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**Performative Feedback Filmmaking:
Participatory Documentary and
Creative Self-Representation in the Community**

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A website of documentation and reflection on the practical processes and outputs of my doctoral project can be visited at:

<https://www.the-parish.ie/>

Abstract

Between 2019 and 2022 I documented and observed various activities at a rural Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) club using video and sound as part of my PhD in Film and Screen Media through Creative Practice at University College Cork. The result of this long-term fieldwork became an exhibition of video, sound, installation and discussion at Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre in 2022. My method, which I call “Performative Feedback Filmmaking”, developed a unique, creative, socially-engaged form of nonfiction filmmaking by drawing from a combination of specific disciplines and techniques, including participatory art, ethnographic filmmaking, sensory ethnography, and video installation. The development of this methodology was informed by extended research into historical and contemporary overlaps between ethnographic filmmaking and contemporary art practices. The subjects of my creative film project are also participants, whose input was vital to the development of the methodology and the final creative work. After three years of participatory filmmaking with the GAA community, I assembled the results as an exhibition of video, sound and installation at a regional public art gallery. This exhibition became a space for dialogue, discussion and talks for four weeks between April and May of 2022, revealing the possibility for this innovative combination of documentary filmmaking, participatory art and video installation as a toolbox for reflexivity and inter-community mediation.

Introduction

0.1 Collaboration, co-creation and participation

The process of making a nonfiction film about an individual or a group of people inevitably begins with negotiations about what the message of the film will be, whose story the film is going to tell, and in what light will the subjects of the film be represented. From the beginning the process is usually therefore foregrounded by questions about the ethics and politics of representation: who is this film being made for? Why is this film being made? Who will profit or benefit from this film? Can this film cause harm? Who is in control? These questions point to debates around ethics in documentary that are at first characterised by the broader topic of the rights of the individual or group who are in front of the camera as they might come into conflict with a filmmaker's right to artistic expression (Butchart 2006, 427). This conflict becomes especially apparent when the perception that a work of documentary film is somehow a representation of truths or realities can have a direct impact on the rights to privacy and the protection from negative social and legal consequences for the subjects. Of course, there are plenty of examples of documentary filmmakers that could be accused of having actively negated the individual rights of their subjects in favour of spectacle, narrative continuity, professional advancement or even for profit. In his exploration of the issues of ethics of documentary filmmaking, Calvin Pryluck (1976) acknowledged the massive contribution that the early proponents of Direct Cinema, such as Frederick Wiseman and the Maysles brothers made to documentary film practice while also pointing out the ethical complexities inherent in their methods (265). Though legal consent was always sought from those who appeared in their films, Pryluck posits that the process of obtaining this consent was often stacked in the favour of the filmmakers, who effectively had the upper hand in a

game of subtle coercion, emboldened and enforced by the intimidatory factor of being the person who is in control of the situation (256). He famously wrote, “Ultimately, we are all outsiders in the lives of others. We can take our gear and go home; they have to continue their lives where they are” (Pryluck, 1976, 258).

A chapter in Bill Nichols’ (2001) canonical documentary studies text *Introduction to Documentary* is appropriately devoted to the subject of ethics in documentary. In this chapter, he identified the problem as being one that draws a distinction between fiction films and documentary films; where fiction film or what he called “documentaries of wish-fulfilment” use actors to play the part that tells a certain story, in documentaries, or “documentaries of social representation”, “social actors” are used instead (7). Here he may have been alluding to the otherwise accepted position of documentary film as the younger sibling of fiction film, always in its shadow, and always somehow mimicking its methods of crafting stories. In practice, the process of making a documentary film that openly addresses the ethical responsibilities to its subjects or participants must begin with a consideration of the power relationship between the filmmaker and the subject/s. It could be said that the auteur, or traditional single author of a film, is a concept that can be more closely compared with novelists and poets than with contemporary media and film production practices. Reece Auguiste (2020), for instance, a former member of the pioneering Black Audio Film Collective, has argued that the production of *any* film is inherently collaborative – even though there may be a single director or writer steering the production or the narrative, it usually takes several people working closely together to make a film (37). While the process of writing a novel or a poem is usually a solitary creative activity, Auguiste proposed an attitudinal shift in how film productions are considered, rather as “a process of co-creation that is more attuned to a rhizome than a hierarchical structure in which extractive and corrosive power relations are played out” (37). The idea of co-creation in film, though it may

