Soul of the Documentary

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Published by Amsterdam University Press

Hongisto, Ilona.
Soul of the Documentary: Framing, Expression, Ethics.
Amsterdam University Press, 2015.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66433.

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Prologue

Capturing a world of becoming

What distinguishes the documentary from other cinematic modalities is its involvement with a world that continues beyond the film's frame. Documentaries depict individual lives, political events, and social hierarchies that keep acting and transforming in myriad connections even after films come to an end. In documentary cinema, “the end” is merely a threshold to the ever-varying processes in which we and the world around us take shape.

Yet, despite the moving compositions of the real, prevailing understandings of documentary cinema tend to posit the world depicted in documentary films as relatively stable and thus rationally verifiable. Although we readily claim that social discrimination takes place at the pinnacle of corporealities, institutions, and historical movements and that ecological disasters occur in relation to political economies and social behavior, we are less inclined to take these processual relationalities as the starting point of our analyses. Rather, there is a tendency to freeze process in order to make it available for further investigation.

This book, however, posits the real depicted in documentary films as dynamic in its own right and adjusts the idea of documentary cinema accordingly. The approach coincides with what has come to be called new materialism in critical theory. New materialism emphasizes the “lively powers of material formations” that coexist with discursive configurations. Here, matter is not dull substance for vibrant interpretations but “an exhibiting agency” that co-composes what documentary films will turn out to be.

The liveliness of the real and the exhibiting agency of matter come with a particular ontological proposition that informs the argumentation. They position actual forms in relation to a mode of reality implicated in emergence. Actual material formations intertwine with always-differentiating processes. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari name this mode of reality the virtual. It is an alternative consistency to actual determinate forms, yet as real. The actual and the virtual form the two coexisting facets of a vibrant reality. Deleuze assigns a particular role to the passage from the virtual to the actual; actualization signals the creative process of differentiation and the actuals that result from the process – bodies and things – host the pull of difference in their being. They are expressions of their own formation.

In this conception of the real, visible bodies and things are as immediately virtual as they are actual. What this means for documentary cinema
is a heightened awareness of the incorporeal and invisible processes in which bodies and things actualize. Another name for these processes is becoming. A world of becoming implies that beings come with vicissitudes that exceed them.

It is my assertion that more often than we have cared to admit, documentary films engage in a productive dialogue with the world in its becoming. However, the concepts we have to explain what documentaries do tend to downplay this side of the practice. It has been much more prevalent to coin the work of documentary cinema to enhancing perceptions of the material world by producing representations of reality.7 Soul of the Documentary takes a different path and outlines how documentaries capture and express individual bodies and actual forms in their becoming.

The book thus locates the defining momentum of documentary cinema to the real as process. Instead of abiding to the gap that separates matter from signification, Soul of the Documentary invests in their entanglement, and looks into the particular strategies with which documentaries participate in reality as process. Indeed, following Deleuze and Guattari, the present project insists that as a system of expression, documentary cinema is not distinct from reality but on a par with it.8 The new materialist proposition that runs through this book presumes that documentaries not only operate on a plane of signification, but also partake in the material processes that co-compose the real.

Finally, these arguments come with the assertion that documentary cinema captivates viewers not so much because of the claims it makes, but because it constantly reminds us that the real is not limited to what is directly perceivable in images. Framing institutes a threshold to a world of becoming rich in the transformative potential of individual bodies and actual forms. This reorients the ethical stakes of documentary cinema from producing accurate and authentic representations to creatively contributing to the transformability of actual beings in the real.9 This is an ethics that does not entail promises of a better future, but that works to sustain the pull of difference in the face of often atrocious actualities. In this book, framing is the performative practice with which documentary cinema participates in and contributes to the real as process.

