 miners' strike in the UK, a book about the 1931 Harlan County strike, a book about the American folk music revival in the second half of the 20th century, and countless blog posts devoted to worker solidarity.[166]

In this sense, Reece's song becomes what links *Harlan County, USA* and the struggles it depicts with broader social justice movements across a span of several decades. This is most clearly demonstrated within *Harlan County,* USA, when the audio track of Reece discussing the

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[165] *Which Side Podcast* Google metadata

[166] In a nice bit of extra recursivity, the *Silver City Daily Press* reported that a cover of "Which Side Are You On?" was performed at a rally against the vote to decertify the union local featured in *Salt of the Earth* (scdailypress.com/site/2014/09/17/union-holds-rally-tuesday/)

song's impetus—a series of violent raids on homes, soup kitchens, and so on during the 1931 strike[167]—is set against archival footage of strikebreaking actions from 1931. This turns Kopple's use of the song, as well as the film itself, into a kind of linchpin uniting not only the two Harlan County strikes but also, thanks to the popularity of Reece's song, the broader labour and migrant rights movements. Thinking about this through the framework of transmedia theory, it can be argued that the song in this case serves the role of character as outlined by Marc Steinberg,[168] or in Alexandra Juhasz's terms, as a fragment that in its multiple variations points to larger narratives which deepen its meaning.[169] To this day, "Which side are you on?" remains so politically evocative a question that a small outrage was provoked when it was used in a Halifax newspaper editorial about a transit strike,[170] and the Occupy Wall Street social media team used it on their Facebook page in May 2017[171] to caption a link to leftist journalist Hamilton Nolan's analysis of a formerly left-leaning West Virginia coal mining community six

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[167] Hevener, 60.

[168] Marc Steinberg, "Character, World, Consumption," in *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Character in Japan,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 190-198.

[169] Alexandra Juhasz, "Ceding the Activist Digital Documentary," in *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices, and Discourses*, eds. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, Catherine Summerhayes, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2014), 43.

[170] Tim Bousquet, "Which side are you on?," *The Coast*, March 11 2012, thecoast.ca/RealityBites/archives/2012/03/11/which-side-are-you-on

[171] Occupy Wall Street, May 5 2017, facebook.com/OccupyWallSt/

months after the disastrous 2016 election in which one candidate promised an immediate return to full-scale coal mining (which, at the time of this writing, has not come to pass).[172]

The positioning of Reece's song as a direct interpellation of viewers in *Harlan County, USA* also constitutes a slightly more subtle connection to *Borinage*'s explicit call to socialist arms. That the song is introduced after viewers have been presented with images of, among other privations, children bathing in buckets further cements the links between *Borinage*, *Salt of the Earth*, and Kopple's film. Moreover, this type of image, as well as images of evictions, cramped and unsafe working conditions, and people literally covered in dirt and dust call to mind not only the earlier films listed here but, to a general audience, evokes the type of Depression-era photography that established a cultural set of visual tropes (which Gaines also holds *Borinage* accountable for)[173] for indicating extreme poverty, particularly to privileged eurowestern viewers. In the context of *Harlan County, USA*, this is not only one strand of a common thread between these films and this type of image, but it calls attention to that common thread and demands that the viewer ask not only whose side they are on but how it is possible that the issue of hot running water (or running water and indoor plumbing at all) in mining settlements, among other infrastructural and humanitarian matters was still somehow open to negotiation in the 1970s,[174] in a nation that positions itself as the leader of the free world.

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[172] Hamilton Nolan, "How West Virginia Lost the Workers' Revolution," *Fusion*, May 5 2017, fusion.kinja.com/how-west-virginia-lost-the-workers-revolution-1794801462?utm_medium=sharefromsiteandutm_source=Fusion_facebook

[173] Gaines, 87.

[174] To say nothing of ongoing water crises in Canadian Indigenous and Northern communities, and in Flint, MI, in 2017.

The outrage generated by these images of privation is at the heart of *Harlan County, USA*'s call to action. *Borinage* issues an explicit call for full socialism and the end of capitalism, drawing on multiple media representations and re-enactments of resistance to effect a mimetic response in viewers, and *Salt of the Earth* does the work of explaining how race, class, and gender intersect while offering a dual message of education and hope primarily to union members, often accompanied by presentations by or talkback sessions with union members involved in the making of the film. *Harlan County, USA*'s call to action lies somewhere between the two. Neither explicitly ideological like *Borinage* nor a lightly fictionalised exemplum like *Salt*, *Harlan County* instead lays out the evidence for the viewer and then literally asks them to consider which side they are on. While Kopple's film clearly takes a side, this call to action relies on affect in a way that the two other films do not. Moreover, *Harlan County, USA* does not offer an immediate solution to the problems presented, or any guidance on how the viewer might take action upon deciding whose side they are, after all, on. Rather, it serves as a piece which asks the viewer a larger moral question based on Harlan County as a case study, and then leaves the viewer to apply the answer as they see fit. This is a form of indirect impact in that it is entirely dependent on individual shifts in worldview and how that is applied in further individual actions—or, as Brian Winston might put it, the viewer would leave the theatre so conscious of labour rights it hurts.[175] In that sense, Torchin's argument that a successful activist film takes advantage of screening context to mobilize audiences in the moment[176] is, on the surface, validated in that *Harlan County, USA* generated a great deal of affect that does not appear to

[175] Brian Winston, "Re: ['VisEv'] 'Documentary Impact: Social Change Through Storytelling'," post on Visible Evidence listserv, August 18 2014.

[176] Torchin, 17.

have been formally channelled in any way. At the same time, however, it begs the question of how one might define success, and points to a further question of the extent to which a filmmaker can be held responsible for that success, however it may be defined, beyond the fact of the film itself.

It thus becomes useful to think about *Harlan County, USA* in context with the previous two films discussed in this chapter, *Borinage* and *Salt of the Earth*. All three films rely on similar imagery of privations in housing conditions to generate support for striking miners, all three crews faced acts of violence during filming (which Kopple ultimately included in *Harlan County, USA*, to great effect), and all three also include discussions of safety in the mines. There are, however, important and somewhat ironic differences between the ways in which the three films were ultimately effective, despite all having the same immediate goal of generating public support for striking miners. In the case of *Borinage*, the agitprop style and direct audience address gives the impression that the film wants to be propaganda, and thus makes big efforts at generating an affective reaction so strong as to stir the people to systemic revolt, as called for in the film's final title card. For such a thing to be accomplished, however, the film would have needed to be far more widely screened than it ultimately was (adding to this is the irony of the film ultimately being remixed into Soviet propaganda and used to further oppress workers). *Borinage* did, however, actually effect a concrete change in the lives of those portrayed after it was screened to the right person under the right circumstances, regardless of its negligible public distribution, thus proving Torchin to some extent right.

Salt of the Earth, meanwhile, intended some level of didacticism to be enacted through generating empathy on the part of the viewer, and wound up being accused of being Soviet propaganda and barred from commercial distribution despite being arguably rooted in the ideal

of "justice for all" that America wishes to be seen as upholding. As a result, the film was screened primarily in union halls and continues to be screened within community and activist organizations. By being shown to very specific and relevant audiences that see themselves reflected in some way in the film, and are able to use the film as a blueprint for action—even if only to address racial and gender inequalities within their own groupings—*Salt of the Earth*, too, effects change through screening context (the irony here being that that change is ultimately to strengthen left-leaning groups the film's opponents sought to weaken). Moreover, this strategy serves as an example both of what Costanza-Chock means by horizontality in organising,[177] and what Coffman cites as demonstrating transformation and commitment on the part of the authorial team.[178] That Torrez continues to attend screenings (at least as recently as 2014), and co-founded Tucson's Salt of the Earth Labour College,[179] only strengthens the film's usefulness in this regard.

Figure 14: Anita Torrez outside the former Mine-Mill 890 hall. Image via cpusa.norcal.org

Finally, Kopple's film, while certainly not fitting any stereotype of what propaganda film looks like, nonetheless relies heavily on shock and outrage in a way that, thanks to the inclusion of direct, in-the-moment violence both echoing and surpassing the violence seen in the archival footage that opens the film, exceeds the shock manufactured by the first two films. In this sense,

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[177] Costanza-Chock, 50, 174

[178] Coffman, 113

[179] See Rebecca Wood, "New Mexican miners commemorate 'Salt of the Earth'," *CPUSA of Northern California*, March 26 2014, http://norcal.cpusa.org/?p=1496

the lack of an Ivens-esque call for revolution or any other explicit call to action is striking precisely for its absence. Replaced instead with a moral question addressed to the individual viewer, the film's commercial success is arguably also where its political success would lie. With that said, however, this is a somewhat nebulous claim that, were this film to have been made today, and in the absence of any particular case study to point to and say "yes, the film did *x, y, z* for these people in this way," seems to cry out for some kind of metric to appease funders. Moreover, the current popular perceptions of and very real social and economic issues unfolding in Appalachian coal mining regions, alongside a terrifying, Randian neoliberal policy direction allegedly mandated by US voters (including, overwhelmingly, those in these regions),[180] would indicate that any sense of solidarity generated by the film has significantly eroded in the forty years since its release. While columnists and pundits are doing an excellent job of arguing about why so many seemed to vote against their own best interests, the more important question this all points to is whether a more focused, specific activist campaign tied to *Harlan County, USA* would have been more effective than simply releasing it and hoping for its long-term absorption into the zeitgeist to eventually influence a social moral compass.

Conclusion

The idea that the shift to clean energy has done little to improve miners' lots, and that representations of life in mining settlements have become riddled with poverty tropes, is taken up in a series of videos produced by AJ+ (Al-Jazeera's online, social media-oriented platform) at

[180] Nolan

the end of 2016.[181] In the weeks following the 2016 US Presidential election, in which one candidate put forth the idea that he would restore jobs to Appalachia in particular by eliminating the Clean Air Act and other environmental standards that called for an end to coal production and a shift to clean energies, a small crew from AJ+ travelled to Harlan County, Kentucky with the intention of collecting first-hand accounts of life in the region. While unemployment is, indeed, rampant in the area, there is also a collective recognition that re-opening coal mines and plants is not a sustainable or long-term solution to the area's economic woes, and that what is more needed are educational and vocational programs that are in keeping with the economic and environmental realities of the region (at one point in the videos, we are shown that the local technical college continues to train students for non-existent mining and coal processing jobs, with no alternatives on offer). This has caused a tremendous "brain drain," as young people leave for college or university in other parts of the country and rarely return for lack of any long-term options or opportunities in the area.

The videos attempt to put a positive spin on the situation by also showing young couples who have chosen to stay in the area, as well as one couple who deliberately moved there from an unnamed city for the purposes of starting a small restaurant with lower overhead costs. However, one of the couples admits that their welding business is floundering given the lack of local contracts, and one can likely safely assume that an area with a shrinking population can only support so many new restaurants or arts centres (the latter being a third business showcased in the videos). Further, the couple who opened the restaurant, despite their best intentions, have a

[181] Sana Saeed, "Appalachia—without the classism and caricatures," *AJ+*, Feb. 6 2017, medium.com/aj-story-behind-the-story/appalachia-without-the-classism-and-caricatures-c1a71d9b271

whiff of cultural saviourism about them when discussing how their "cosmopolitan" and "international" menu provides new educational experiences for local residents, and imply that the Appalachian diet was primarily composed of fried white foods before their arrival on the Harlan County scene.

This kind of stereotyping about Appalachian life is the second-biggest issue raised by participants in the AJ+ videos. Thanks in part to a long history of union activism and labour conflicts in the area, a great deal of visual media over and above *Harlan County, USA* has been produced about Appalachia in general and Harlan County in particular. According to the citizens of Harlan County interviewed, including a former miner who participated in Kopple's film, the vast majority of this media has contributed to—if not outright manufactured—an idea of Appalachian mining towns as, essentially, shantytowns and slums, rife with illiterate and obese citizens (as though these two qualities are moral defects) living in abject poverty. While the region's economic fortunes have severely declined since the reduction in the use of coal energy, and the nature of capitalism is such that workers are consistently paid the lowest salaries and provided with the lowest-cost, most minimal working and living conditions employers can legally get away with, former miners in the AJ+ videos argue that their specific technical training will make it harder for them to find any other jobs they are qualified for, at anything approaching the same salaries, particularly as they age. In addition, the area's longstanding dependence on coal extraction has dictated local education policy, with higher education options limited to mining-related technical programs and primary and secondary schools underfunded. In this context, a White House official's March 2017 defence of federal funding cuts to PBS—

> When you start looking at the places that will reduce spending, one of the questions we

> asked was 'Can we really continue to ask a coal miner in West Virginia or a single mom in Detroit to pay for these programs?' And the answer was no (…) We can ask them to pay for defense, and we will, but we can't ask them to continue to pay for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting[182]

—is doubly disingenuous: Not only does it perpetuate a stereotype of Appalachia as living in such poverty that the additional $1.37 per person, per year that made up PBS's former federal funding[183] would represent too great a hardship, it does so without offering any other alleviation of actual hardships, and without any solution to the gap in early childhood education that many PBS programs have been filling, according to an analysis in *The Atlantic* (Sperling and Lazarowitz).[184]

In this way, the AJ+ videos perform an important function. They acknowledge that there is poverty and a lack of services and opportunity in Appalachia in general and Harlan County in particular, and that this is due to choices (mis)informed by market capitalism and an over-reliance on resource extraction. At the same time, however, the videos avoid fetishizing their subjects' living conditions, relying instead on the interviewees' own testimonies about their lives in the region. Reaction to these videos, in the form of comments left on YouTube, run the gamut

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[182] Paulina Firozi, "Budget director: We can's ask coal miners or single moms to pay for Public Broadcasting," *The Hill*, March 6 2017, thehill.com/homenews/administration/324345-budget-director-we-cant-ask-coal-miners-or-single-moms-to-continue-to

[183] Taylor Tepper, "President Trump Wants to Kill These 17 Federal Agencies and Programs. Here's What They Actually Cost (and Do)," *Time*, Jan. 24 2017, time.com/money/4639544/trump-nea-sesame-street-budget-cut/

[184] Gene B. Sperling and Danielle Lazarowitz, "*Sesame Street* Isn't Just for Affluent Kids," *The Atlantic*, March 17 2017, theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/03/trump-budget-pbs/519999/

from discussions of what sustainable industries could reasonably replace coal (hemp)[185] to a thoughtful analysis of the similarities between Harlan County and British coal towns and the impact of austerity politics (including the repeal of the Affordable Health Care Act) on these communities.[186] While there are, surprisingly, only a few comments in the "thanks, Obama" genre, there are several more loaded with anti-Muslim rhetoric directed at AJ+. Importantly, there is also a brief but passionate debate about whether the videos are an accurate portrayal of life in Harlan County in 2016, with one poster contending that the videos gloss over the area's issues and expressing a generally pessimistic outlook for the area's future, and respondents agreeing that a small handful of successful businesses does not an economic renaissance make, but that at the same time, the area and its residents have much more to offer than is currently (or has ever been) recognised.[187]

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[185] Witchback Great and Iron Side, comments on "The Unheard Story of Appalachia's Coal, Part 1," *YouTube*, February 2 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VBYsEGpLDI

[186] Jane Smith, comments on "The Unheard Story of Appalachia's Coal, Part 1," *YouTube*, February 2 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VBYsEGpLDI, and "How Coal's Decline Devastated Appalachia, Part 2," *YouTube*, February 3 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJxCqHoUAT8

[187] x2turtlemasterx2 and haleygwynneable, comments on "How Coal's Decline Devastated Appalachia, Part 2," *YouTube*, February 3 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJxCqHoUAT8, and x2turtlemasterx2 and Louise Anderson, comments on "The People Who Are Bringing Back Appalachia, Part 3," *YouTube*, February 4 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYEEBpHJMAQ

By privileging their subjects' own words, the AJ+ videos avoid relying on the visual tropes exploited by all three films examined in this chapter, most particularly in *Borinage*. While these images cannot help but to evoke some kind of affect on the viewer's part, ostensibly spurring the viewer to some kind of action or ideological shift, even (or especially) when manufactured, these images, like those created for *Ravished Armenia*, rely on visually communicating the suffering of actual humans rather than allowing the humans in question to speak for themselves. With that said, the conditions shown in mining settlements and in the mines themselves in all three films constitute a vivid argument against privatization and the turning over of social infrastructure, workplace safety, and energy programs to private interests. It is that all available evidence shows that, in the 84 years since *Borinage*, such privatization has run rampant through resource-rich nations, with basic issues of health, safety, and education continuing to be managed, if at all, in the service of these private interests that renders the wide-scale use of images that exploit individual misery so frustrating. Not only are the people represented in the images reduced to their circumstances, but, despite the best intentions of the filmmakers and (presumably) a large swath of viewers, such circumstances (and their resultant stereotypes) persist across generations, as demonstrated by the striking similarities between the three films examined in this chapter.