be open to denigration as an unworkable utopian ideal, is a reality of creative production in film and media, and more commonly it has become a methodological starting point for groups of artists and filmmakers who are conscious of the artistic merit that multiple voices in collaboration can bring to a work. For fifteen years between 1983 and 1998, the influential seven-member Black Audio Film Collective produced a series of creative documentaries, exhibitions and experimental films often addressing issues related to Black and Asian diasporic cultures in Britain.¹ Their methodological values of inclusive, participation and dialogic practice can be detected in the underlying message of their films: that cooperation is the first step on the path to societal change. In a recent potential indication of the shifting tide of attitude towards collaborative and co-created artworks, the 2022 international art exhibition Documenta Fifteen in Germany, which every five years serves as a prognosis for the direction of global contemporary art, was programmed by Ruangrupa, a non-profit Indonesian art collective, and the overwhelming majority of the events, exhibitions and installations presented during the one-hundred-day festival were from artist collectives or were created by artists working in collaboration with communities. In one memorable example, the artist and filmmaker Kiri Dalena worked with community members to form a cooperative that collected and distributed food donations during shortages caused by the eighteen-month Covid lockdown in the Philippines. The participants waited in lines for hours to collect sometimes as little as five hundred grams of rice while Dalena's static camera and microphone recorded (with permission) the act of waiting and the conversations that were had (Documenta Fifteen). The result was displayed as a five-channel video installation named *Pila (Lines)* that demonstrated without spectacle the heroic and altruistic actions of individuals when working as a collective, made with and within that very collective.

¹ Prominent examples include *Handsworth Songs* (1986), which explored the racial tensions that led to the 1985 riots in the Handsworth area of Birmingham, and *Who Needs a Heart* (1991), which examined the British Black Power movement of the 1960s and its leader, Michael X.

In their 2022 book, *Collective Wisdom: Co-Creating Media for Equity and Justice*, Katerina Cizek and William Uricchio enlisted the help of several media production and researcher colleagues to attempt to generate a set of definitions for co-creation in media (21). According to their book, central to defining co-creativity in media is the opposing model of the single, autonomous auteur or author of a creative work, which is presented as a myth that has connections to the concepts of the self, ego and individual will (Cizek and Uricchio 2022, 26). Aside from these apparent individual psychological compulsions, is a long tradition of the prevalence of single authorship in film and media industries, stemming from the large studio production model. Cizek and Uricchio draw a definite line between this traditional model of film and media production and the commercialisation of media, and a generalised distinction between the single, monolithic auteur production model made for either ego or profit and the democratic, co-created model, made instead for social development, progression or justice. Co-creation is then in a sense a reaction to a traditional model of filmmaking from which documentary filmmaking also ultimately descends. It is a process dependent from the outset on a collaborative and contingent approach, whose outcome cannot be determined, and therefore resists being labelled as a product or commodity. The outcome of a co-created or participatory project is collectively owned, to be employed for the ultimate benefit of the collaborative group and perhaps for posterity as a tool for education or as an artwork. This is, of course, not a new concept. Chapter One of this dissertation describes how artists and intellectuals including the Dadaists and the Situationists International aligned the production of literature and art with Marxist and modernist ideas to identify political problems with the single, commodifiable artwork. However, scholarship that deals directly with the fundamentals of co-creative and participatory practices only began to emerge in the 1990s, notably with Nicholas Bourriaud's 1997 collection of essays, *Relational Aesthetics*. Cizek and Uricchio's 2022 book has refined this discussion and has created a set of