Aesthetics of the frame

A man dressed in white moves violently in an outdoor space. The camera captures the movement with a frame of his upper body. In the image, his
arms and head sway agitatedly in slow motion. A group of drummers sit in a row behind him. The camera starts moving toward the man. His eyes turn in his head as a group of women harness his frantic movement with their hands. Are they pinning him down for the camera? The man keeps twisting and turning despite the arms that embrace his body. The camera moves closer, tilting down the man's spastic body and up again to a frame of his face. It looks like the hands holding the man were in fact moving with him, as if they were all part of the same choreography. The camera moves to a close-up. Eyes wide open, the man smiles quaintly.

The sequence is from Maya Deren's documentary footage of Haitian Vodoun rituals that was assembled into the documentary film *Divine Horsemen – The Living Gods of Haiti* (1977) almost twenty years after her sudden death in 1961. Deren, who is better known as an experimental filmmaker, shot the footage used in the film during her visits to Haiti from 1947–1951. The time spent in Haiti proved to be a turning point in her career. Deren writes of her observations and experiences, claiming that documenting the Haitian rituals challenged her artistic practice: “I began as an artist, as one who would manipulate the elements of a reality into a work of art in the image of my creative integrity; I end by recording, as humbly as I can, the logics of a reality which had forced me to recognize its integrity, and to abandon my manipulations.”

Deren’s statement draws attention to the dissonance between artistic practices and documenting the real. In her experimental work, Deren arranges elements of the real according to an idea she holds in her mind. In documenting the Haitian rituals, she faces a reality she cannot compose in the image of her creative integrity. She no longer has absolute control over what she films but must document the strange, vibrant and, to a large extent, inexplicable integrity of a reality that unfolds before the camera.

Although Deren insists upon humble recording, the audiovisual characteristics of her footage do not advocate a stark division between documenting and creative practice. The frame that moves up and down the man’s spastic body, draws nearer the group of people and then withdraws again, suggests a creative approach that is fundamentally different from the formal manipulations that Deren speaks against in the documentary context. Here, creativity does not concern the mise-en-scène or the editing of the footage, but pertains to framing, to the manner in which the documentary approaches and participates in the unfolding ritual.

These remarks are not intended to question Deren’s humility in the act of recording the Haitian rituals, but to foreground the inherent creative dimension in encountering a world of becoming. In this way, although Deren
So if the Documentary
discounts creative manipulations from documentary practice, her Haiti
footage provides this book with both a theoretical and a methodological
starting point. First, *Soul of the Documentary* sets out to conceptualize
documentary cinema as *an aesthetics of the frame*; that is, as an aesthetics
that foregrounds documentary participation in the real. Second, this
conceptualization is formed with a selection of documentary films in which
the entanglement of creative work and documenting the real is particularly
striking. The conceptual work effectuated in the book is conditioned on and
indebted to the audiovisual specificity of the selected documentary films.

The aesthetics of the frame, then, transposes some of the key tenets of
documentary discourse. Namely, it reorients considerations of creativity
and aesthetic choices from John Grierson’s far-reaching legacy of the
documentary as *an aesthetic of the document*. In his ‘First Principles of
the Documentary’, written in the early 1930s, Grierson claims a distinction
between the mechanical recording of “natural materials” and “the creative
treatment of actuality.” For Grierson, however, the distinction is not abso-
lute, but rather a prerequisite for the documentary in general. Mechanically
produced traces of the world – photographic images – secure a bond to the
world of natural materials in the face of creative treatment. In Grierson’s
vision of the documentary, aesthetic work takes place *ex post facto*, after an
unquestionable link to a pre-existing world has been established.

The creative treatment of actuality comes to light in a poignant manner
in *Industrial Britain* (UK 1931), a documentary produced by Grierson and
directed by Robert Flaherty for the Empire Marketing Board. The film
depicts Britain’s industrial developments in the early twentieth century by
focusing on individual workers such as potters and glassblowers. Flaherty’s
shots foreground the craftsmanship of the workers and the atmosphere
of industrial life. The highly composed fragments are accompanied by an
assertive voiceover that positions the abstract camera angles and poetic
lighting into the imperial project of modernization. Thus, the documentary
shapes the social in the image of the British Empire with aesthetic devices.