The exploitation of poverty tropes in an attempt to generate viewer affect that can then be harnessed to effect change is hardly unique to these three films, and will be seen again the films examined in the next chapter (all of which deal with homelessness in Montreal). With regards to the films in this chapter, however, by showing these working and living conditions, as well as in some cases the repercussions felt by the people trying to improve their conditions, these films issue a call to action that, if nothing else, asks viewers to consider their own views of organized

labour. While *Borinage* can be said to have been directly impactful in the sense that its viewing by a Belgian official did lead to changes in the Borinage region, and *Salt of the Earth* can be said to have had an impact in the sense that it became used as a flashpoint for discussions of race and gender in contemporaneous union halls, *Harlan County, USA*, which arguably had the widest screening audiences of the three films, relies entirely on a critical mass of individual viewers to shift their perceptions of organized labour to effect change from the bottom up (through voting differently, boycotts, calls to representatives, etc.). This strategy, of course, returns us to the question of how impact can be defined, whether it can or should be measured, and what the filmmaker's responsibility should be in these regards. As seen with these films, "impact" can occur in a multitude of ways, which are not always positive, sometimes unsustainable, and frequently based entirely on the nuances of human experience—which it is impossible to quantify. In the next chapter, we will examine six interrelated films from two filmmakers, charting their increasing (and differing) understandings of impact and responsibility.

Six movies and a website: Mapping Montreal's Homeless

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen how three filmmakers have approached similar issues over three generations, raising questions about screening context and calls to action. In this chapter, we will continue to explore these questions, while also delving into differing understandings of impact and responsibility, by examining six interrelated films (and a website) from two filmmakers. Daniel Cross's Street trilogy,[188] *Danny Boy* (1993), *The Street* (1996), and *S.P.I.T.: Squeegee Punks In Traffic* (2002), portrays homeless Montrealers, considering reasons for and solutions to their circumstances. These films evolve in style from portraiture in *Danny Boy* to a more collaborative approach in *S.P.I.T.*, in which a camera is given to the main character, Éric

[188] The author has been instructed to acknowledge that she worked as an administrative assistant for four hours per week at Cross's company, EyeSteelFilm, throughout her undergraduate degree. She would like to additionally clarify that no part of her duties brought her into contact with any part of the production process of any films beyond cataloguing expenses after the fact, that all of the films examined in this chapter were completed long before she began working there, and that at the time this project was first conceived, she had only seen *S.P.I.T.* as part of her undergraduate coursework. Moreover, she had so little contact with the filmmakers discussed here that one primarily recognizes her from a shared academic context, and the other would not be able to pick her out of a lineup. The primary benefit to this project of having worked there is having obtained digital copies of the later films in this corpus thanks to a friendly distribution team member.

"Roach" Denis. Empowering Roach in this way arose from a concern about co-opting already marginalized voices in the name of what would become a commercially released documentary film, and also led to Roach's awakening as an activist filmmaker himself. Following *S.P.I.T.*, Roach produced his own trilogy of films examining structural violence and injustice towards the homeless community, and his attempts to disrupt this violence.

While Cross's approach in the earlier films does actually romanticise homelessness, as he himself admits, his ongoing concern with amplifying the voices of those in the homeless community ultimately exceeded the boundaries of filmmaking, and led to the creation of the *Homeless Nation* web project. This project served as a social networking and blogging platform for and by homeless people, and as a way for people to remain connected and search for missing loved ones as they move between cities (often after being chased out by discriminatory legislation and bureaucracy disguised as criminal justice and urban planning, a topic taken up in Roach's work). Roach's three films (*RoachTrip, Punk le vote*, and *Les Tickets*), meanwhile, simulatneously represent and address his own community, as well as broader audiences, in an attempt to excavate the reasons why homeless people of all stripes are marginalized to the extent that they are, particularly in Montreal. These latter three films both draw from and inform discourse within that community, while serving as a nexus for the circulation of underground punk music touching on the same themes taken up in the films.

By considering these six films as well as the *Homeless Nation* platform as a multifaceted activist media project within the context of Quebec's rich history of activist media and socially engaged documentary, I will argue that Cross's work evolved from portraiture to an early form

of the genre theorized by Pierre Rannou as "cinema of indignation,"[189] and that Roach's films represent a more complete example of the genre. I will then examine the different ways the two filmmakers' work operates as activism, including discussions of both the *Homeless Nation* project's initial success and current state of failure, and Roach's films' relation to the Montreal punk community through online message boards and music file sharing.

The films (and website)

Shot on super 8mm film in 1993, *Danny Boy* portrays brothers Danny and John Clavin as they cope with homelessness, Danny's heroin addiction, and John's nascent alcoholism. With no direct or sync sound, the soundtrack is comprised of John being interviewed about Danny's history by Cross, followed by a brief interview with Danny himself. The visuals consist largely of footage of Danny meandering from squat to squat, playing with his dog, and shooting up. *The Street*, Cross's 1996 follow-up to *Danny Boy*, once again sees the Clavin brothers and their entourage through a series of ups and downs as they cycle through periods of sobriety and stability, and addiction and homelessness. Made over a six-year period in which Cross became deeply involved in the men's lives, his desire to help here manifests in direct interventions ranging from assistance navigating the health care system to outright telling one subject that sobriety would go a long way to solving the individual's problems. While originally made as a student film, *Danny Boy* has since been commercially released on DVD, along with *The Street*. It can thus be safely assumed that Cross intended for the two to be seen together, particularly given

[189] Pierre Rannou, "Pour un cinéma de l'indignation," *Esse* 51, printemps/été (2004), accessed Oct. 17 2015, http://esse.ca/fr/node/2373

the continuity in both subject and subject matter. As such, *Danny Boy* is being considered here as part of the activism Cross undertook with *The Street* and his third film, *S.P.I.T.: Squeegee Punks in Traffic*.

Made in 2002, *S.P.I.T.* focuses on one protagonist, Éric "Roach" Denis. Having been placed in a juvenile detention centre at 14 and almost immediately running away from it, he, too, is seen to cycle through periods of addiction and sobriety, bouncing between precarious housing situations and the street. Here, Cross enters into the action only when Roach addresses him directly. Cross's emphasis on amplifying his subject's voice leads him to give Roach his own camera, known as the RoachCam, enabling Roach to take some degree of control over how he and his friends are presented in certain sequences of the film.

Empowered by the RoachCam, and fulfilling the ambition stated at the end of *S.P.I.T.* to become a filmmaker in his own right, Roach's 2003 directorial debut, *RoachTrip*, focuses on a cross-country journey to investigate the policies and situations that keep members of his community cycling between fruit picking in BC and squeegeeing in Montreal. Roach's next film, *Punk le vote* (2006) was initially conceived as a project in which Roach would document his friend, Starbuck, running on an anarchist platform in the federal Outremont riding in the 2006 election. However, the temptation to become actively involved proves too much and Roach ultimately runs for office himself on a platform dedicated to ending the stigma against homelessness.

In *Les Tickets*, his 2011 film, Roach directly addresses a social issue as an activist media-maker. Setting out to track down and interview some of his old street friends that he knows to have thousands of dollars in unpaid fines for such minimal offences as being in a park after midnight, Roach eventually takes on the very people in positions of power who have changed

legislation and renamed public spaces so as to effectively criminalize homelessness. While Roach remains the central force of the film, the emphasis is on larger systemic issues affecting an entire class of people, and his main characters are chosen in function of the film's argument. As such, Roach's trilogy can be considered a legacy of Cross's Street trilogy in that Roach's collaboration with Cross in *S.P.I.T* is what gave rise to his subsequent career as an activist media-maker with a broader, more system-oriented investigative drive than Cross's propensity to portraiture and outsider ethnography.

Finally, by the time of *S.P.I.T.*'s release, Cross had spent over a decade immersed in parts of Montreal's homeless community, and chose to take more direct media-based action, resulting in the *Homeless Nation* website. Billed as a site by and for the homeless, *Homeless Nation* provides a space for the homeless or precariously housed to connect, share their stories, and search for missing loved ones. The project's original intent was to both develop a network and sense of place for a group defined by having no fixed location, while ensuring that their voices are heard and they are not left behind by the digital divide. Launched in 2003, thus predating Facebook, and winning several awards for community involvement and web innovation, the site has since fallen prey to an insidious combination of funding cuts, technological obsolescence, and internet spammers. As a result, very little new legitimate content was produced after 2010, by Cross's team or by individual users, undermining the usefulness of the site, and at the time of this work's final revision, the site had been taken offline entirely and is only partially available through the Wayback Machine internet archive.

Indignation and impact

Shot over approximately twenty years, the six films associated with this project reflect an evolution not only in Cross's filmmaking style and Roach's engagement with the world, but also in the history of committed documentary in Quebec. An unsigned editorial in a 2002 issue of *Séquences* argued that following the loss of the 1980 referendum, committed documentary in Quebec turned to examining Quebec's relation to the outside world and ways of resisting the homogenizing forces of neoliberalism and globalization.[190] This editorial classifies work of that era into three very broad categories: portraits of marginalized people; works which attempt to use expert testimony to solve problems; and films whose creators work with and among "everyday people," seeking to witness and amplify their experiences from their own perspectives in an attempt to transcend "walls of ignorance" and use cinema as a healing tool.[191]

In a 2004 article titled "Pour un cinéma de l'indignation," Pierre Rannou theorizes a cinema of indignation as having evolved from committed documentary. Rannou describes this concept as based in the idea of testimony and witnessing, voice amplification, and self-representation being radical acts that go beyond simple rhetoric and reportage to remind viewers of their responsibilities as citizens and inspire subsequent actions. Rannou positions Cross as epitomizing this cinema of indignation, drawing particular attention to his practice of being present alongside his subjects rather than merely observing them. Rannou specifically cites both *S.P.I.T.* and *RoachTrip* as examples of indignant cinema and its transformative effects. Rannou also includes the predecessor of *Homeless Nation*, the now-defunct *Homeless Archive* website, in

[190] "Le documentaire québécois des années 90: bonnes nouvelles malgré tout…," *Séquences* 217 (2002): 30-3.

[191] Ibid.

a prescient footnote describing ways in which contemporaneous engaged and indignant filmmakers were beginning to use new media to expand their projects' reach, incite action, and provide a participatory venue for social change.[192]

Considering these two articles in relation to each other, I propose that Cross's trilogy can be contextualized as part of a branch of a third wave of committed documentary in which filmmakers work directly with everyday people and use cinema as a healing tool. I also propose that, its evolution from portraiture to self-representation, as well as with the creation of the *Homeless Nation* project, it represents the start of a trajectory towards a cinema of indignation in Quebec. Further, I propose that through a centrifugal unfolding of perspective while maintaining Roach's voice as the central node from which this perspective emanates, Roach's work reflects a similar and more fully fleshed-out evolution from self-portraiture (*S.P.I.T.* and *RoachTrip*) to indignant cinema (*Les Tickets*). In this sense, I argue that the impact Cross sought to make through the interventions in his first two films is ultimately realized through Roach's work, and through the *Homeless Nation* project.

Impact or intervention?

Looking closely at Cross's first two films reveals a surface-level idea about impact, based in direct intervention and romantic ethnography. *Danny Boy*, while focusing on the Clavin brothers, is nonetheless clearly the work of an outsider. This is made evident in Cross's presence on the soundtrack, in which he initially lets John speak freely, but then asks Danny leading questions in order to confirm his own ideas about drug addiction ("So it makes you feel like it doesn't matter

[192] Rannou, "Pour un cinéma de l'indignation."

if you live, would you say?"). Less directly, Cross's choice of camera position also establishes him as an outsider, with several very wide shots showing open, wintry expanses of (formerly) decimated city blocks in which Danny circulates. While the immediate intention here is obviously to generate sympathy on the viewer's part as a means of fostering a change in wider social attitudes towards homelessness and drug addiction, the secondary effect is that Cross's position as an outsider is reinforced by the physical distance between the camera and subject, as well as by the careful composition of such images.

The Street, which essentially functions as an extension of *Danny Boy*, also reinforces Cross's outsider status, despite the years he spent immersed in his subjects' world. This is made explicit in the opening moments of the film, in which Cross's voice-over narration makes clear that while his intention may be to document the men's lives in a non-judgemental and voice-amplifying way, the film will nonetheless unfold from his perspective. Further, this introductory narration states, in so many words, that Cross had romanticised homelessness as a rejection of consumer culture and freedom from the constraints of life under capitalism, and that the filmmaking experience had taught him otherwise. This positions the film as unfolding from his perspective and being about his own transformative experience rather than anything else; however, by engaging in portraiture as it does, the film fails to provide any real point of identification or mimetic effect for viewers who are not coming from the same limited perspective as Cross was at the time of filming. Cross repeats this romantic sentiment in the director's commentary on the DVD issue of the film, stating that *The Street* was filmed during what he saw at the time of recording as a more romantic time of homelessness and hobos (an idea which also explains the choice of a harmonica solo as the score for *Danny Boy*). This is problematic on several levels, as it indicates that not only had Cross, after making both of these

films, not moved past his romanticisation of homelessness, but also that the men portrayed in these films were, in his mind, representative of the wider homeless population, despite being exclusively white men of Irish descent.

Given that these films are the work of an outsider filmmaker engaging in portraiture intended to demystify a marginalized population to a wider audience, using affect generated by the intimacy of portraiture and by visual tropes of inner-city poverty, while tokenizing the films' participants, the films can be considered a form of outsider ethnography. On the other hand, it can also be argued that an outsider perspective is inevitable in cases where the filmmaking approach is anything other than a subject's own self-representation. Further, this kind of portraiture and Cross's long-term immersion in his subjects' lives are what serve as the basis for his work being situated as part of a third wave of committed documentary, as well as Rannou's conceptualizing of Cross's work as cinema of indignation, however problematic some of the work's implications might be.