distinctions between different types of collaborative practice. According to Cizek and Uricchio's study, a co-created project not only offers alternatives to the traditional single-author model, but it is a specific process that involves the initiation of those within it and the involvement of a range of skills and personnel; "a constellation of media production methods, frameworks and feedback systems" (2022, 19). The work of Kiri Dalena on *Pila (Lines)*, and the work of the Black Audio Film Collective cannot be called "co-creative" according to the specific, collaboratively produced definitions of Cizek and Uricchio. While their projects may have had the similar objectives of just, collective production, and similar values that resisted the commodification of their artworks, both Dalena and the Black Audio Film Collective were the original artist innovators of their projects – they facilitated their productions with the informed and willing participation of communities and individuals. These practices, and those of others that are reviewed in this dissertation, including British contemporary artist Jeremy Deller and French anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch, can more closely be described as "participatory", as discussed at length by Claire Bishop in her 2012 book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. For these reasons I have chosen to refer in this dissertation to the methodology of filmmaking that I developed with Clonakilty GAA Club as "participatory", and not "co-created", while acknowledging the fluidity of these terms in a climate of emerging scholarship on this spectrum of practices.

Participation in nonfiction film and video art is an artistic process that aims to directly address John Rouch's (1974) question: "For whom, and why, have you made this film?" while also seeking to undermine the structural imbalance of power inherent in the relationship between filmmaker and subjects (43). It aims to be the foundation of an artistic methodology that benefits all the stakeholders in some way, working as much with the

critical and technical expertise of the filmmaker(s) as with the collective experience and knowledge of the participants or collaborators.

From the beginning of the planning stage of my practice-based doctoral documentary project, my key objective was to use experimental means to design a methodology of participatory nonfiction filmmaking that could be employed as a tool of self-reflexivity and empowerment within a community. My starting point when doing this was to identify existing methods that have progressively engaged with the representation of human subjects in a way that considers the ethical implications of both the production and exhibition of these representations, while also opening a space for possible co-creativity that would bring a range of voices and attitudes to the project. I realised that, in order to allow space for the voices of the community that I was to work with to be heard and become apparent in the result of my filming activities, I would need to employ tactics that would limit the effect that my personal voice and creative style as author, artist or filmmaker would have on the message of the resulting work. My intention was to closely embrace the principle of co-created artwork by facilitating a rhizomatic working practice within a community, one that would be open to an evolution of style and intention rather than a planned approach that I may have subconsciously referred to throughout the process. This intentionality brought me at first to consider certain methods used by anthropologists in ethnographic field research, whose purpose is to generate data for empirical analysis, which ultimately necessitates a deliberately detached, participatory and open-minded approach.

0.2 Uncovering participation in ethnographic filmmaking

Though film and sound recordings began to be used by ethnographers in the field since the 1950s, there has been some dispute among anthropologists regarding the

compatibility of film as a creative medium with anthropology as a scientific discipline on account of its connection to spectacle and entertainment (Taylor 1996, 64). However, a certain cohort of anthropologists embraced the possibilities of film and sound recording as invaluable tools of data collection that have the capability of generating knowledge far beyond what is possible by simple human observation (64). Jean Rouch, whose early “ethnofiction” work I analyse in Chapter One, was a forerunner in this movement. Rouch’s ethnographic filmmaking from the period between his 1955 experimental film *Les Maîtres fous* (*The Mad Masters*) to his 1961 documentary collaboration with philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin *Chronique d’un été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*) provided initial conceptual reference points for my methodological approach. He famously lost faith in the ability of conventional, commercial nonfiction film to faithfully and ethically recount the experiences of the anthropological subject he encountered in 1946 when we handed over film footage he had made on a trip on the Niger River to Les Actualités françaises to be edited (Rouch 1975, 55). Though the resulting film, *Au pays de mages noirs* (1947), was a commercial success in France, Rouch was unhappy with the editorial treatment of his original footage as Les Actualités françaises had added a musical soundtrack and voiceover, essentially exoticizing the subject of the film for a French audience (Rouch and Fulchignoni 1980, 161). This experience prompted him to begin to develop his own unique methods of engaging with the subjects of his filmed ethnographic studies. Over the next years, he realised that the behaviour of the subjects of his films were inevitably altered by his presence and by that of that camera, and instead of attempting to combat the effect that this had on his production he embraced this interaction between entities. His style of anthropological fieldwork became one of sharing and dialogue rather than simple observation and recording. This “ethnodialogue” innovation introduced participation, feedback systems and reflexivity into his process (Feld 2003, 19). In Chapter One, I describe how Rouch employed these