For Brian Winston, Grierson and Flaherty’s aestheticizing turns the social
dimension of the British industry “pretty and personal” and results in run-
ning away from social meaning.

What is of particular importance here is that Grierson articulates creative
treatment as separate from the world of natural materials. This gap has been
reiterated later in Bill Nichols’s seminal claim that “our access to historical
reality may only be by means of representations.” Although Grierson’s
explicit instrumentalism is not directly comparable to Nichols’s postulation
of documentary film as a modality of representation, the tension between a
pre-existing world and documentary accounts of that world persists.\textsuperscript{17} The aesthetics of the frame seeks to close the gap by emphasizing the exhibiting agency of “natural materials.”

The majority of work on documentary cinema follows Nichols’s lead and elaborates on the discursive stakes of documentary representations in such diverse fields as cultural memory, politics of resistance, and testimonial cultures – to name just a few. What brings these fields together in the documentary context is an investment in the photographic image and its ability to render the world knowable within the documentary. The premise of knowability opens up to the construction of shared memories, anti-normative identities, and positions of witnessing. However, although the documentary is widely considered a “constructing discourse,” its own constructedness also puts the premise of knowability in doubt. Nichols notes that the documentary has never been accepted as a full equal among other discursive practices – such as science and politics – that regard their relationship to the real as direct and immediate.\textsuperscript{18}

The aesthetics of the frame draws inspiration from studies that locate their unique drive in the promise of knowability and its simultaneous impossibility. For example, Elizabeth Cowie notes that the gap in representation introduces the unrepresentable as the real that cannot be fully apprehended, but that is nevertheless desired in recordings of reality.\textsuperscript{19} Although this book does not share Cowie’s Lacanian disposition, the emphasis put on excess – what remains beyond the visible and the audible – is of particular interest for the present purposes. Stella Bruzzi, for her part, introduces the notion of performance to account for the dynamic interaction between documentary content and representation. She argues that by admitting the impossibility of thorough or full representations, documentary cinema could claim a major territory in the dialectical relationship of the reality being filmed and filmmaking. For her, this negotiation gives rise to a performative documentary truth.\textsuperscript{20} The aesthetics of the frame is equally invested in the dynamic interaction between realities captured on camera and the procedures of framing. Ultimately, however, the performative interaction suggested here departs from the representational paradigm.

This study has been equally inspired by projects that elaborate on the contingency of the photographic image in the context of documentary experience. Here, investments in objectivity have been replaced by an interest in the malleability of the image and its import on the experience of temporality in documentary works. In her take on the audiovisual experience of history, Jaimie Baron foregrounds the temporal disparity generated between a then and a now within documentary films. According to Baron,
the recognition of this incongruence is crucial for the production of an “archive effect” in documentary cinema. In Malin Wahlberg’s discussion of documentary time, poetic enactments of the image as trace amount to experiences of archive memory that connect documentary films to the social and political stakes in the construction of cultural memory. The present project moves even further away from the index and conditions the work of documentary cinema on the frame. This moves the stakes of the discussion from historical evidence to engagements in the moving material relationalities of actual bodies and events.

The main difference between representational considerations of documentary film and the aesthetics of the frame comes down to conceptions of reality. The paradigm of representation maintains reality as matter upon which a form of signification is positioned. It is not expressive in itself, but knowable through modalities of representation and signification. The aesthetics of the frame, on the other hand, bypasses the gap in representation by insisting on the emergent consistency of matter and the ways in which the frame taps into reality as occurrent. Again, Deren’s *Divine Horsemen* clarifies the distinction. The distributed version of *Divine Horsemen*, like many prior and later works that deal with non-Western cultures and customs, abides by a disposition that makes sense out of the world that opens in front of the camera. The footage is arranged into an expository mode of representation in which a solemn voiceover explains the ritual and the related deities to the viewer. However, framing enables an alternative conceptualization. It is as if the frame was one of the performers, of the same reality as their movements. Moreover, the frame is not content with documenting the specific movements of the performers’ bodies; it seems equally interested in the perpetual unfolding of gestures and their connections. Put differently, it taps into the corporeal movements not as choreography to be explained, but as a set of gestures that unfurls in relation to dimensions that exceed the performers’ bodies. With the changes in camera angle and distance, framing evokes the complexity of Vodoun and suggests that forces that are not visible as such animate the performers’ bodies in the ritual.