While Cross refrains from overt moralization in *Danny Boy*, he does directly tell one character in *The Street* that the individual's problems are entirely down to their alcoholism, and suggests sobriety as an immediate solution. This creates an undercurrent of saviourism that ultimately taints Cross's more immediately helpful interventions, including caring for Frank O'Malley after he loses a leg to gangrene, and accompanying John Clavin as he attempts to navigate the social welfare bureaucracy and get involved with outreach work. The latter situation, in which John attempts to stop drinking, sign on to welfare benefits, and secure an apartment, would seem to be the desired outcome for Cross, particularly since John is sober and in a stable housing and employment situation at the start of *Danny Boy*. However, this attempt to return to stability causes a rift with his brother and the rest of their friends, which erupts in

violence when John's efforts are interpreted as denying his history and rejecting his social group(s) for the sake of the camera.

This scene comes towards the end of *The Street*, and is followed by a sequence in which Cross is seen bathing and shaving Frank before screening previous footage of Frank back to him. Given its placement after a sequence (described above) in which Cross's presence makes his subjects' lives more fraught, this sequence, notwithstanding the compassion displayed within it, seems designed to redeem Cross's interventionism. Further, considering these two sequences as a bookend to Cross's opening declaration of having romanticised street life indicates that *The Street* is not only about the men portrayed, but also about Cross's own romanticised vision of the street and of his role in these men's lives. This romantic vision of the filmmaker as saviour seemingly involves rescuing at least one man from life on the street without realizing the cultural, emotional, and social impact this interventionism would have on the group in which the filmmaker intervened. In that sense, Cross's direct interventions with and unsolicited advice to his subjects raise questions about whether the impact pendulum has swung too far to the individual extreme with these films. Given that these interventions are nonetheless, well-intentioned and undertaken largely out of compassion and a genuine desire to help on Cross's part, and given the length of time Cross spent filming the men and the closeness he felt to them (stating on the director's commentary both that he felt he had become part of the men's families and that he saw Frank in particular as a father figure), this results in a seemingly unresolvable tension between both the usefulness and problematic results of Cross's approach.

This tension can be considered through Hal Foster's writings on the artist as ethnographer. Drawing on Benjamin's argument for solidarity in material practice, Foster investigates the ethical and political issues presented by ethnographic artistic practices, including

over-identification with the subject in an attempt to mitigate any process of othering, thereby displacing the subject as subject while confusing identity with identification in a form of ideological patronage.[193] By this, Foster means a kind of slippage in which the artist centres their own experience while presenting it as (and perhaps even believing it to be) the authentic experience of their subjects. If Cross's films are interpreted as an ethnographic body of work, there are then dual questions of whether or not Cross's attempts at intervention with his subjects stem from his perception that he is part of that community, and (regardless of the answer to the first question) whether such intervention constitutes a form of saviourism that re-marginalizes his subjects by presuming not only that they cannot help themselves, but that the advice proffered—to just stop drinking and sign on to welfare—had not already occurred to them.

The questions also arise as to whether Cross has slipped into ideological patronage with his actions in *The Street*, and if so, whether such patronage is corrected by handing the camera over to Roach in *S.P.I.T.*, or if that act itself is a conflation of political and artistic transformations.[194] That *The Street* is as much about Cross's attitude towards homelessness and alcoholism and his attempts to save at least one of his subjects as it is about the men portrayed indicates that this is certainly a possibility. However, the film contains no narration after Cross's introductory statement, meaning that the only time Cross is actually heard is when he is directly interacting with the men. In this sense, there has been no direct co-opting of voice by the filmmaker in the style of early ethnography, but he is increasingly present on both the audio and

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[193] Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1996), p. 173-4.

[194] Foster 173.

image tracks as the film progresses, laying the groundwork for the kind of slippage Foster describes.

Further, while several of Cross's attempted interventions seem like a morally right thing to do, the question inevitably arises as to whether they would have occurred had Cross not also been filming at the time. The sequence in which Cross cares for Frank after the latter was discharged from hospital with literally nowhere else to go is one such example. Cross tends to Frank's wounds, helps him bathe and shave, and makes him dinner. The only people on-screen in this sequence are Cross and Frank, and images of Cross cooking the meal himself suggests that Cross has taken Frank into his own home. The director's commentary track, however, reveals that this actually took place in the home of Richard Boyce, Cross's early collaborator on the film. This detail is not made clear in the film; the only hints that there is even a third person present are in a slight pan left as Cross sits down at the table and a third plate of food being visible in the lower right of the frame. The implication of this scene is that by this point in filming, Cross had become one of the film's subjects, directly altering its course of events, and in need of redemption following the altercation between the Clavins.

Figure 15: Cross serves dinner. Frame grab from The Street.

Cross then takes Frank into the living room, and plays back some earlier footage to Frank. At first glance, this seems like a standard device designed to give a film's subject the opportunity to respond to how they have been portrayed in the film up to that point. However, that Cross prefaces this footage by saying "This is therapy, Frank" indicates that Cross's intention is more than simply paying lip service to notions of empowerment, and actually to

convince Frank to make a renewed effort at sobriety. Further, Frank has no visible or verbal reaction to this footage, which consists of a long take of Frank in post-operative care, ending with a close-up on the bandaged other foot he is in danger of losing, while the narration Cross has matched to the shot is Frank himself vowing to stay off the streets and not let his addiction make him "a fuckin' loser." Given that Cross is not actually a trained counsellor or social worker, engaging in these psychological games with Frank exposes Cross's own ideology. By showing this footage to Frank and framing it as therapy, and by earlier telling Frank outright that alcohol is the source of all his problems, Cross locates a substantial portion of the solution to Frank's problems in Frank himself. In this sense, despite having been made in order to change viewers' attitudes, and despite a CBC interview showing Frank actually in an editing room approving the film (although this is possibly only for the CBC cameras),[195] *The Street* embodies the problems of participatory video as outlined by Shannon Walsh in her essay "Speak to Yourself: The Cultural Politics of Participatory Video."

Walsh's essay problematizes participatory video as a liberal approach to problem-solving in which the onus for change is placed on the individual, and which can lead to a saviourist mindset, co-opting the subject's experience for the ultimate benefit of the researcher/filmmaker.[196] Walsh further argues that this approach implicitly retains control of speech by the ruling elite, while perpetuating a myth that if a community's problems are simply

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[195] Daniel Cross, interview with CBC News, ND, *The Street* DVD extras, dist. EyeSteelFilm, 1997.

[196] Shannon Walsh, "Speak to Yourself: The Cultural Politics of Participatory Video," in *Screening Truth to Power: A Reader on Documentary Activism*, ed. Svetla Turnin and Ezra Winton (Montreal: Cinema Politica, 2014), 46, 49.

heard then they will be magically solved.[197] Walsh also questions whether the emphasis on participatory video in activist media circles does not ultimately undermine other, more radical actions aimed at bringing about change.[198] Clearly, playing deliberately selected footage back to Frank and presenting it as therapy in the hopes that it will inspire him to stop drinking is placing the onus for change on the individual (and framing addiction as a matter of choice). This is particularly disturbing in the context of a film that only briefly explores any kind of structural barrier to true change, while implicitly blaming its subjects for their circumstances, and arguably constitutes a negative form of impact on the film's participants.[199] While Frank being discharged from hospital with nowhere to go is certainly indicative of broader systemic problems, this is not explicitly addressed, and is instead followed by the sequence in which Cross prepares dinner for him. Moreover, that this immediate problem is presented as being solved by Cross's presence places the onus for responding to a structural problem on individual solutions, rather than arguing for structural change on a broader scale, ultimately modeling a neoliberal response to a social problem aggravated by neoliberal social policies. In this context, any consciousness-raising Cross may have hoped to achieve with this work is limited in terms of any longer-term impact it may create, in that it focuses entirely on interim solutions rather than investigating the larger source of problems.

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[197] Walsh 50, 49.

[198] Walsh 51.

[199] Not to mention that calling something "therapy" when one is not actually a trained therapist or counselor, and engaging in behavior that a person with an addiction may receive as being shamed for that addiction, are deeply unethical choices.

The sequence following Cross's dinner with Frank, in which John tries to sign up for welfare, visits an apartment, and volunteers with an outreach organization, is another missed opportunity in this regard. After his visit to an outreach worker, who provides him with the necessary documents to collect welfare benefits, John is seen waiting in a provincial welfare office, at which point there is a cut to John visiting an apartment, where he spends the night, and is then seen making sandwiches to distribute to the homeless as part of a team of volunteers. This leaves the impression that John's foray into provincial bureaucracy was a success, and that he is now sufficiently stable to begin volunteering with an outreach organization himself. However, Cross indicates in the director's commentary of *The Street* that once in the welfare office, the woman John met with attempted to reinforce the limitations that the paperwork from the outreach group was meant to resolve, and which were specifically meant to prevent homeless people from being able to collect welfare.[200] Cross then goes on to explain that the apartment John stays in is the home of an evangelical Christian who runs the outreach organization John is then seen to be working at.

These two details add a level of complexity to John's situation, making clear that despite the film's simplification of matters, there are great structural barriers to be overcome, and the solution to John's problems is not necessarily situated within John as an individual. That Cross withholds this information from the final cut while simultaneously portraying himself as a sympathetic do-gooder in the preceding sequence, and that he presents the film at the outset as being an investigation of his own preconceived notions about homelessness, results in a film that is not only inflected with saviourism and ideological patronage, but which ultimately does co-opt the men's experiences for the sake of Cross's own knowledge and self-representation. This

[200] Daniel Cross, *The Street* – Director's Commentary, DVD, dist. EyeSteelFilm, 1997.

dichotomy between what went into the final cut of *The Street* and what Cross himself states on the director's commentary track further upholds Walsh's argument that participatory video perpetuates the myth that once a problem is heard, it is solved. That Cross also told an interviewer from the CBC that the experience of making *The Street* made him a better parent, and that ultimately that is what he wanted viewers to come away with,[201] also contributes to this impression while simultaneously explaining why other, more radical or direct actions aimed at dismantling systemic or structural oppression are not explored in the film, in turn reinforcing the co-opting of experience and insertion of himself as subject.

That this undated interview is available on the DVD as an extra feature, along with Cross's commentary on the film itself, position DVD extras as a (perhaps dying) additional platform for transmedia activism. These additional features afforded Cross the opportunity to clarify some things and acknowledge his short-sightedness on others, in a one-way (that is, non-participatory) display of transformation within the authorial team.[202] The director's commentary in particular is interesting to consider in light of Elizabeth Coffman's argument that "the public will also judge documentary projects on the transformative nature of what comes before, during, and after production."[203] While it is impossible to ever recover one's own subjectivity, making real-time transparency through fragments circulated online before, during, and after production

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[201] Cross, interview with CBC News, ND, *The Street* DVD extras.

[202] Elizabeth Coffman, "Spinning a Collaborative Web: Documentary Projects in the Digital Arena," in *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices, and Discourses,* eds. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2014), 113. (Coffman 2014)

[203] Coffman, 113.

critical to this kind of evaluation of a documentary project, a director's commentary track allows for a more in-depth reflection on the film, often several months (if not years) after its making. When such tracks feature the director speaking alone, they also have the potential to produce nearly the same kind of intimacy as radio in that there is a greater sense of direct address to the viewer as the director shares their personal reflections on the film and filmmaking process. Even when, as is the case with Cross's director's commentary track for *S.P.I.T.*, the director is speaking with their collaborators, there is nonetheless a sense of being privy to more information than what is diegetically available. Thus, the director's commentary track functions as a precursor to the kinds of real-time, behind the scenes updates filmmakers are now able to share over social media (and that are particularly common with crowdfunded projects). Moreover, while the audio emphasis on the director's perspective centres the filmmaker as the point of mimetic identification for the viewer, this can help to heighten a mimetic effect in films such as *Danny Boy* or *The Street* where there are no "scenes of rioting, images of bodies clashing, of bodies moving as a mass,"[204] as Gaines writes, but rather portraits as seen through the filmmaker's eyes. As Coffman explains, "moving images assist the viewer in critical ways with experiencing the conflicts within social/narrative contexts, sharing the physical movements that other bodies have made—as victims, protestors and labourers."[205] That *Danny Boy* and *The Street* are portraits through Cross's eyes makes it hard to generate any overwhelming mimetic response in the way that Gaines describes, but doubling down on that perspective through the director's commentary brings viewers further into Cross's position as a well-intentioned labourer, if nothing else, by retracing the movements and actions Cross may have taken that are

[204] Gaines, 90.

[205] Coffman, 109.

not seen on the films' video tracks. In this way, directors' commentary tracks can serve as an additional transmedia fragment giving greater meaning to the whole, even if they are themselves as longform as and expand on the larger narrative they point to.

Intervention in the political sense: Roach as (auto)ethnographic activist

Coming into *S.P.I.T.* more aware of the power dynamic inherent in participatory media-making, Cross provided Roach with a video camera, which had several major effects on both Roach and *S.P.I.T.* First, it not only gave Roach the opportunity to determine how he was portrayed in much of the film, but also to determine how his own perspective and culture were portrayed. While it can also be argued that this does not guarantee that any of what Roach shoots ends up in the final cut, ultimately, enough was used that Roach was given credit as a co-director. The other, more practical impetus for the RoachCam, according to the directors' commentary for *S.P.I.T.*, was that there were several occasions when Roach would refuse to be filmed.[206] The RoachCam allowed Roach to film when and where he felt comfortable without requiring Cross and his crew to be present, thereby ensuring not only a sufficient amount of footage from which to craft a narrative, but spontaneously filmed footage from events Cross may not otherwise have had access to. According to Cross, it also allowed for a level of intimacy with Roach that Cross was concerned would have been unattainable had he himself shot on video—while shooting *The Street* on older 16mm equipment and a Nagra recorder meant Cross was obliged to be in the

[206] Daniel Cross et al., *S.P.I.T.* – Directors' Commentary, DVD, dist. EyeSteelFilm, 2001.

men's space at all times, shooting Roach on video himself would have enabled slipping into a much greater distancing from his subject, thanks to the more flexible technology.[207]

In addition, by giving Roach his own camera, Cross was able to incorporate into the film a degree of intimacy impossible to achieve by any other means—that of Roach, alone with himself. This is exemplified in a sequence roughly midway through the film when Roach, high on a mix of acid and cocaine, begins talking to himself in the mirror. Roach reveals in the commentary track that in this moment, he legitimately thought he was going to die, and recorded this as his last conversation with himself.[208] This scene, as well as an earlier one in which Cross, at Roach's behest, films Roach shooting up in one long take with a tightly framed close-up on the needle itself, is presented in the final cut without any commentary from Cross, or any later admonitions about a need for sobriety in order to progress to a more stable housing situation. This lack of editorializing or intervention from Cross is particularly noteworthy in comparison to *The Street*. The simple act of filming Roach while he shoots up in one long take, without commentary, is an excellent example of Rannou's conceptualization of cinema of indignation (which he describes as based in the idea of testimony and witnessing, voice amplification, and self-representation being radical acts that go beyond simple rhetoric and reportage to remind viewers of their responsibilities as citizens and inspire subsequent actions) including a practice of

Figure 16: Acid and coke, like peanut butter and sardines. Frame grab from S.P.I.T.

[207] Cross, *S.P.I.T.* – Directors' Commentary.