methods with and within the Hauka community in modern-day Ghana to make a film, *Les Maîtres fous* (1955), that transcended the boundaries of observational documentary and ethnographic filmmaking as they were then understood, and instead could more easily be compared to a contemporary work of socially engaged participatory art. Chapter One investigates the effectiveness and the objectives of participatory practices in documentary film as they sometimes overlap with contemporary art practices. It begins by addressing the myth that cinema itself can somehow become “complete” by achieving fully objective communication (Bazin 1967, 21). Rather than striving for this aim, Jean Rouch worked from an experimental principle of bringing multiple voices to a film project through open and contingent participation, increasing and effectively stacking the layers of subjective individual voices in his films. This principle was tested in his 1967 collaboration with Edgar Morin, *Chronique d’un été*, but I argue that it ultimately failed in its objective to be an authentic and independent voice for the participants in the film. *Chronique d’un été* pushed the boundaries of documentary methodological experimentation, essentially handing over much of the means of production of the film to a group of young Parisians and using mid-production screenings to prompt debate amongst the group on the nature of truth in representation, but in the end it was the authorial and editorial hands of Morin and Rouch that dominated the narrative.

0.3 Participatory art

The methods employed by contemporary and conceptual artists working from the early 1990s under the broad umbrella of participatory art provided a further input of artistic and collaborative approaches for the development of my filmmaking and exhibition

methodology. Chapter One also discusses how these practices are often closely aligned with the philosophical objectives of the participatory practices of Jean Rouch in the 1950s and 60s. At that point, I was also interested in the conceptual means by which contemporary artists such as Jeremy Deller and Phil Collins developed their participatory projects, and the ethical, procedural and artistic implications of such work. Participatory art (also known under different names for different variations, including relational aesthetics, socially engaged art, etc.) is an artistic practice that uses a dialogic or participatory engagement with a cultural group or community (Bishop 2012, 2). In common with certain conceptual and Marxist-influenced art practices that prioritised non-commercial, non-commodifiable forms, from Dada to the work of the Situationists International (SI) from the early 1950s, the objectives of participatory artists often are to engage with cultural and community organisations on political issues, with the intention of opening space for discourse on certain political or social issues. Importantly, this form of art aims to work against the imperative of single, monolithic authorship and the commercialisation or commodification of artworks (Bishop 2012, 13). A well-known example of a participatory artwork by British artist Jeremy Deller, *The Battle of Orgreave* is discussed in Chapter One. In 2001, Deller organised a large-scale re-enactment of a battle that took place between striking coal miners and police in Orgreave, Yorkshire in 1984, in collaboration with ex-miners, the local community of Orgreave and battle re-enactment societies. Key to the experience of the documentary that was made about this project by Mike Figgis (2001) (also named *The Battle of Orgreave*) is a moment at the height of the battle re-enactment when Deller is asked by the filmmaker, “How’s it going?” Deller responds that he is “not in charge anymore.” This assertion identifies a moment when the artistic aspirations of Jeremy Deller have been succeeded by the concerns of the participants in the project. The re-enactment of the battle at Orgreave became a cathartic experience for many of the ex-miners who had spent the previous sixteen years trying to come to terms with

the implications of what essentially was the deathblow to the British coal mine strikes of 1984 and 1985.