In this sense, framing is at odds with the authoritarian voiceover and the edits that aim at explaining Vodoun in *Divine Horsemen*. While capturing the specific choreography of the performers, framing intensifies the depicted gestures and thus summons the invisible dimensions of Vodoun into the footage. The choices in framing depict performing bodies opening up to processes that exceed them. The actual moving bodies are captured in a manner that expresses their becoming in the ritual. Hence, the Vodoun
ritual is no mere “dance-form” to be given meaning to, but a vibrant assemblage of moving bodies, cultural traditions, chalk lines, drumming, dirt ground, and animals that has its own expressive agency.25

The aesthetics of the frame, then, proposes a novel ontology for the documentary. In distinction to the Griersonian tradition and its legacy in the documentary’s representational paradigm, the aesthetics of the frame calls attention to two levels of expression: the exhibiting agency of the real and documentary renditions of it. What is more, these levels are seen as immanent to one another in the event of filmmaking. The entanglement allows reorienting the work of the documentary from explicating what already is to facilitating the vibrant becoming of the real in its myriad manifestations.

The closest interlocutor to this proposition can be found in Laura U. Marks’s enfolding-unfolding aesthetics for cinema. In a move that makes conventions and clichés newly interesting for cinema scholars, Marks argues that genres and narrative conventions are filters that regulate how images unfold from the world. The filters govern how images unfold into visibility and enfold back into the world after having passed through information grids.26 In work leading to enfolding-unfolding aesthetics, Marks discusses documentary images and their connection to the virtual. Drawing from Deleuze’s image typology and C.S. Peirce’s semiotics, Marks shows how documentary images open up to an unseeable and unsayable real.27

The aesthetics of the frame connects with the idea of the real consisting of an actual and a virtual dimension. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s postulation, Elizabeth Grosz claims that the artistic frame expresses virtual forces as sensations.28 The frame delimits a territory in which actual forms intensify. The demarcating power of the frame, its emphasis on the limit, accords the actual forms in the image with an intensity that exceeds them.29 More precisely, the frame summons the virtual forces hosted in actual forms and expresses them as sensations that break through the bounds of the frame. The sensations that build up in artistic frames are extra-beings to the actual forms delimited by the frames.30 Often, it is difficult to say where the artistic frame ends and sensations begin, but it is crucial that the expressed sensations do not resemble the forms and methods that express them: painterly sensations are not “painterly” per se, nor are the sensations that intensify in documentary forms “documentary.”

Framing in documentary cinema, then, performs a double movement that both captures the real and expresses it. Capturing actual forms in a documentary frame expresses the virtual forces of the real as sensations. These sensations move and have effects beyond the documentary frame.
— and are thus also ethically saturated. The created extra-beings host the
differentiating pull of the virtual and are thus like “gifts” loaded with both
potential and responsibilities. Paraphrasing Guattari, the responsibility of
the creative instance extends to the created sensation and the acceptance
of the gift by the viewer.39

In the aesthetics of the frame, the two levels of expression come together
in the double bond that captures the real and liberates it as sensation.32 The
act of framing regulates the movement from captured forms to intensive
sensations, and functions as an interface to realities that are yet unseeable
and unsayable. Working toward realities to come, operations of the frame
are also experimentations in the real.

Soul; or, what can documentaries do?