[208] Roach, *S.P.I.T.* – Directors' Commentary.

being present alongside a subject rather than merely observing them.[209] At the same time, simply filming Roach and allowing him to speak, without reacting, and making it possible for Roach to film himself as the mood struck him, avoids co-opting Roach's position and voice as subject in favour of Cross's experiences of filming, as occurred in *The Street*.

While the RoachCam does not retroactively negate the patronage in *The Street*, it does address its underlying causes by removing the possibility for Cross to intervene in one of Roach's darkest moments, while also allowing him to maintain a greater emotional distance, and by extension not over-identify to the point of appropriating Roach's position as subject. This, in turn, leads to a piece of work that had a positive impact on its subject for the simple fact of letting the subject be the subject with no confusion as to who or what the film is really about. Further, that the RoachCam allowed for greater intimacy between the viewer and Roach points to the ways in which the characters in Cross's previous films were denied true self-representation and participation in the films, thereby undermining their purpose of cinema as a healing tool. In this sense, then, empowering Roach with his own camera as a filmmaking tool, rather than filming him from an outsider perspective while encouraging him to work on sobriety first, constitutes an actual form of solidarity in material practice while also lessening the negative aspects of participatory media-making.

The RoachCam experience is also what empowered Roach to want to address his own situation through filmmaking. While each film in the resulting trilogy begins by referring directly to *S.P.I.T.*, they can nonetheless be understood as their own body of work, which rather than evolving from pure portraiture to attempted cinema of indignation evolves instead from attempted autoethnography to pure cinema of indignation, and from representation to direct

[209] Rannou, "Pour un cinéma de l'indignation."

action. They can also be understood through Sasha Costanza-Chock's discussion of horizontality, in that activism originating from the grassroots and remaining non-hierarchical is likely to be more effective and sustainable in the long term, versus a top-down approach.[210] In other words, Roach's self-representation and direct actions are more likely to be effective as activist media mobilizing audiences and supporting its subjects than Cross's interventionist, outsider approach.

Thinking about this in a further transmedia context, Roach essentially constructs himself as a character uniting his activism across his films, using a fragment from his participation in *S.P.I.T* to do so. The scene from *S.P.I.T.* in which Roach shoots up is inserted at the start of each of Roach's films. In each case, it is presented as a pivotal moment in Roach's personal history, and as an explanation of the motivation for his films, as well as for the direct action two of them contain. In that sense, it can be argued that this aspect of Cross's participatory media-making approach to *S.P.I.T.* has actually enabled self-recognition and democratic participation on Roach's part.[211] Further, by reusing this footage in his own films, Roach is essentially leveraging the most vulnerable part of his own background, rather than others' vulnerabilities, in order to generate empathy on his viewers' parts.

The *S.P.I.T.* footage shot on Roach's request is re-appropriated here in the interests of explaining the perspective Roach takes in his three films. That he includes this in all three films, despite the focus of the latter two unfolding from Roach himself to larger social structures that have gravely impacted Roach and his community, indicates that even in these latter two films,

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[210] Sasha Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 6.

[211] Walsh 51.

there is some degree of autoethnography in operation. Catherine Russell, in her book *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, argues that autoethnography occurs when a filmmaker "understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes."[212] That Roach uses footage of himself at his lowest point to introduce films about seasonal migration of street kids across Canada, the federal electoral system, and the criminalization of homelessness, all of which clearly unfold from Roach's perspective, is a literal example of this practice.

Russell further states that autoethnography is a form of staged self-representation taking place on any of three levels—as a voice over, as camera operator ("the origin of the gaze"), and onscreen—and that images of the self as subject operating the camera point to both the fictional construction of this image and a necessary split in subjectivity.[213] In all three cases, Roach narrates the segment from *S.P.I.T.*, explaining its significance not only at the moment it was filmed, but what it has come to represent since and how it informs the film in which it is re-situated. In these moments, Roach's self-representation occurs in all three sites simultaneously: on the audio track, as narrator; onscreen, as historical subject; and as the origin of the gaze, as the filmmaker who has included the archival footage he is verbally reflecting upon. Further, by explaining the provenance of these images, Roach calls attention to the split in subjectivity and fictional construction of the moment in which he is narrating, and in so doing paradoxically reinforces the documentary value of both this image and the subsequent actions it inspires. In this sense, these moments at the start of each of Roach's films uphold Russell's arguments that it is

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[212] Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 276.

[213] Russell 277, 280.

impossible to recover one's own subjectivity, and as such, an autoethnographer must reconstruct a representation of it through the use of archival material and diaristic voice-overs, functioning thus as "a time traveler who journeys in memory and history."[214]

While each of Roach's films begins with this scene, and each includes Roach's first-person narration throughout, they also each take a slightly different approach to the material, and to autoethnographic representation. As with Cross's films, their chronological order also reflects a continuum along which the filmmaker's thought process evolved. Roach's introduction to filmmaking and self-representation in *S.P.I.T.* links his films closely with Cross's, positioning Roach's films as a continuation of the evolution or unfolding in perspective of Cross's trilogy. In this model, the RoachCam serves as the tipping point at which Roach's more outward-looking perspective begins to dominate. In this sense, while Rannou takes *S.P.I.T.* as the epitome of cinema of indignation, I argue that it is in fact the *start* of a cinema of indignation, and that Roach's trilogy, despite starting from an autoethnographic approach, is what ultimately completes the evolution to cinema of indignation started by Cross.

To that end, Roach's three films, like Cross's, can be placed on a continuum of approaches that both parallels and continues the development in Cross's approaches. While *S.P.I.T.* constitutes an exercise in controlled self-portraiture intended to deepen Cross's portrait of Roach, *RoachTrip* is freely undertaken as an exercise in autoethnography. Focusing solely on himself and to some extent those in his immediate orbit, Roach here sets out on a road trip from Montreal to BC's Okanagan valley. Many sequences in the film have clearly been filmed by a third party, and the resulting split in subjectivity, expressed through the visual distance between the camera's gaze and Roach as an onscreen presence as he narrates his own actions on the audio

[214] Russell 281

track, echo the distance between image and sound in *Danny Boy*. Further, that this is in large part a road movie in which Roach reconstructs a trip taken by him and his comrades in the past brings to mind Russell's description of Jonas Mekas's travel diary films. Specifically at play here is Russell's claim that such films, through reconstructions of past journeys, indicate that "there is something inherent in cinematic representation that dislocates the self," but that at the same time the filmmaking process is a means of unifying the split self.[215] By narrating his own actions, and by acknowledging through his narration that the journey he is on is a reconstruction of past journeys, and that there is a cameraman present, Roach effectively unifies this split.

In *Punk le vote*, Roach sets out with the intention of creating a portrait of his friend Starbuck as Starbuck runs for office. Roach again begins the film with footage of himself in *S.P.I.T.*, establishing that even this intention was informed by his past and, as such, that his portrait of Starbuck is essentially a projection of himself onto his friend. This perspective is reinforced by a consistent first-person narration through the first act of the film, which, while focusing on Starbuck's entry into the electoral system, is nonetheless recounted visually and orally from Roach's perspective. In addition to displacing or co-opting Starbuck's voice while reducing him to an object of portraiture rather than an active participant in the film, this perspective brings to the fore Roach's over-identification with Starbuck, strongly echoing Cross's missteps with *The Street*. Here, however, Roach openly turns the camera on himself through the second and third acts of the film, running for office against Starbuck, at one point confessing that he understands politicians' desire for media attention as he himself has found it addictive.

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[215] Russell 286, 285.

By openly acknowledging this need to be the focus of media attention, Roach has inserted himself as the subject of the film without actually engaging in ideological patronage. Further, he considered and presented Starbuck as a peer, and the split between the two came about as the result of an ideological difference, which they openly discuss in the film's third act. Not incidentally, this ideological difference was based in Starbuck's rejection of the electoral system as an anarchist, and his reluctance to be the centre of media attention. In contrast, Roach not only enjoys such attention, but believes in dismantling neoliberal political systems from within, the first step of which, in his view, was being elected, and registering as many homeless people as voters as he could while using the media attention garnered to draw attention to the systemic marginalization of Montreal's homeless populations. In other words, Roach's co-opting of Starbuck's position as subject is to some degree based on a mutual respect for ideological differences and strongly rooted in the activist potential of electoral campaigns, rather than an attempt by Roach to impose a particular viewpoint or behaviour on Starbuck. Finally, Roach inserting himself as subject and running for office himself after Starbuck effectively walks away from his campaign represents an unfolding of Roach's perspective, in which he begins to examine and heighten his engagement with the outside world, shifting towards more direct activism than (self)portraiture.

This shift to a more outward-facing perspective and direct activism is continued in *Les Tickets*. Roach again begins the film with the footage of himself shooting up in *S.P.I.T.*, along with footage of the moment he leaves Bordeaux prison after serving a short sentence for unpaid tickets relating to his time on the street, in order to ground the film's perspective in his own experiences. However, *Les Tickets* allows Roach to correct his own missteps with *Punk le vote* by, from the outset, positioning himself as a (better) Michael Moore-esque filmmaker

investigating Montreal's criminalization of homelessness. Consisting largely of interviews with Roach's former street comrades, outreach workers, activists, police officers, and politicians, Roach successfully avoids any ideological patronage by consistently reminding the viewer that this is the world he is from and that the authority figures he is interviewing are those who marginalize him and the film's other subjects.

That Roach actively seeks out and interviews those with whom he had previously been affiliated on the street, at times placing them directly in conversation those responsible for laws specifically targeting them, is not only the ultimate amplification of voice, but works as an example of a filmmaker being present alongside their subjects in an empowering way that does not co-opt any voice, while simultaneously reminding viewers of their responsibilities as citizens. In this sense, *Les Tickets* can be interpreted through two different but complementary lenses: first, as a barely recognizable form of autoethnography in which the filmmaker actively investigates the social and structural factors that have shaped his life and who he has come to be; and second, as a particularly effective example of cinema of indignation (which Rannou explains as based in the idea of testimony and witnessing, voice amplification, and self-representation being radical acts that go beyond simple rhetoric and reportage to remind viewers of their responsibilities as citizens and inspire subsequent actions),[216] whose autoethnographic elements heighten the work's impact with

Figure 17: From left, Benoît Labonté (Ville-Marie borough mayor); Mario (target of a bylaw); Roach. Frame grab from Les Tickets.

[216] Rannou, "Pour un cinéma de l'indignation"

regards to reminding viewers of their responsibilities as citizens, and calling for a variety of actions depending on the viewer's own social position.

If an anarcho-punk casts a spoiled ballot, are they still an anarcho-punk?

It is the very fact of Roach's position as a member of the communities he depicts and on whose behalf he acts in his films that is perhaps of most use in discussion of questions about impact and the amplification of grassroots voices. Cross's films are the work of an outsider working ostensibly to sensitize a more middle-class audience to a segment of the population they may overlook in their day-to-day experiences of the city, despite his ultimately saviourist actions. By contrast, Roach's work is clearly not only about communities in which he claims membership but *from* them as well. This is immediately evident in the films, both through the degree of participation Roach is able to solicit from his subjects, no matter how confrontational the situation may be, and through the inclusion of material relevant to the anarcho-punk scene of which Roach is part.

The latter element is perhaps most evident (and memorable) in the opening sequence of *Punk le vote*, featuring a deeply cynical animated explainer on Canadian politics followed immediately by footage from a performance by Roach's co-protagonist's band, Starbuck et les impuissants ("Starbuck and the powerless"), who dedicate their song "Débranchez-moi, je suis un Libéral" ("Unplug me, I'm a Liberal"[217]) to the audience's, and by extension the viewers', Liberal-voting parents. With its title and with this sequence, *Punk le vote* makes clear up front

[217] Whose opening stanza concludes "J'ai voté Jean Chrétien, j'ai voté pour un chien"/"I voted Jean Chrétien, I voted for a jerk"

Figure 18: Starbuck shows us how he really feels. Frame grab from Punk le vote

what its agenda is, what cultural sphere it comes from, and the two audiences it most directly addresses.

While all three of Roach's films, as well as *S.P.I.T.*, are set to soundtracks featuring exclusively Montreal punk bands, *Punk le vote*, both by Starbucks's participation and by virtue of the ideological question the film's premise raises—whether anarchists can or should participate in the electoral process, either as candidates or as electors—is most directly connected to the Montreal punk scene. This connection is reinforced by several threads on the general politics discussion board at Quebec Underground, a music- and media-sharing website with sporadically active discussion forums for and by Quebec punks.[218] [219] Timed around the 2008 federal election, these threads openly question whether votes deliberately cancelled as an act of resistance as well as the rate of non-participation should be taken into account when calculating results. They also include debate about whether casting a cancelled vote or running for office, even with the intention of using the experience to open broader public discussions about homelessness and proportional representation while registering previously disenfranchised voters, are so antithetical to the broader principles of the anarchist and punk movements that they effectively

[218] anarchoi, "un autre gouvernement conservateur – 59,2%: plus bas taux de participation dans l'histoire," *Quebec Underground*, Oct. 26 2008, http://www.quebecunderground.net/message.php?t=1272

[219] anarchoi, "les punks qui s'impliquent dans le jeu politique," *Quebec Underground,* Sept. 17 2008, http://www.quebecunderground.net/message.php?t=1241

constitute acceptance of the neoliberal, capitalist state. It should be noted that this debate, which is likely to never be settled one way or another in the absence of a large-scale socio-political experiment in actual anarchism following a (utopian) mass rejection of capitalism, echoes the debate between Roach and Starbuck in *Punk le vote* which gave rise to Roach's entry in the 2006 federal election. In this way, the debate unfolding online and referring back by name to Starbuck and Roach shows that Roach's work resonates within the community, and has indeed opened at least one of the discussions he had hoped it would.

Roach's experiment with *Punk le vote* is not the only time he is mentioned on the Quebec Underground message board. While the political debate threads on this forum are interesting, the site's primary function is for sharing and circulating music and other media from local, primarily Montreal-based, punk bands. To that end, both *Punk le vote* and its soundtrack have been posted for streaming and/or download in the forum,[220] and the soundtrack for *S.P.I.T.* has also been posted (with a response from Roach himself indicating that he curated the musical selections for *S.P.I.T.* and saying that he enjoys seeing his old work still being enjoyed).[221] That these items circulate(d) online years after the fact, with most relevant threads seeming to be active in the 2008-2011 timeframe (for context, *S.P.I.T.* was released in 2001 and *Punk le vote* in 2006), indicates that these films and their soundtracks remain(ed) relevant to the community portrayed for some time after their release. Moreover, that both these artifacts' re-appearance, as well as

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[220] anarchoi, "PUNK LE VOTE – DOCUMENTAIRE avec Starbuck et Roach," *Quebec Underground*, May 22 2008, http://www.quebecunderground.net/m633/punk_le_vote_documentaire_avec_starbuck_et_roach

[221] anarchoi, "(COMPILATION) s.p.i.t. (Squeege Punk In Traffic)," *Quebec Underground*, May 4 2008, http://www.quebecunderground.net/m226/compilation_s_p_i_t_squeege_punk_in_traffic

current events, can spark debates connecting the films' contents with ongoing politics along with, in several threads, nostalgia for the days when Roach and his camera were a fixture on the pre-gentrification downtown Montreal street scene,[222] [223] demonstrates that not only were these films at the very least seen by these message board users, but that the films (and *Punk le vote* in particular) have achieved their aim with regards to sparking discussion in the community from which they sprang.