Successful participatory art projects such as *The Battle of Orgreave* not only involve the participating community in the trajectory of the planning and execution of the project, but they ultimately bring some form of social benefit to the community. I decided to adopt the model of a participatory art project as a key methodological signpost for my community-based participatory filmmaking project. This would mean having lengthy, transparent conversations with my community group in advance of the filming stage in order to determine how they could potentially benefit from my engagement. Also, in the course of filming I would arrange meetings with key individuals and groups from within the organisation to review and discuss the footage already made and to determine the next stages of the filming process. Rather than having plans made for what might be filmed and when, I would take my cues from the community. Finally, when the initial filming process would be complete, I planned to assemble groups and individuals from the community that I would be filming with for screenings, followed by open discussions about the footage, about the community and about the issues or points pertinent to the community raised by the footage they would have just watched. These sessions would also be filmed and along with the original, “observational” footage would form a component of the finished work.

In Chapter One, I argue that the activation of this potential empowerment, or the ability of a film or artistic project to effect social or political change, is dependent on there being a certain level of “productive antagonism” in the relationship between the artist and the participants, or between the ideological forces that govern a situation. Finally, through an analysis of Steven Eastwood’s 2018 documentary film *Island*, which followed the final weeks and hours in the lives of terminally ill patients at a hospice, this chapter argues that ethical practice in documentary filmmaking, especially when dealing with vulnerable

subjects, is ultimately contingent upon advanced levels of subject participation and a certain relinquishing of authorial control.

Jean Rouch's attitude to representative ethnographic filmmaking, combined with methodological innovations made by contemporary artists and documentary filmmakers seemed to me to contain core principles of the philosophical approach that I would need in building an inclusive, non-hierarchical, participatory and reflexive filmmaking methodology within a community. Rouch's work was made primarily for research, but also employed creative innovations that examined the necessarily subjective nature of the documentary filmmaking process and the medium itself. As is evident in his experimental approach in *Les Maîtres fous* and *Chronique d'un été*, Rouch, Deller, Collins, Eastwood and others also embraced the contingency of a filming situation rather than engage in excessive planning and organisation. I decided that reflexivity, participation and open contingency were to form a methodological framework for my rhizomatic filmmaking engagement with a community.

0.4 The aesthetics of reflexive practice

The ethnodialogic films that Jean Rouch made from 1955 onwards were made possible using new and relatively portable 16mm cameras and audio field recorders. These cameras were almost always operated handheld, a habit which Rouch acquired after losing his tripod during the production of an early ethnographic film (Feld 2003, 148). This handheld filming style created a certain aesthetic that became familiar to audiences of Direct Cinema and *cinéma vérité* productions from the 1960s onwards and made the bodily movements of the filmmaker apparent to the audience through on-screen camera movements. These "corporeal images", as coined by filmmaker and anthropologist David MacDougall (2005), allow the inherent reflexive nature of the photographic image to be publicly displayed

to the audience (3). Jean Rouch didn't shy away from this reflexivity; rather, he embraced it as an aesthetic element of his work. As a self-declared intellectual descendant of Jean Rouch, filmmaker and anthropologist Lucien Castaing-Taylor of the Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL) at Harvard University is a contemporary proponent of the corporeal image (MacDonald 2015, 403). His collaborative films and video installations with Véréna Paravel, another member of the SEL, including *Leviathan* (2012), *Caniba* (2017) and *Somniliquies* (2017), as discussed in Chapter Two, all show a willingness to visually demonstrate the importance of the corporeal experience as a mode of human engagement with the world, deliberately prioritising the sensorial as experienced by the body over the intellectually discursive or textual (Henley 2020, 424). In these films, the workings of the digital cameras and sound recording equipment, including lens focusing, digital artefacting, lens flaring and microphone popping are often opaquely incorporated into the work, adding further layers of authorial and technological reflexivity. These images often appear imperfect and degraded and, by doing so, distance themselves deliberately from the high-end, high-definition consumer aesthetic of large television and film production companies. In her essay on the "poor image", Hito Steyrel (2009) identified a "class system of images" where high-end, high-resolution "rich" images exist in opposition to low-end, low-resolution, compressed and degraded "poor" images. As visual literacy develops alongside Internet technology, this class system has, according to Steyrel, become intuitively recognisable to all.