The conceptualization of documentary cinema as an experimentation in
the real comes with the consequent questions; what can documentaries
do? What are their capacities to operate in the real? Leaning on a Spinoz-
ist understanding of capacities, I argue that there are no predetermined
ideas or rules as to what documentary films can or cannot do.33 The three
documentary operations mapped in this book — imagination, fabulation,
and affection — are determinations of what specific documentaries do, not
preconceived notions of what they should do. This distances the present
argument from the Griersonian postulation of the documentary as “a
hammer” designed to shape the social sphere.34 Instead, I claim that as
documentary films enact deeds characteristic to them — as they reframe
archival documents, as they observe or as they witness — they articulate
what they can do. What a documentary film does creates the limits of what
it can or cannot do. For example, in Divine Horsemen, the ethnographic
paradigm with which Deren’s footage was arranged ex post facto clings on
to the preconceived idea of making sense out of the ritual. The participatory
framing of the footage, however, articulates a capacity to perform with the
composite layers of the real.

The title of this book points to a further definition of how capacities
are understood here. In common parlance, the soul is often taken to refer
to an immaterial and permanent essence that determines the contours of
individual life. Even if the body vanishes, the soul persists. This argument
can be traced to Plato’s disposition of the soul as a disembodied psyche
that determines the body’s different functions. Soul of the Documentary,
however, takes its cue from Aristotle’s De anima — On the Soul, in which he
argues that the soul is inseparable from the body. Aristotle posits that the soul is the capacity of the body to engage in activities that are characteristic to it. The inseparable soul is liable for the animate behavior of the body. His conceptualization of the soul is akin to the Greek word anemoi, referring to wind or breath as the capacity of life. What is here drawn from Aristotle’s anima is the definition of soul as a capacity immanent to the body. Aristotle’s take on the soul urges us to consider anima in an immanent relation to animation.

Moreover, instead of promising the soul of the documentary, the book sticks to an indeterminate form of soul. This focuses the stakes on capacities that do not define documentary cinema for good, but emerge in relation to specific ways of doing. In his last published essay, Deleuze proposes a similar move. He approaches the immanent relationship of capacities and bodies with the distinction of “a life” and “the life.” Immanence names the coexistence of the two plateaus – impersonal capacities and individual bodies. Following this line of thought, documentary capacities are a life that coexists with the life of documentary practices. Thus, Soul of the Documentary maps capacities that do not determine the life of the documentary, but instead offer a nuanced take on a perpetually emergent practice: the documentary is in the way it is capable of doing.

Imagination, fabulation, and affection are inferred from the immanence of documentary practices (reframing documents, observing, witnessing) and capacities (to imagine, to fabulate, to affect). To speak of capacities as the documentary’s soul, then, is to admit that they cannot be narrowed down to particular practices; they exceed both the limits of practices and the limits of the genre. In this sense, capacities are akin to an indefinite archive of potentials that documentary techniques can tap into. Moreover, much like the documentary frame brings out the fact that the depicted world continues even though the film ends, capacities also persist. The capacity a documentary articulates with its particular techniques is what keeps working even after the film’s time comes to an end. Although the ethnographic scope of Deren’s project is from an earlier moment, the film nevertheless persists because of its powerful articulation of performing with the vibrant textures of the real. The documentary keeps acting because the capacity it articulates travels beyond the film’s “actual body,” its represented duration and historical context.

The emphasis placed on the emergent qualities of documentary cinema extends to the analyses conducted in this book. The aim is to pay serious attention to the audiovisual choices of the selected documentary films and to deduce their capacities of operating in the real from these choices. This is
not to disclaim the declared ambitions of particular historical movements or to return to the auteur as the prevailing source of meaning, but to respect the inherent creative dimension of documentary filmmaking. Hence, the analyses take form immanently to the documentary practices.

The discussed documentary films represent multiple geographical and historical axes. The ensemble is heterogeneous in style, but most of the works have a connection to the major European upheavals of the twentieth century. All but one of the films were made in the early 1990s or later and the assemblage includes both canonical and lesser known documentaries.