It should be noted at this point that Roach developed his own website devoted to promoting the films, which included a message board. This site, however, is no longer in existence, and the Wayback Machine has only captured the main page of the message boards and not the content of any actual discussion threads.[224] This is a great shame, considering that the threads that seem to have had the most activity are those timed with events portrayed in *Punk le vote* and with contemporaneous police harassment of punks and/or homeless people, and they would presumably have afforded greater insight into community responses to *Punk le vote*, both during and after its production, as well as to events that would later inform *Les Tickets*. Had this been preserved, it would likely have made for a fine example of transmedia activism moving recursively between online and offline spaces, between community and screen, as well as an example of radical transparency around and participation in authorial processes that Coffman

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[222] Anarpit, "découragé," *Quebec Underground*, January 15 2010, http://www.quebecunderground.net/m2785/decourage

[223] anarchoi, "PUNK LE VOTE -- DOCUMENTAIRE avec Starbuck et Roach"

[224] General Discussion forum, roachcam.ca via Wayback Machine, https://web-beta.archive.org/web/20070715093835/http://www.roachcam.ca:80/forum/viewforum.php?f=1&sid=1d07918c40da87520a3c8d78c35fdca7

argues is essential to a successful transmedia activist project.[225] The takeaway here is that, contrary to popular belief, the internet is not necessarily forever, and information disseminated or discussions taking place online do not remain eternally accessible and ongoing. The Wayback Machine, as a bot programmed to snapshot only main pages, cannot be accused of making determinations as to what is worth archiving or not. However, that additional content preserved on this DIY archive relies on human input and therefore a human determination as to what is worth preserving—as with more formal archives—indicates that there remains a subconscious perception that online discourse (particularly from communities that continue to be marginalized), despite being held up as a measure of "impact" in current activist documentary debates, is not quite worthy of being preserved for future research. This ultimately perpetuates a kind of intellectual elitism to which online discourse is, ironically, held out as the antidote. Moreover, I argue that the very fact of this situation is evidence that putting all of our impact eggs in the social media and online interactivity basket is, at best, short-sighted: Not only is there the potential that the media fragments (and metrics) this generates become inaccessible at some point, but in their unavailability, they cease to be shared, circulated, read, or otherwise consumed, and their impact becomes an intangible, unmeasurable past event, rather than an ongoing contribution to discussions about radical alternative futures.

In this sense, the three other ways in which Roach's activism is present within and circulates through his films become even more essential. First, by being screened at self-proclaimed prestigious film festivals and on higher-brow TV channels, in addition to screenings

[225] Coffman, 113.

in schools and through alternative screening collectives,[226] the films sensitize a middle-class audience to the real ways in which votes and other support for certain political ideologies, as well as individual acts like phoning the police out of fear of the "other," impact real human beings on an immediate level, dooming many of them to a cycle of constantly having to start from nothing (and in the case of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour, putting them at risk of physical state violence). This is made most explicit in *Les Tickets*, which begins with Roach being released from Bordeaux jail after serving time for unpaid loitering tickets, and subsequently explaining how the street-to-jail-to-street cycle is nearly impossible to break when the prison sentences in question are for unpaid fines handed out as a consequence for living on the street. Moreover, as the report prepared for the NFB around film and social impact states, "Films can have their greatest and most enduring impact through the education system (…) A film's shelf life can go on for decades and its use may be far more creative and wide-ranging than even the filmmaker can foresee or know about."[227] In this way, screenings in schools and through collectives are perhaps the most important platform for Roach's activism. Second, by bringing together those who make and enforce discriminatory laws that perpetuate such cycles with those most impacted by them, *Les Tickets* in particular harnesses the power of the camera and the threat of media exposure to gain access to and the immediate attention of such power brokers, who are in turn forced to, at the very least, recognize the humanity of those most impacted by their actions. In so doing, *Les Tickets* both as a finished film and within its

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[226] Roach, *RoachCam*, March-April 2007, https://web-beta.archive.org/web/20070712235116/http://www.roachcam.ca:80/en/index.htm

[227] Erin Research Inc., "Breaking New Ground: A Framework for Measuring the Social Impact of Canadian Documentaries." Report presented to the NFB (2005): 6.

production process becomes an important platform in which impact on its subjects is generated, in turn having an impact on any viewers who, through mimesis, are inspired to similarly intervene with elected policy makers. Finally, the trilogy acts as an outlet for both community self-recognition and discourse, as well as models for a different way of being within that community. While *RoachTrip* is primarily about self-representation and intra-community recognition and validation of the systemic breakdowns that have led people to this community, *Punk le vote* builds on this self-representation to question the community's anti-political participation stance and open discussions of alternative forms of resistance, and to encourage direct political action by displaying activist interventions at the political, organizational, and street levels. In this way, ultimately, each of Roach's films builds off the last in a way that amplifies the activist potential of the trilogy as a whole.

***Homeless Nation*: Pre-social media networking as activism**

That Roach is actually someone who has experienced the oppression and marginalization he deconstructs in all three of his films, and that these films reflect, resonate for, and generate discussions within the community represented, makes his trilogy an effective, insider mapping of certain aspects of street life, clearly based in his own experience, and which does not pretend to stand in for others' experiences or generalize. By contrast, Cross's first two films constitute an outsider mapping of the street, essentializing the experience of homelessness. This is epitomized by naming his second film *The Street*, and remarking in the director's commentary as well as in the introductory narration to the film (as discussed on page 99) that the men Cross followed in

that film seemed to him to be representative of a romantic vision of street life.[228] Considering Foster's statement that the ethnographic method "demands that artists and critics be familiar not only with the structure of each culture well enough to map it, but also with its history well enough to narrate it," along with Cross's outsider perspective and essentialisation and romanticisation of the street, Cross's first two films do not serve as an appropriately mapped and narrated document.[229] Further, by giving Roach the RoachCam in *S.P.I.T.*, Cross implicitly recognized that he could not ethically or accurately map a street life that is evidently very different from his earlier, romantic notions of homelessness. While the RoachCam enabled and empowered Roach to develop his own filmmaking practice, it can also be seen as the root of a line of thinking about problems of outsider representation of marginalized people, and of the role that new media forms can play in enabling self-representation. The creation of the *Homeless Nation* project sought to address those problems by providing a social networking platform for a community whose networking was previously limited to in-person and word-of-mouth communication, while also providing a platform for blogging and video-blogging, with equipment and training made available to facilitate this communication.

Billing itself as a website "By and for the homeless," the *Homeless Nation* initiative placed donated computers, video cameras, and other equipment in shelters and drop-in centres across Canada, providing training to staff so that they in turn could offer support to those using the

[228] Cross, *The Street* -- Director's Commentary

[229] Foster, 202.

equipment.[230] In this way, the project sought to overcome its most immediate challenge: that it situated itself at an extreme end of the "digital divide" engendered by class privilege and structural inequalities. What is left unspoken, however, is that the project only reached those willing to use drop-in centres and those who meet shelters' criteria for admission, which often include a monetary fee for use, sobriety requirements, regulations around hygiene and appearance, gender policing, and, occasionally, adherence to a specific set of religious beliefs.[231] As a result, those who were able to engage with the website in these contexts, even in a text-only format rather than recording any of their own video, still represent only one segment of the homeless population, calling *Homeless Nation*'s claim to "meet homeless Canadians where they

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[230] "Homeless Nation: About Homeless Nation." *Homeless Nation,* n.d. Homelessnation.org/index

[231] See, for example:
https://www.lighthousesaskatoon.org/services/housingplus/emergencyshelter/shelterrules/
https://www.onslowco.org/shelter-rules
https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2015/01/09/crowding_not_the_only_deterrent_for_homeless_in_citys_shelters.html
http://thehill.com/regulation/pending-regs/291522-transgender-rules-for-homeless-shelters-spark-firestorm
http://www.bet.com/news/national/2017/05/09/trans-woman-s-viral-salvation-army-shelter-tweets-sparks-nationa.html
https://thinkprogress.org/salvation-army-refuses-housing-shelter-to-transgender-woman-2660c79b4cd4

are," as well as the project's name itself, into question.[232] Further, while the website also describes working in squats, at protests, and so on, these are by nature temporary sites, requiring that a person with the appropriate training be present with and responsible for the technical equipment in use. Given the ephemerality and informality of these situations, it is reasonable to assume that this is likely to be someone who is largely an outsider to the community, and whose primary concern is the equipment rather than community. Thus, despite its best intentions, *Homeless Nation* to some extent replicated the barriers to accessing digital media storytelling it sought to dismantle.

Nonetheless, the *Homeless Nation* project not only provided a participatory venue for social change, as Rannou terms it,[233] but in its existence, mission, and naming, it provided a site of coalescence and fixity for a group that is otherwise lacking in these things (making its demise all the more upsetting). Benedict Anderson's idea of nationhood as an imaginary of plural and simultaneous experience forming a shared chronology, and of the national subject as formed through media address,[234] is useful in thinking about how the *Homeless Nation* project can be said to build a nation that, by definition, has no fixed spatial dimension. This idea also provides an alternate way of thinking about the RoachCam as a transitionary device in subject formation, signalling an evolution from outsider ethnography in *Danny Boy* to self-representation in both Roach's trilogy and in the original intention for *Homeless Nation*.

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[232] "About Homeless Nation"

[233] Rannou, "Pour un cinéma de l'indignation"

[234] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (1983; Rev. ed. London, New York: Verso, 2006), 35.

Finally, there is the question of the website's current state. While it was initially maintained by an administrator from EyeSteelFilm (Cross's production and distribution company), the site's description includes a mention that unless further funding from government programs, corporate sponsors, or private donations could be secured, the *Homeless Nation* project's existence would be threatened. The most recent postings on the site bear this out: dating to 2014, they were primarily spam links to sunglasses and sneaker sales, or to pirated Hollywood output. Prior to that, the most recent uses of the site by the communities it was intended for date to 2011, with a sharp drop off in usage after posts relating to the protest actions and disruptions planned around the 2010 Vancouver Olympics (an event notable for the displacement and dispossession enacted on Vancouver's marginalized and precarious populations by related construction projects). Most tragically, the comments appended to the missing persons information exchange also consist mainly of spam touting Ugg boots and multiple iterations of the "this was a good and informative post on my favourite topic to read about" trackback genre. Moreover, at the time of this work's revision in May 2017, the website was found to be no longer online, and accessible only through the Wayback Machine archive.

The current state of affairs on the *Homeless Nation* site indicates that, indeed, additional funding for, at the very least, a site moderator was not secured. In addition, that there appears to have been no community moderation occurring in its place, and that there have been no community posts made since 2011, indicate that the entire program has ground to a halt, presumably due to lack of funding. In this sense, then, I argue that despite the *Homeless Nation* project's noble intentions, its demise clearly demonstrates that neoliberal solutions to social problems are not actually effective, and that technology in and of itself does not actually produce unwaveringly inclusive, self-regulating, democratic utopias, or sustainable impact(s). Further,

these failures raise the question of what role filmmakers can and should be expected to play in providing social support and solutions to these issues—having started the projects which ultimately led to *Homeless Nation* and all its promise, is it Cross's personal responsibility, or EyeSteelFilm's corporate responsibility, to ensure the continued viability of the *Homeless Nation* project? Moreover, does the effectiveness of Roach's films, produced and supported by EyeSteelFilm and initially enabled by the RoachCam as representational device, ultimately serve as an extension of the activism intended by Cross with the making of his trilogy?

I argue that, as a company that describes itself as having been "founded through making films with the homeless community" before branching out into more commercial projects ("*Up the Yangtze* grossed close to 1.5 million dollars in North American box office, one of the year's top documentary releases. The film also won dozens of awards, such as the Genie (Canada's Oscar) for Best Documentary"),[235] it would have been incumbent upon EyeSteelFilm to fund a small stipend to support an intern to moderate *Homeless Nation* and/or to seek out funding for its continued operation. Having seen firsthand that there are many interns receiving a liveable hourly wage to work in post-production at EyeSteel (as laudable as that is), that this was not implemented as a stopgap to keep *Homeless Nation* operational and useful raises many more uncomfortable questions. Moreover, opting not to do this would be more palatable had the resources allocated to *Homeless Nation* subsequently been directed to other advocacy work aimed at brining about the kinds of structural change needed to adequately address homelessness in Canada, as well as fostering a better understanding of addiction as a disease rather than a question of choice. Instead, perusing the company website shows that the projects undertaken

[235] "About," *EyeSteelFilm*, http://www.eyesteelfilm.com/about/

since have been in an increasingly popular and less overtly political vein of documentary,[236] as well as an active distribution arm handling independent, international, and "arthouse" films,[237] with no indication that these ultimately serve to support any other advocacy or activist projects connected to the films which launched the company. In this sense, I argue that the abandonment of the *Homeless Nation* project constitutes an ethical breach towards the community upon whose stories the company was founded, and points towards the much larger problems with relying on privately managed solutions to public problems, and with relying on technology—and social media platforms in particular—as the be-all, end-all of media-based activism.

[236] "Projects", *EyeSteelFilm*, http://www.eyesteelfilm.com/projects/

[237] "Distribution," *EyeSteelFilm*, http://www.eyesteelfilm.com/distribution-2/

Conclusion: But what does it all mean?

Through the case studies analysed in this thesis, we have seen the myriad ways in which filmmakers, producers, or distribution and promotion agents can influence the social discourse and political thinking around the systemic or structural problems addressed through their transmedia activist projects. We have also seen different kinds of impact at work, both positive and negative, but all centered on long-term human experience rather than the immediate gratification of quantifiable outcomes. For example, the previous chapter takes up the interrelated work of two filmmakers around the same topic, but with radically different approaches and outcomes, thus demonstrating the impossibility of an effective universal rubric for evaluating impact. Cross's investigation of homelessness in Montreal is mostly limited to the individual situations of older, white men of Irish descent, and later, of one drug-addicted youth, proposing solutions based on the individual choices of his subjects. By contrast, Roach uses his squeegee punk history as a starting point to explore the systemic and structural issues that result in homeless people of all ages and backgrounds being trapped in cycles that endlessly return many to the streets, proposing if not solutions then at the very least actions that viewers can take to help dismantle these systems of oppression. In other words, where Cross's films use narrowly focused portraiture to evoke pity and sympathy from viewers, Roach's films, by featuring a wider range of subjects and demonstrating the breadth and depth of the structural problems they face, evoke a more empathetic political mimesis. Cross's initial aims with *The Street* and *Danny Boy* in particular were very broad (despite the films' narrow focus), and thus, the impact of these films is hard to adequately define, let alone quantify. Cross then shifted to a more participatory approach with the addition of the RoachCam in *S.P.I.T.* before moving on to create the now-defunct *Homeless Nation* project. This award-winning project was a tangible thing which could

be pointed to as generating positive impact by providing a then-stable space for connection and community-building, by providing training on new media technologies, and by developing a slightly more nuanced awareness of homelessness among those who were solicited for equipment and other donations.