The documentary films discussed in *Imagination: Relational documents* deal with the aftermath of World War Two and life in Soviet Russia. Kanerva Cederström’s *Two Uncles* (Finland 1991) and Chris Marker’s *The Last Bolshevik* (France 1993) deploy dispositions of remembering to imagine the lives of those who are no longer present. *Two Uncles* focuses on the filmmaker’s uncle who disappeared in the war, and *The Last Bolshevik* concentrates on the late Soviet filmmaker Alexander Medvedkin. In both cases, imagination takes shape as the documentaries divert emphasis from the indexical qualities of their documents to the incipient relations in them. Remembering, then, does not amount to reconstituting lives long gone, but to imagining the possible lives of the two men with archival documents in documentary cinema.

*Fabulation: Documentary visions* centers around the entanglement of creative storytelling and documentary observation. The documentary classic *Grey Gardens* (Albert & David Maysles, USA 1975) and the less widely distributed *Tanyusha and the 7 Devils* (Pirjo Honkasalo, Finland 1993) observe situations in which the actions of the filmed subjects have been deemed inappropriate or abnormal by their respective communities. The documentaries, however, observe their subjects in ways that overcome these categories and consequently begin fabulating visions of alternative ways of being in this world. As the documentaries fabulate, they create resistance to the observed circumstances.

*Affection: Documenting the potential* discusses documentary films that are explicitly entangled with political events. Jayce Salloum’s *everything and nothing* (Canada 2001) deals with the Lebanese resistance movement, and Chantal Akerman’s *From the East* (Belgium 1993) and Kanerva Cederström’s *Trans-Siberia* (Finland 1999) with the changing power relations in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union. All three films bear witness to the respective political situations in ways that work on the viewer affectively. Instead of foregrounding the discursive dimension of political commitment, the documentaries capture the transformative potential in the events
they discuss and pass it on to the viewer. As a documentary experience conditioned on potential, affection attunes the viewer to political change on the level of becoming.

Imagination, fabulation, and affection offer distinct yet connected answers to the persisting question of what can the documentary do. Imagination posits that the documentary can compose the possible lives of those who are no longer here, fabulation suggests that the documentary can create resistance to actual circumstances and envision new ways of being in the world, and affection proposes that the documentary advances political commitment by attuning the viewer to qualitative change. What brings all three facets together is the worldview embedded in the aesthetics of the frame: the documentary brings more life into the real by framing actuality in its becoming.

Reorientations in epistemology and politics

One of the consequences of the aesthetics of the frame is the repudiation of the indexical image at the heart of the documentary. This has an effect on both documentary epistemology and politics. Firstly, the aesthetics of the frame implies that content is not pre-formed for the documentary to convey but it intensifies, takes form and is expressed on the audiovisual plane of the documentary.39 This challenges the evidentiary work of the documentary conditioned on indexical images charged with a double existence that retains a physical connection to the external world and works as evidence in the discursive chain of the documentary.40 Secondly, whereas the frame grants access to a world of becoming, indexical images foreground a physical connection to the world as a given: “Instead of a world, we are offered access to the world.”41

The aesthetic proposition put forward in this book insists on framing as the drawing of boundaries. Framing encloses archival documents, actual bodies, and political events within a territory in a manner that makes them expressive of qualities that are not visible as such. In the frame, bodies intensify and open up to immeasurable dimensions.12 Framed bodies become expressive of indeterminate qualities – “a life” in Deleuze’s vocabulary – and as they do, they also break through the frame as sensations of excessive intensity. According to Elizabeth Grosz, “[F]raming is the raw condition under which sensations are created, metabolized, released into the world, made to live a life of their own, to infect and transform other sensations.”13
The frame, in other words, changes documentary film's relation to its outside. Whereas the outside has traditionally been positioned as “the world” documentaries seek to access and which nevertheless evades thorough explanations, the frame posits the outside as immanent to documentary cinema. The outside is rich in the world's indeterminate becoming that is expressed as intensive sensations via the frame. The frame captures the indeterminate liveliness of actual bodies and releases their liveliness back into the world as sensations.\(^4^4\)

Consequently, the epistemological work of documentary cinema changes. At this turning point, Michel Foucault’s conception of knowledge and its relation to historical research proves helpful. In Foucault, spaces such as the prison institution and the discourses typical to a given moment in time come with mechanisms that historical research must crack open. Deleuze paraphrases Foucault's project as follows: “It must extract from words and language the statements corresponding to each stratum and its thresholds, but equally extract from things and sight the visibilities and ‘self-evidences’ unique to each stratum.”\(^4^5\) The mechanism of visibilities and statements is immanent to each historical formation and it is the historian's job to express this mechanism. The task of the historian is to express the distribution of what is seeable and sayable at a given time. This bears an effect on the role of the document. In Foucault, the document is not a trace of a past era but a monument that is expressive of its own distribution.\(^4^6\) The Foucauldian document is not used to reconstitute monuments of the past; it is a monument that expresses the mechanism of its own arrangement.\(^4^7\)

As research addresses the discourses and sights of a given time and cracks them open, it expresses the mechanism that controls what can be seen and said at that time. Following Foucault, this directs the epistemological stakes towards expressing the limits of knowledge (what can be seen and said). This notion of knowledge is remarkably cinematic because it is constituted of the visibilities (images) and statements (sounds) of a given moment.\(^4^8\)

Deleuze uses this very disposition to describe the operations of the cinema of the time-image after World War Two.\(^4^9\) In his view, the cinema that followed Auschwitz and Hiroshima is constituted on a crucial disjunction – the unimaginably vast destruction and the fact that it took place. For Deleuze, the time after the war is characterized by the impossibility of understanding and communicating what took place, an impossibility that comes with the fact that the events \textit{did} take place. The cinema of the time-image – because it takes this very disjunction as its point of departure – accords the possibility of \textit{finally seeing} what has been lost in action and reaction.\(^5^0\) What cannot be understood as a chain of events that led to the
holocaust can be cracked open in the incommensurable relations between images and sounds in the cinema of the time-image. From a Foucauldian perspective, the cinema of the time-image bears witness to the mechanism of what is seeable and sayable after the war in a particularly effective way because it emphasizes the limits of seeing and saying in its audiovisuality. From a Foucauldian perspective, the cinema of the time-image bears witness to the mechanism of what is seeable and sayable after the war in a particularly effective way because it emphasizes the limits of seeing and saying in its audiovisuality.51

Put differently, the epistemology of the time-image refutes the communication of what was seen and said and replaces it with an analysis of the limits of the sayable and the seeable.52

Not surprisingly, then, epistemology leads to politics. The epistemological work of considering the limits and conditions of knowledge coincides with the political act of revealing these limits. As cinema becomes expressive of the mechanism that conditions seeing and saying, there is a chance of finally seeing. Deleuze makes an important addition to Foucault’s outline in insisting that finally seeing is not limited to the revelation of the mechanism in place, but it extends to envisioning what is still unseeable and unsayable in the present.53

The constitution of a vision of the yet unseeable and unsayable coincides with Maurizio Lazzarato’s insistence on the creation of “possible worlds” in the political event.54 According to Lazzarato, political events take place via incorporeal inclinations [impersonal capacities] in order to produce metamorphoses in corporeal modes of existence.55 The political event as he sees it is not a solution to a problem but a “shock” to the established ways of having a body. The point is that the political event does not work on the body directly but expresses a possible world that works on incorporeal inclinations. It modulates the modes with which bodies affect each other and are themselves affected. Lazzarato’s political event is first incorporeal, then corporeal.56

The aesthetics of the frame posits framing as a practice where actual forms delineated by the frame become expressive of dimensions that exceed them. Hence, the frame continuously tends to its own limit – not in an effort to contain and explain, but in order to reveal the limits of what is seeable and sayable at a given moment in time. Framing intertwines with Foucault’s disposition of knowledge as it works on the dimensions of actual forms that exceed the seen and the said in the image. This has political implications for documentary cinema because, following Lazzarato, the expression of a world of becoming beyond actual forms is simultaneously a vision of “a possible world.” The epistemological connects with the political in the aim of changing the conditions of the mechanism that controls visibilities and statements at a given moment in time. When a documentary film “finally sees” it envisions a reality to come.