With that said, *Homeless Nation*'s long, slow decline into presently being viewable only through screen captures deposited in the Wayback Machine archive indicates that this impact is arguably short-lived, and points to a larger issue of sustainability in evaluating the impact of transmedia activism. When funders evaluate "long term" impact within a three to five year time frame,[238] this sets the stage for projects with immediate benefit, such as *Homeless Nation*, to last only as long as the funding tap is turned on, and if action is not taken to secure longer term funding before the end point of the initial funder's time frame, then the project is at risk of falling into decline. (Mis)understanding "long term" as meaning three to five years also means that projects whose impact is more of a slow burn, and particularly those which engage in consciousness raising as a means of provoking (conversations about) systemic change, are evaluated as being less impactful. By this rubric, Roach's projects have no tangible thing that can be pointed to or measured as generated impact, but rather, their influence can be found in parsing social discourse several years after the films' releases. As I have shown in the previous chapter, *Punk le vote* sparked a serious discussion within the anarchist-punk community about the merits of participation in electoral politics at a moment when historically low voter turnout in several consecutive elections led to the continual re-election of an unpopular Conservative government. By leveraging the public platform afforded him by running for office, Roach was able to register

[238] Erin Research, Inc. "Social and Cultural Impact of Canadian Documentaries." Report presented to the NFB, 2005: 7.

previously disenfranchised voters and call broader attention to the issue of homelessness. Filming this process resulted in a document of these actions that can be circulated and have continued impact for as many years as it takes for these issues to be adequately and appropriately addressed, constituting a form of impact that cannot be measured, quantified, and turned into sleek graphics, but that is nonetheless ongoing and holds its own importance. Moreover, that the *Homeless Nation* project was the recipient of several major human rights awards during its short lifespan before being allowed to die off for lack of funding shows that even those projects which can produce some kind of measurement or other funder-pleasing data still require serious ongoing commitments in order to produce ongoing, meaningful impact if a self-sustaining mechanism is not inherent to the project in the first place. In other words, a project which stems from existing activist or grassroots work, which models actions that can be easily duplicated by viewers or that points to some kind of solution to the issues presented, and which in some way appeals to the nuances and fundamentals of human experience—which cannot be reasonably quantified—is likely to have greater and more meaningful impact in the long run that one produced by outside consultants and media-makers working on contract.

In this sense, I argue that filmmakers can be held responsible for the impact of their work, within an operating definition of "impact" that looks beyond quantifiable outcomes to consider the human element. By this, I mean that filmmakers can (and very much should) be held responsible by audiences, funders, social movements, and the communities filmmakers work within for the ways in which they approach their topics, and treat or present their subjects. I also argue that media makers embarking on projects that go beyond their films to provide a service of some kind, particularly to marginalized populations, can (and, again, should) be held responsible for ensuring that some kind of self-sustaining mechanism be in place so that should the project

suddenly find itself without public funding or private sponsorship, there is no interruption in service. Moreover, privately undertaken projects which provide support services to marginalized populations—or for that matter, to the any populations—should not actually be made so necessary by a lack of public equivalents as to leave a void in services should these private projects cease to exist, but that is perhaps a problem for a different kind of thesis.

I further argue that while filmmakers, producers, or distribution and promotion agents can be held responsible for the content within films, as well as their production methods, publicity campaigns, and (to some extent) screening contexts, it is wholly unreasonable to expect filmmakers to assume responsibility for generating what amounts to metrics of interest largely to corporate-backed foundations. In other words, filmmakers can and should be held responsible for maximizing the direct human impact of their films through method, representation, screening context, and community outreach, but their films and related projects cannot and should not become the cinematic equivalent of clickbait. To do so would be exploitative of and condescending to the films' subjects and audiences, as well as any previous activism these films may draw on. It would also demand of the committed or activist filmmaker that their activism become secondary to generating clicks, page views, re-tweets, and other easily visualized data, and this ultimately in the service of upholding a status quo in which the systemic injustices their films address are the result of policies designed to benefit the same entities behind the foundations which fund these projects.

This is taken to an extreme in the case of *Ravished Armenia* and the Near East Foundation, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Here, we have a non-profit organization that, with the best of intentions, engaged a Hollywood screenwriter and director to dramatize the memoirs of an Armenian genocide survivor in order to make a fundraising film.

Somewhere along the way, however, those good intentions became conflated with box office potential, leading to a heavily fictionalized script replete with white saviourism, extreme anti-Muslim sentiment in the film's paratextual ecology, and unimaginable ethical breaches in the Foundation's treatment of survivors in America, ultimately replicating many of the structures of oppression it claimed to be in resistance to.[239] While there are no verifiable claims regarding the film's box office receipts, what percentage of those funds were returned to the Foundation, and how that portion of the proceeds was ultimately spent, a scholar with deep ties to the Foundation has estimated that the film raised $117 million ($2.5 billion in 2015).[240] In that sense, *Ravished Armenia* was arguably successful in its primary goal (raising funds to aid the Foundation in ministering to survivors of the Armenian genocide), but given the current state of eurowestern discourse on race, gender, and religion, as well as the repeated and ongoing genocides over the past 100 years and the violent, totalitarian regimes presently in power in Turkey and Syria, any larger goal in that arena has clearly not been achieved.[241]

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[239] Given that the film's extras were allegedly also survivors of the genocide who had resettled in California, and that they were required to recreate the hardships and violence they had previously experienced for the sake of a sensationalist film, it could also be argued that the making of *Ravished Armenia* itself constituted an act of racialised, gendered violence on a large scale. That, however, is also a topic for a different thesis.

[240] Anthony Slide, *Ravished Armenia* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 28.

[241] While not directly affiliated with the Near East Foundation, a 2017 film called *The Promise*—a similarly fictionalised and whitewashed memoir of the Armenian genocide—has launched an email and social media campaign under the hashtag #KeepThePromise. The title and hashtag both refer to a commitment to educate others about genocide and to dismantle attempted cover

Tracing a connection between the Near East Foundation's media practices in 1919 and today, we have seen that their calls to action are located on an individual, emotional level, and that the solution to the problems presented in their media output is for private individuals to donate money to this non-profit foundation so that they may provide individuals with relief from the material effects of state violence. We have also seen that this media output celebrates their own work as much as (if not in some cases more than) it speaks to the issues the Foundations wishes to address, while reinforcing Orientalist, misogynist, and anti-Muslim rhetoric. This raises two questions: First, whether a film or other media object can be said to be truly activist when their activism is implicit, hidden behind a celebration of an organization's history or activities, or when their calls to action both rely on neoliberal appeals to individual donors rather than agitating for broader, systemic change, and reinforce racial, religious, or gender-based misconceptions which are responsible for other injustices. Second, it raises the question of whether relying on neoliberal do-good impulses and reinforcing a specific worldview in the process is necessarily the best way to engage with and mobilize audiences. I argue here that the answer to both of these questions is no, for the simple reason that these conditions ultimately

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ups or denials of it. On one hand, generating or redirecting social discourse is exactly part of what I argue a successful activist film should do. On the other, that the film's narrative, like that of *Ravished Armenia*, prominently features American saviourism, and that, also as with the earlier film, it is very unclear as to where the proceeds from this film are going and how they will be spent, position the film as being as much a measure of perceived moral righteousness among American Christian viewers as anything else—another echo of *Ravished Armenia*.

serve to perpetuate injustices and worsen social conditions in the long run, while reifying the neoliberal, patriarchal, white supremacist status quo.

The miners' rights films examined in the second chapter of this work take an entirely different tack. While two of them were arguably produced as part of specific organizations' media ecologies, all three do call for large-scale systemic change. The films vary in tone from propaganda to cinéma vérité via melodrama, but all three nonetheless rely on similar imagery in making their calls to action: poor living conditions, ramshackle housing, dangerous working conditions, severe food insecurity, and (para)state violence towards and indifference to these communities. Moreover, two of the films explicitly show women and people of colour taking the lead in agitating for change, further exploring the ways in which the impact of the conditions in mining communities is amplified for those who are not white men but who are subjugated to them in some way.

While only *Borinage* includes a direct exhortation to viewers, in the form of its final title card calling for socialist revolution, all three offer examples of direct actions that can be taken to ask for change (and indeed, one, *Salt of the Earth*, was ultimately used as a union training film). All three films also rely on visceral reactions generated by some combination of images taken inside claustrophobic mine spaces, images of children suffering, and images of (para)state violence. As such, regardless of any other calls to action, these films ask viewers to consider the larger implications of the erasure of the labour required for and material realties of resource extraction and processing. The AJ+ videos examined in the conclusion to chapter three perform the same function, relying on the first-person testimony of residents of Harlan County thirty years after Kopple's film to highlight the ways in which the shift to more sustainable energies has not been accompanied by a structural shift to ensure the social and economic sustainability of

the area. With that said, that the two Harlan County projects in particular rely on viewer agency to determine what their most responsible reaction to the information presented should be could, in the absence of any more explicit messages, unintentionally create a thought process of "*x* conditions are bad and these people treated terribly, therefore I will stop using *y* product that relies on this resource and this labour."

This economic-boycott line of thinking is what the American right argues is responsible for the loss of jobs and general economic decline in Appalachia, all the while overlooking the bigger picture: that nothing about the coal industry—not the resource, not the working and living conditions in mining communities, not the industry itself—is really sustainable over the long term, and new solutions are needed. That new solutions are needed is what the AJ+ videos set out to show, while also countering the stereotypes of mining communities that have taken hold in our cultural consciousness as a result of the kinds of images seen in the three films examined in chapter two (all three of which also overlook the question of long-term sustainability, economically, ecologically, or socially, in the communities portrayed). Taken in context with the three films considered in chapter two, as well as with Cross's films, the *Homeless Nation* project, and the alleged treatment of Armenian genocide survivors by the makers of *Ravished Armenia*, the AJ+ approach to present-day Appalachia thus highlights the question of whether filmmakers can ultimately be held responsible for thinking about impact in terms of their subjects' best long-term interests, or if the relationship between metrics and project financing has ultimately fostered the kind of short-term thinking likely to lead to an increase in so-called parachute filmmaking.

We have seen here several examples of attempts to think longer-term and avoid abandoning a community once shooting wraps, most notably in Roach's work and the *Homeless*

Nation project,[242] and filmmakers (as well as activists) have an absolute right to maintain a variety of interests and engage with a range of causes. However, projects that grind to a halt after a short period, that do not address root causes behind the issues they investigate, that do not provide a clear call to action or model easily duplicated actions within their diegesis, and that do not provide a great deal of transparency about their goals may ultimately do more harm than good (particularly if they have been providing a marginalized group with some kind of service that is not otherwise available, as was the case with *Homeless Nation*).

In this sense, ultimately, I argue that current debates around impact and responsibility have become so mired in the definitions of impact set up by the consulting industry (the industry that most stands to benefit from this instability) that other ways of thinking about impact have been lost. It is in this newly restrictive definition of impact that questions arise about the role of filmmakers and their responsibilities, and in the involvement of consultants and new kinds of producers—namely, "impact producers"—that the sense of the word "filmmaker" also begins to lose its shape. The production structure behind *Ravished Armenia*, which involved a non-profit organization and various Hollywood players, and the resultant confusion about where or if a line can be drawn between the film's marketing and publicity campaigns and the activist outreach campaign, shows that this has long been murky territory. However, the advent of social media mixed with neoliberalism has produced a situation where an activist project, no matter what the

[242] It should also be noted that several participants in *Harlan County, USA*, when interviewed for the making-of accompanying the film's Criterion DVD release, claim to have stayed in close contact with Kopple following the end of shooting, and that the production credits for the Criterion issue indicate that some kind of post-production work was done at Appalshop (a media production outfit in Harlan County, whose owners were also interviewed for the AJ+ videos).

activist and/or filmmaker's initial intention may be, is no longer considered viable unless accompanied by a business plan and impact producer. This is also increasingly the case in Canada, where popular myth is that we are blessed with abundant public funding. While our public agencies are themselves abundant, the funding they have to distribute to filmmakers and activist/non-profit groups shrinks by the year. This has two effects relevant to this thesis: First, it puts these agencies in the position of needing to operate under their own neoliberal austerity policies, which in turn means an increasing emphasis on impact through a quantifiable return on investment framework, hence the commissioning of an impact report to the NFB in the first place. Second, it puts filmmakers and activist and/or non-profit groups increasingly at the mercy of private funders and their interests. In the documentary context, this primarily means applying for "grants" from media conglomerates such as Bell, Rogers, and Shaw, and partnering with private broadcasters (many of whom are owned by one of these corporations). Moreover, the Hot Docs film festival, which is based in Toronto and is considered one of the two most important film festivals in Canada (and which itself provides grants to filmmakers), commissioned an impact report from an American consultant, focusing on American case studies, and increasingly features American films while relegating Canadian content to niche programming. This indicates that the gap between the American and Canadian activist documentary production contexts is not only smaller than we think, but at risk of disappearing entirely.

Such neoliberal structures place undue emphasis on short-term results intended to satisfy funders, and particularly funders who represent the social responsibility (read: public relations and tax write-offs) arms of large corporations, with little thought for long-term results, systemic changes, and the wider meanings of the word "impact." Moreover, this emphasis on metrics has led to a conflation of "transmedia" with "social media," reinforced by the latter's built-in

capacity for automatic transmission of impression metrics (page view, retweets, and so on). As we have seen with every case study in this thesis, expanding our understanding of "transmedia" to include all works—digital, analog, material, or otherwise—in a particular media ecology, and our understanding of "impact" to include unquantifiable human experience, makes it apparent that transmedia approaches have been used by activist storytellers to generate impact since before Grierson ever even uttered the word "documentary." In other words, the technological determinism and limited understandings presently operating within the impact industry and documentary funding ecology are ultimately shortsighted in their erasure of both historical fact and human experience.

Given this, an interesting direction for future work in this area would be to track a privately funded activist documentary over the coming decades to see if, in the long term, it succeeds in changing the social and political discourse around whichever issue the project engages with. *Blackfish* (2013, Gabriella Cowperthwaite), often held up as an example of what is currently meant by "impact" for the social pressure that resulted in the end of Sea World's breeding program as well as several of its theme parks, would be an excellent case study, given that it drew on a long history of animal rights activism[243] and was inspired[244] by a work of

[243] But without ever directly mentioning the long history of animal rights activism targeting Sea World that preceded it, or the inroads into popular culture made by such activism following the on-the-job death of a SeaWorld trainer, for example the 2009 Neko Case song "People Gotta Lot of Nerve."

[244] "About," *Blackfish*, http://www.blackfishmovie.com/film/#about

longform digital journalism.[245] Further, the film was acquired by CNN, who could assure a wider audience than many activist documentaries are afforded, and who subsequently built their own ecology of investigative reporting around it.[246] Such a project would investigate whether the film's amplification of animal rights and anti-zoo activism ultimately succeeds in altering public perceptions of zoos and aquariums to a point that such places are abolished, or if atrocities such as the South Lakes Zoo in the UK (where 500 animals are said to have died under conditions of neglect and abuse in the four years since *Blackfish*'s release)[247] will continue to exist. In other words, I propose that an interesting direction for future research would be to take several case studies of films held up as exemplars of what is termed "impact" in the early 21st century, of which *Blackfish* is perhaps the most notorious example, and to trace the evolution of popular discourse and social policy around the root causes of the injustices they expose in order to determine whether or not the advent of an entire industry devoted to producing impact genuinely represents an improvement over older, less data-driven approaches.

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[245] Tim Zimmerman, "The Killer in the Pool," *Outside*, July 30 2010, https://www.outsideonline.com/1924946/killer-pool?page=all

[246] "CNN Films: *Blackfish*," http://www.cnn.com/specials/us/cnn-films-blackfish/

[247] "Cumbrian zoo facing calls to close after nearly 500 animals die in less than four years," *The Telegraph*, Feb. 28 2017, accessed May 21, 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/28/cumbrian-zoo-facing-calls-close-nearly-500-animals-die-less/

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Appendix A: Filmography

The Act of Killing, 2012, 143 min.
Dir.: Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn, Anonymous
A visually, formally, and emotionally striking documentary in which perpetrators of Indonesia's 1965 genocide re-enact their crimes as though they were scenes from contemporaneous American and Indonesian genre films.
See Introduction ("Impact")

AJ+ series on Harlan County, 2017:
The Unheard Story of Appalachia's Coal, Part 1, 7 min.
How Coal's Decline Devastated Appalachia, Part 2, 6 min.
The People Who Are Bringing Back Appalachia, Part 3, 7 min.
Prod: Maggie Beidelman, Sana Saeed, Omar Duwaji
A three-part video series looking at Harlan County, KY, in late 2016.
See Chapter 2 (conclusion)

Blackfish, 2013, 90 min.
Dir.: Gabriela Cowperthwaite; Prod.: Gabriela Cowperthwaite, Manuel Oteyza
An award-winning feature documentary exposing SeaWorld's abusive practices, with a particular focus on the death of trainer Dawn Brancheau.
See Conclusion

Borinage (aka *Misère au Borinage*), 1934, 36 min.
Dir: Joris Ivens, Henri Storck
A silent agitprop-style film focusing on conditions in the Borinage mining region of Belgium.
See Chapter 2

Danny Boy, 1993, 15 min.
Dir: Daniel Cross
A short film about Danny and John Clavin, two brothers living on the streets of Montreal.
See Chapter 3

Harlan County, USA, 1976, 74 min.
Dir.: Barbara Kopple
A feature documentary about union politics and a miners' strike in Harlan County, KY.
See Chapter 2

The Promise, 2017, 135 min.
Dir.: Terry George; Prod.: Eric Esrailian, Mike Medavoy, William Horberg, Ralph Winter, Denise O'Dell
A love triangle set against the backdrop of the Armenian genocide in which an American photojournalist is ultimately positioned as the hero.
See Chapter 1 (conclusion)

Punk le vote, 2006, 73 min.
Dir.: Éric "Roach" Denis; Prod.: Mila Aung-Thwin and John Christou for EyeSteelFilm
A documentary in which Roach and his friend Starbuck both run for office in the bourgeois Outremont riding, on platforms including proportional representation, voter enfranchisement, radical solutions for homelessness, and the general illegitimacy of the state.
See Chapter 3

Ravished Armenia (aka *Auction of Souls*), 1919, 24 min*
Dir.: Oscar Apfel; Feat.: Aurora Mardiganian
A fictionalised re-interpretation of Mardiganian's memoirs of the Armenian genocide, in which a white American schoolteacher is positioned as the protagonist and white American missionaries the heroes.
*Originally a feature printed on nitrate, nearly the entire film has been lost. Two extant fragments have been combined with other newsreel/actuality footage to make a 24-minute mini-"documentary" about the Armenian genocide, currently circulating online under the title *Ravished Armenia*.
See Chapter 1

RoachTrip, 2003, 46 min.
Dir.: Éric "Roach" Denis; Prod.: EyeSteelFilm
A documentary in which Roach re-creates the journey between the streets of Montreal and Okanagan tree-planting and fruit-picking operations undertaken by many marginalized Canadian youth.
See Chapter 3

S.P.I.T.: Squeegee Punks in Traffic, 2001, 80 min.
Dir.: Daniel Cross; Feat.: Éric "Roach" Denis; Prod.: Daniel Cross, Mila Aung-Thwin, Pascal Maeder for EyeSteelFilm
A documentary focusing on Montreal's squeegee punk culture and on Roach specifically, inspiring Roach to become a filmmaker himself.
See Chapter 1

Salt of the Earth, 1954, 94 min.
Dir.: Howard Biberman; Prod.: Paul Jarrico, International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers
A dramatized retelling of a violent strike at a New Mexico zinc mine, with special emphasis on the role of the community's women in fighting for better conditions in the mining settlement.
See Chapter 2

The Street, 1996, 78 min.
Dir: Daniel Cross
A documentary looking at a group of men living on the streets of Montreal.
See Chapter 1

They Shall Not Perish, 2017, 60 min.

Prod.: Shant Mardirossian; Feat.: Victor Garber, Tony Shaloub
A self-produced documentary outlining the history of the Near East Foundation.
See Chapter 1 (conclusion)

Les Tickets, 2011, 52 min.
Dir: Eric "Roach" Denis; Prod.: Daniel Cross for EyeSteelFilm
A documentary in which Roach explores the systemic failures that keep people cycling between jail and the street.
See Chapter 1

Up the Yangtze, 2007, 93 min.
Dir.: Yung Chang; Co-prod.: EyeSteelFilm and NFB; Dist.: EyeSteelFilm
A documentary following a worker on a tourist cruise ship on the Yangtze river in China.
See Chapter 3 (Homeless Nation)

Print ads for *Ravished Armenia* alternate between two modes of address, clearly destined for two distinct audiences. The first positions Mardiganian as the only Christian woman to have survived the atrocities, and generally features longer blocks of text citing clergy, judges, and other moral authorities (i.e., white Christian male colonial authority figures) as having deemed the film to be morally worthy despite the outrages depicted.[65] While larger, and therefore pricier, versions of these ads appear in trade publications, smaller versions of them with more concise texts appear in mainstream publications like the *Times* and the *Post*, usually a day or two after the film's being mentioned in entertainment listings or towards the end of the film's run at a given theatre. According to Torchin, these types of ads drew on a more general context of media portrayals of Armenian persecution being framed specifically as Christian persecution, thus leveraging religious affinity to draw audiences to screenings, while turning such news coverage into part of Near East Relief's media ecology over and above coverage focused on the film and its production or gala screenings.[66] The second type of advertisement, seen more often in trade publications, plays heavily on the more outrageous aspects of the atrocities depicted in the film, refers to the film as spectacular, and sometimes features line art of a nearly-nude woman in bondage.[67] In Minneapolis, the latter was alleged to


EXHIBITORS HERALD AND MOTOGRAPHY

MONEY-MAKING ATTRACTIONS

Aurora Mardiganian, sole survivor of half a million Armenian Christian girls, escaped to America after two years in Turkish harems and Kurdish slave raiders. She re-enacts her unspeakable experiences in the film. Her story is supplemented by the official reports of Commissioner Lord Bryce and Ambassador Morgenthau.

Never a Film Like It!

See it and you will understand why it is playing to capacity everywhere—in little theatres and big ones.

AUCTION of SOULS

From H. L. Gates' Sensational Book, "RAVISHED ARMENIA"

Though extremely sensational this picture has everywhere enlisted the sympathy and support of the best people, including churches.

See It and You'll Book It

Ask any exhibitor who has run it.

Figure 2: "Never a Film Like It!", image via Exhibitors Herald and Motography, July 12, 1919: 8.

[65] "Never a Film Like It!," ad, *Exhibitors Herald and Motography*, July 12, 1919: 8.

[66] Torchin, Creating the Witness, 44-52.

[67] "Greatest," 3584.

Figure 3: Preshow belly dancer; image via Motion Picture News, January 10, 1920: 603.

Further, every screening of the film, regardless of other publicity stunts, included a scripted, live prologue performed by local actors between the film's opening titles and the first scene of the film itself. The script for the prologue, also reprinted in Slide's work, includes costume and lighting notes as well as stage directions, ensuring consistent reproduction at every performance and in every venue, in an attempt to ensure a consistent reading of the film by every audience, and a consistent affective—and financially lucrative—response. This prologue, which called directly on audience members to donate to Near East Relief, features an embodied, implicitly masculine America as the Christian saviour of an embodied, explicitly female, literally ravished Armenia, along with a hefty dose of Islamophobia.[72] As Benedetta Guerzoni points out in her study of the film, such gendered imagery in both the prologue and print advertising for the film draws on a longer tradition of representations of Armenia embodied in devout Christian women, and further to that, of Armenian women as victims, and particularly victims of sexual violence.[73] Guerzoni also points out that to US audiences in particular, "representation(s) of violence against women (were) often a

[72] Slide, Ravished Armenia, 273.

[73] Benedetta Guerzoni, "A Christian Harem: *Ravished Armenia* and the Representation of the Armenian Woman in the International Press," in *Mass Media and the Genocide of the Armenians: One Hundred Years of Uncertain Representation*, eds. Joceline Chabot, Richard Godin, Stefanie Kappler, and Sylvia Kasparian (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 55.

Figure 4: A crowd in Dayton; image via Exhibitors Herald, January 31, 1920: 90.

on metrics as an indication of impact.[81] Further, many exhibitors' claims to have broken their own attendance records were printed in articles lauding the publicity stunts mounted around the film. Where the truth value of these statements and photos is strengthened is, instead, in very short exhibitor-submitted reports from small towns, printed under headings like "What the Picture Did For Me." While a few of these report solid box office business, usually as a result of a promotional or publicity campaign of some kind, others report slower sales and an unpopular reception, with comments such as "Picture excellent, but leaves too terrible an impression. Not a picture for children,"[82] and "Drew a big house, but very few liked it."[83] The latter are mainly situated in smaller towns, likely with smaller budgets for generating their own publicity through costly sideshows, staged protests, and so on. That many of these also cite the film's dark nature as the reason for its unpopularity serves to reaffirm others' decisions to exploit the more prurient aspects of the film and create a spectacle around it, despite its sober subject matter. One exhibitor went so far as to write in to a trade publication to advise other small exhibitors to advertise higher ticket prices for the film, as a way of evoking the prestige around the film's gala premiere in order to generate excitement and thus larger audiences without needing to engage in any further spectacle-making.[84] Ultimately, in the

[81] "Dayton Liked It," photo, *Exhibitors Herald*, January 31, 1920, 90.

[82] "What the Picture Did For Me," *Exhibitors Herald*, May 1 1920, 79.

[83] "What the Picture Did For Me," *Exhibitors Herald*, May 29 1920, 75

[84] "What the Picture Did For Me," *Exhibitors Herald*, April 10 1920, 69.

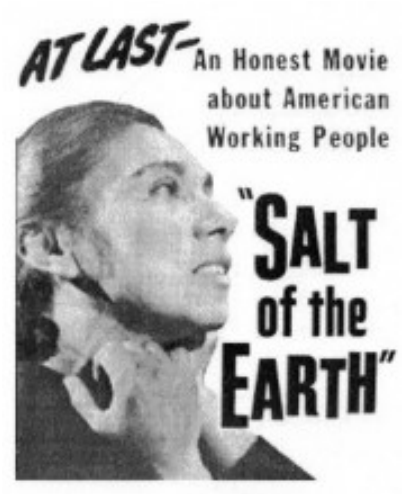

Figure 5: Poster for Salt of the Earth; image via interferencearchive.org

on and contributing to left-wing cultural output in the process. Tracing a through line from *Borinage* to the fictionalized melodrama of *Salt of the Earth* (1954, Herbert Biberman), written by blacklisted Hollywood screenwriters, produced by the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter workers, and cast largely with the miners whose lives the film reflects, to Barbara Kopple's life-imitates-art *Harlan County, USA* (1976), I will examine the films' respective representative modes and their (presumed) effects on the viewer, as well as their uses of or connections to the activist media ecologies to which they belong. As a post script, I will briefly examine a short series of videos about Harlan County produced by AJ+ (Al-Jazeera's online, social media-oriented platform) towards the end of 2016, with an eye to contextualizing the more common perceptions of miners in present-day, mainstream, middle-class eurowestern cultures, and the conflicting ideologies such perceptions serve.

Ultimately, I will argue that these three films, as well as the AJ+ videos, can be situated on a continuum of leftist transmedia examining the living and working conditions of a labour force essential to the rise of modernized society and consumer culture, but ultimately erased from it, hugely marginalized, and used as political pawns.

Borinage

Ivens's 1934 film, best described as newsreel-style agitprop, includes not only scenes filmed specifically for *Borinage*, but also footage recycled from actual newsreels, and, in certain

striking steelworkers in Ambridge, Pennsylvania being attacked and beaten by police, followed by a montage of the Borinage region and its miners at work. This use of footage from both contexts draws a clear connection between the US and Belgium, Ambridge and Borinage, upholding the claim in the film's introductory and closing titles that the situations depicted are both a symptom and result of a "crisis in the capitalist world," the solution to which is "socialism and dictatorship of the proletariat." This direct appeal to the viewer's social conscience coupled with an explicitly presented alternative to the structures of oppression creating the situations portrayed is a marked contrast to the racialised, gendered, and neoliberal approach of *Ravished Armenia* (in which solutions are located in individual donations to private foundations), and to the appeals presented in the other films to be discussed in this chapter.

While the film's leftist perspective is made explicit in the call for total socialism in the film's closing titles, it is also spelled out in *Borinage*'s climax, featuring a recreation of a march held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx. Footage of other marches in *Borinage* is taken from newsreels of the corresponding events,[111] thereby appropriating media coverage of leftist activity into the Popular Front's burgeoning media ecology through its inclusion here. In this final sequence, as people march through the streets, carrying a large portrait of Marx, in an absurdly and ironically ornate frame, at the front of the procession, others watching from their front stoops and on street corners are swept up in the celebratory solidarity on display, and join in the march themselves. According to Waugh, this recreation-turned-reality ended in

Figure 6: "A demonstration on the 50th anniversary of Karl Marx's death"; frame grab from Borinage

Gaines calls an "aesthetic of similarity"[115]—united in resistance, in a specific, local, familiar, place, *Borinage* uses affective mimesis to also inculcate in viewers a sense of tangible possibility of what could be and how it is within the viewer's power to make it happen.

The importance of the order of these images, particularly in relation to their content and composition, cannot be overstated. Coming on the heels of intimate, human portraits of the living conditions in mining settlements, presented by the doctor whose published writings *Borinage* is said to be based on,[116] the sequence featuring a spontaneous demonstration functions as both a cathartic reaction to the deprivations shown in the settlement and a call to action. The first act of the film is heavy on action-filled newsreel segments as well as re-enactments of violent clashes between miners and police, with wide shots featuring large crowds, dynamic movements within the frame, and comparatively quick editing. The second act, by contrast, focuses on not more than a few individuals at a time, featuring many close-ups of sick and/or dirty children, lingering shots of housing conditions, and examples of day-to-day acts of solidarity between individuals and families. This slower pace, as well as the focus on individual stories as representative of an entire population (rather than on that population as a whole), gives the viewer both a human point of identification on screen, as well as the time for that identification to be made and for the viewer to then connect conditions on-screen with whatever precarity may be present in their own life, or conversely, to recognize the relative privileges they may enjoy. This identification and connection has the potential to raise support for the miners through a

Figure 7: Frame grab from Borinage

Figure 8: The women vote to join the picket line. Frame grab from Salt of the Earth.

This becomes of prime importance to the film's mission when considering the ways in which race and gender within an oppressive capitalist structure are discussed. Women's leadership of the strike forms the film's main plot line. The union hall confrontation in which the men recognize that they can no longer be alone on the strike's front lines and that community-wide resistance is necessary (albeit with a tone of desperation belying residual injuries to their masculinity in so doing) is a major climactic moment in the film. The debate enacted in it, which results in the men supporting the women by a narrow margin, is certainly instructive for other (predominately male) union-centred audiences.

There are three other explicitly didactic moments that stand out in the film, another in a patriarchal household and the other in a heavily masculinized setting (a bar), culminating in a third discussion in a mixed setting. The first is an early scene in the film in which Esperanza (played by Revueltas) tells her husband, Ramón (played by Chacón) that their radio, purchased on credit, is at risk of being repossessed after they have missed a payment on it. While Ramón's immediate response[148] both speaks to and is dismissive of the traditional gender roles that will later be challenged, his second comment points more directly to the easy credit of the post-war boom years ultimately functioning as a structure of economic oppression: "'No money down. Easy term payments.' I tell you something: this instalment plan, it's the curse of the working

[148] "It isn't right, she says. Was it right that we bought this… this instrument? But you had to have it, didn't you? It was so nice to listen to." (Wilson and Rosenfelt, 8).

Figure 9: "But you had to have it, didn't you?" Frame grab from Salt of the Earth

man."[149] With this comment, the film points out the ways in which credit, positioned as an easy way to attain the trappings of a middle-class lifestyle, ultimately keeps people in a perpetual state of dependency on continued employment and thus less likely to agitate for better wages or working conditions. The remainder of the scene, in which Ramón explains to Esperanza that the union must prioritize issues in the interest of preserving jobs at all, and that workplace safety takes precedence over community living conditions, bears this out.

The second such moment comes in the very next scene. Taking place in a bar, Ramón, his colleagues, and their union representative are discussing their workplace safety issues. While on one level this conversation is simple narrative exposition, it also directly addresses white union members and allies by pointing out that anti-Latinx discrimination in pay and working conditions is also a tool used to control white workers. As Ramón points out, this discrepancy affects non-white workers much more, making white workers who do not speak up ultimately complicit not only in their own oppression but also in a deeper structure of oppression towards non-white workers and communities. This is then followed by Ramón recounting the concrete, causal connections between lack of adequate pay, sanitation, and health care, and mechanisms of fear exploited by the employer to further control the workforce:

> "No sanitation. So my kids get sick. Does the company doctor wait? Twenty bucks. So we miss one payment on the radio I bought for my wife. Does the company store wait? 'Pay—or we take it away.' Why they in such a hurry, the bosses' store? They're trying to

[149] Wilson and Rosenfelt, 8.

Figure 10: Mural on the side of the former Mine-Mill 890 hall. Image via lajicarita.wordpress.com

Chacón and is identified as commemorating the film, rather than the strike.[153] (*The Denver Post*, to its credit, did manage to locate an archival image of what appears to be a strike action, but Chacón is misidentified in the caption, and, despite the poor quality of the image, it remains unclear whether it was a still taken on-set or a photo from the actual strike itself.)[154] In this way, *Salt of the Earth* goes beyond reclaiming imagery of the strike for the union's own purposes, but it has come to supplant this imagery and dominate the media ecology surrounding the strike.

With that said, it is not unreasonable that production histories of *Salt of the Earth* focused on community input on a political, rather than visual, level, given the film's intended purpose. As Baker points out (and as implicitly affirmed by Coffman's arguments), even the act of making the film itself became a form of activism, in that the degree of support offered by the community required the re-activation and re-valorization of the Ladies' Auxiliary (initially formed when the community's women voted to replace male picketers) within the community.[155] In this sense, the filmmaking process itself became an activist intervention with lasting, positive impact on the community represented, an impact which could presumably be replicated across communities in which the film was screened, particularly when presented by the women who

[153] David Correia, "Copper Giant Freeport-McMoRan Destroys Famous 'Salt of the Earth' Labor Union in Southern New Mexico," *La Jicarita*, Sept. 30 2014, lajicarita.wordpress.com

[154] The Denver Post, "N.M. miners' vote decertifies union," *The Denver Post*, Sept. 23 2014, denverpost.com

[155] Baker, 220-2.

These accounts also show that *Salt of the Earth*'s influence in the Southwestern US has remained strong in the past decades. One labour rights blog includes an entry that features many images of commemorative plaques at sites where the women in particular picketed and led other actions in New Mexico.[158] There is also a Salt of the Earth Labor College in Tucson, Arizona, founded in 1994—the 40th anniversary of the film's release. This college is a kind of "university of the streets," featuring several guest lectures per term, all from labour activists and union leaders, and all dealing with issues raised in the film as they continue to exist in contemporary contexts, as well as an annual screening of the film itself.[159] The same blog's coverage of College activities indicates that Anita Torrez, who travelled to union locals around North America with the film in the 1950s (including the screening held in Trail, BC), and who is now based in Tucson, attended one such screening in 2012.[160] As such, *Salt of the Earth*'s model of small-scale screenings in union or pro-labour contexts, accompanied by discussion leaders, may not be the most attention-getting tactic on a broad scale. Instead, as was the case with *Borinage*, targeted screenings to

Figure 11: A screening of Salt of the Earth at the Salt of the Earth Labor College. Image via hobodispatch.blogspot.com

[158] Richard Boren, "60th Anniversary of the classic film 'Salt of the Earth'," *The Hobo Dispatch*, Feb. 26 2014, hobodispatch.blogspot.ca

[159] Salt of the Earth Labor College, "Schedule," January 2017, saltearthlaborcollege.com/schedule

[160] Boren, "20th Anniversary of Salt of the Earth Labor College in Tucson, AZ," *The Hobo Dispatch*, Feb. 26 2014, http://hobodispatch.blogspot.ca/2014_02_01_archive.html

In *Harlan County, USA*, Kopple essentially embedded herself and her crew with striking coal miners and their families in Harlan County, Kentucky, documenting violence and intimidation on the strike's front lines as well as the community's solidarity actions. Rather than recreating actions and violence as Ivens and Biberman did, however, Kopple and her crew eventually took part in the labour actions and experienced the same (para)state violence as the miners portrayed, taking the idea of committed documentary to a whole new level. It should also be noted that the strike documented by Koppple took place against the backdrop of the US oil crisis, thereby amplifying both the importance of coal as an energy source and, consequently, the disparity between the interests of capital and the well being of mining communities.[161] This tension is further amplified by the fact that many of those portrayed in Kopple's film are old enough to have survived the post-war Red Scare and accusations of Communism lobbed at trade unions and labour activists, and those from the oldest generation shown also held the 1931 Harlan strike—roughly contemporaneous with the Ambridge (1933) and Borinage (1932) strikes—in living memory, as exemplified by Florence Reece's reprise of her protest song written for the earlier strike, "Which Side Are You On?."[162]

Figure 12: Florence Reece leading "Which Side Are You On?" Frame grab from Harlan County, USA

[161] United Mine Workers representative Phil Sparks states in the film that oil companies at the time owned 70% of America's coal reserves, thus heightening the importance of coal to capital at that particular moment in time.

[162] John W. Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 60.

Much has been written about *Harlan County, USA*'s use of local music, particularly music written and/or performed by members of the community portrayed. While the importance of the film to preserving Appalachian folk music cannot be overstated, it is Reece's song that is of the greatest interest to this project, both for its direct interpellation of viewers and for its transgenerational and transgeneric importance. Reece reprises this song as a means of uniting the community at a union meeting. This of prime importance in that it forms a direct connection through time and space with both the previous strike—during which Reece first wrote the song—and the events portrayed in *Salt of the Earth*, in which women were also called upon to perform the emotional labour of uniting the community in a commitment to continuing acts of solidarity and resistance (climaxing with one woman making a moving speech at a community meeting). These parallels call attention to how little had really changed in the intervening decades, on many levels.

Moreover, that the camera in *Harlan County, USA* cuts from a head-and-shoulders close-up of Reece at the microphone, shot from a slightly low angle, to a pan of those in attendance looking up at her and singing along, not only demonstrates that "Which Side Are You On?" holds a great deal of local and historical significance, but it also implicitly positions the song as a labour hymn, with Reece as a congregation leader and therefore a moral authority figure. According to Alessandro Portelli's oral history of Harlan County, "Which Side Are You On?" and other songs of resistance stemming from the 1931 strike are set to "traditional gospel and ballad tunes," with Reece's song set to "Lay the Lilies Low," a Baptist hymn. According to Portelli, this stems from the fact that "Modernization and the mining industry had been dumped upon Harlan wholesale, so quickly that

Figure 13: The younger people in attendance also know all the lyrics. Frame grab from Harlan County, USA

of "justice for all" that America wishes to be seen as upholding. As a result, the film was screened primarily in union halls and continues to be screened within community and activist organizations. By being shown to very specific and relevant audiences that see themselves reflected in some way in the film, and are able to use the film as a blueprint for action—even if only to address racial and gender inequalities within their own groupings—*Salt of the Earth*, too, effects change through screening context (the irony here being that that change is ultimately to strengthen left-leaning groups the film's opponents sought to weaken). Moreover, this strategy serves as an example both of what Costanza-Chock means by horizontality in organising,[177] and what Coffman cites as demonstrating transformation and commitment on the part of the authorial team.[178] That Torrez continues to attend screenings (at least as recently as 2014), and co-founded Tucson's Salt of the Earth Labour College,[179] only strengthens the film's usefulness in this regard.

Figure 14: Anita Torrez outside the former Mine-Mill 890 hall. Image via cpusa.norcal.org

Finally, Kopple's film, while certainly not fitting any stereotype of what propaganda film looks like, nonetheless relies heavily on shock and outrage in a way that, thanks to the inclusion of direct, in-the-moment violence both echoing and surpassing the violence seen in the archival footage that opens the film, exceeds the shock manufactured by the first two films. In this sense,

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[177] Costanza-Chock, 50, 174

[178] Coffman, 113

[179] See Rebecca Wood, "New Mexican miners commemorate 'Salt of the Earth'," *CPUSA of Northern California*, March 26 2014, http://norcal.cpusa.org/?p=1496

image tracks as the film progresses, laying the groundwork for the kind of slippage Foster describes.

Further, while several of Cross's attempted interventions seem like a morally right thing to do, the question inevitably arises as to whether they would have occurred had Cross not also been filming at the time. The sequence in which Cross cares for Frank after the latter was discharged from hospital with literally nowhere else to go is one such example. Cross tends to Frank's wounds, helps him bathe and shave, and makes him dinner. The only people on-screen in this sequence are Cross and Frank, and images of Cross cooking the meal himself suggests that Cross has taken Frank into his own home. The director's commentary track, however, reveals that this actually took place in the home of Richard Boyce, Cross's early collaborator on the film. This detail is not made clear in the film; the only hints that there is even a third person present are in a slight pan left as Cross sits down at the table and a third plate of food being visible in the lower right of the frame. The implication of this scene is that by this point in filming, Cross had become one of the film's subjects, directly altering its course of events, and in need of redemption following the altercation between the Clavins.

Figure 15: Cross serves dinner. Frame grab from The Street.

Cross then takes Frank into the living room, and plays back some earlier footage to Frank. At first glance, this seems like a standard device designed to give a film's subject the opportunity to respond to how they have been portrayed in the film up to that point. However, that Cross prefaces this footage by saying "This is therapy, Frank" indicates that Cross's intention is more than simply paying lip service to notions of empowerment, and actually to

men's space at all times, shooting Roach on video himself would have enabled slipping into a much greater distancing from his subject, thanks to the more flexible technology.[207]

In addition, by giving Roach his own camera, Cross was able to incorporate into the film a degree of intimacy impossible to achieve by any other means—that of Roach, alone with himself. This is exemplified in a sequence roughly midway through the film when Roach, high on a mix of acid and cocaine, begins talking to himself in the mirror. Roach reveals in the commentary track that in this moment, he legitimately thought he was going to die, and recorded this as his last conversation with himself.[208] This scene, as well as an earlier one in which Cross, at Roach's behest, films Roach shooting up in one long take with a tightly framed close-up on the needle itself, is presented in the final cut without any commentary from Cross, or any later admonitions about a need for sobriety in order to progress to a more stable housing situation. This lack of editorializing or intervention from Cross is particularly noteworthy in comparison to *The Street*. The simple act of filming Roach while he shoots up in one long take, without commentary, is an excellent example of Rannou's conceptualization of cinema of indignation (which he describes as based in the idea of testimony and witnessing, voice amplification, and self-representation being radical acts that go beyond simple rhetoric and reportage to remind viewers of their responsibilities as citizens and inspire subsequent actions) including a practice of

Figure 16: Acid and coke, like peanut butter and sardines. Frame grab from S.P.I.T.

[207] Cross, *S.P.I.T.* – Directors' Commentary.

[208] Roach, *S.P.I.T.* – Directors' Commentary.

investigating Montreal's criminalization of homelessness. Consisting largely of interviews with Roach's former street comrades, outreach workers, activists, police officers, and politicians, Roach successfully avoids any ideological patronage by consistently reminding the viewer that this is the world he is from and that the authority figures he is interviewing are those who marginalize him and the film's other subjects.

That Roach actively seeks out and interviews those with whom he had previously been affiliated on the street, at times placing them directly in conversation those responsible for laws specifically targeting them, is not only the ultimate amplification of voice, but works as an example of a filmmaker being present alongside their subjects in an empowering way that does not co-opt any voice, while simultaneously reminding viewers of their responsibilities as citizens. In this sense, *Les Tickets* can be interpreted through two different but complementary lenses: first, as a barely recognizable form of autoethnography in which the filmmaker actively investigates the social and structural factors that have shaped his life and who he has come to be; and second, as a particularly effective example of cinema of indignation (which Rannou explains as based in the idea of testimony and witnessing, voice amplification, and self-representation being radical acts that go beyond simple rhetoric and reportage to remind viewers of their responsibilities as citizens and inspire subsequent actions),[216] whose autoethnographic elements heighten the work's impact with

Figure 17: From left, Benoît Labonté (Ville-Marie borough mayor); Mario (target of a bylaw); Roach. Frame grab from Les Tickets.

[216] Rannou, "Pour un cinéma de l'indignation"

Figure 18: Starbuck shows us how he really feels. Frame grab from Punk le vote

what its agenda is, what cultural sphere it comes from, and the two audiences it most directly addresses.

While all three of Roach's films, as well as *S.P.I.T.*, are set to soundtracks featuring exclusively Montreal punk bands, *Punk le vote*, both by Starbucks's participation and by virtue of the ideological question the film's premise raises—whether anarchists can or should participate in the electoral process, either as candidates or as electors—is most directly connected to the Montreal punk scene. This connection is reinforced by several threads on the general politics discussion board at Quebec Underground, a music- and media-sharing website with sporadically active discussion forums for and by Quebec punks.[218] [219] Timed around the 2008 federal election, these threads openly question whether votes deliberately cancelled as an act of resistance as well as the rate of non-participation should be taken into account when calculating results. They also include debate about whether casting a cancelled vote or running for office, even with the intention of using the experience to open broader public discussions about homelessness and proportional representation while registering previously disenfranchised voters, are so antithetical to the broader principles of the anarchist and punk movements that they effectively

[218] anarchoi, "un autre gouvernement conservateur – 59,2%: plus bas taux de participation dans l'histoire," *Quebec Underground*, Oct. 26 2008, http://www.quebecunderground.net/message.php?t=1272

[219] anarchoi, "les punks qui s'impliquent dans le jeu politique," *Quebec Underground,* Sept. 17 2008, http://www.quebecunderground.net/message.php?t=1241