Another practice of certain ethnographic and documentary filmmakers that holds the promise to further eliminate excessive authorship from the filmmaking process was the "long take", or the process of allowing the camera to record for as long as possible to absorb as much experiential data as possible and to limit the prescriptive effects of editing. Along with others working with forms of ethnographic film and artists' film and video – such as Ben Russell, Harun Farocki, Stan Brakhage and Robert Gardner – Lucien Castaing-Taylor and

Véréna Paravel also advocate for the long take as part of their reflexive, observational aesthetic (Taylor 1996, 64). In a discussion about montage, André Bazin (1967) described the directorial method of Eric von Stroheim in maintaining a long shot in terms that allowed the audience to truly consider what the images in front of them were showing: “Take a close look at the world, keep on doing so, and in the end it will lay bare for you all its cruelty and its ugliness” (27). For Bazin, the technique of montage in film had the unique ability to create meaning exclusively from the juxtaposition of images, and the act of staying on one singular image was a radically different way of creating meaning (28). In his 1991 essay “When Less is Less: The Long Take in Documentary Film”, David MacDougall argued that the short take in film, either as part of a montage sequence or as an element of the narrative composition of the film, is ultimately leading, almost dictatorial – it doesn’t allow the audience to spend time considering the image and so removes agency of meaning creation from the viewing process (37). For MacDougall, here lies the ultimate separation between the objectives of ethnographic nonfiction film and commercial documentary: the “dead spot” in a long shot, where nothing appears to be happening, is usually cut away or discarded by commercial film producers, sacrificing excess or unintended meaning that might be contained in subtle body movements, glances or by simple, unassuming objects sitting in the frame that might have otherwise been overlooked (MacDougall 1999, 41).

The framework of the filmmaking method that I was to employ in the field was developed from these specific experimental principles of ethnographic filming that I discovered in the work of Jean Rouch, David MacDougall, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, amongst others. First of all, my approach was to be open to contingency: I would make plans and take the advice of my community collaborators for when and where I should be filming, and without making any further plans I would simply turn up and film what was happening using an observational approach. Second, my camera would be handheld

for most of the time to allow my community collaborators to always know when I was filming, while also inserting a sensibility of my own corporeal presence and the technological presence of the camera into the video footage. This would inevitably bring camera-shaking and movements into the images, which I had decided to embrace as an element of the “corporeal” and “poor” aesthetic of the film work that I would be building. The camera I chose to film with at this stage of the production was a small, digital camcorder-style Canon XA11. My reasons for choosing this camera to work with were both practical and aesthetic. Practically, this style of camera is self-contained, weather-proof, light and small. For recording sound, I bought a shotgun microphone enclosed in a large “blimp” windshield to deal with difficult weather conditions that I might find myself in. Aesthetically, the images made by this camera and me operating it would declare their place in the “class system of images” as “poor” – not cinematic, non-commercial, but as functional, vernacular and observational (Steyrel 2009). The small, portable and simple camera that I chose to use would also allow me to use long shots as a defining principle of my filmmaking style; allowing the activity that would happen in front of the camera to take precedence over what I may have considered to be “useful” or “necessary” to my project. Finally, and most importantly, my filmmaking method demanded that my process be inclusive, participatory and collaborative.

0.5 Considering the *where* and the *how* of presentation

From the early stages of the development of a participatory, corporeal filmmaking methodology I was aware of the central importance that the context for screening or exhibition has on the creation of meaning in a film or video work. Chapter Two of my dissertation examines the potential of the art installation as a space for experiential and sensory mediation of nonfiction film. It argues that the contemporary art installation space

holds very different potentials for the mediation of documentary and nonfiction film that are experiential as opposed to spectatorial. The physical space, the institution, the geographic location and the context for exhibition all provide context for the work that affect its reading by an audience, and in the case of a video installation of nonfiction film, these elements can have the effect of disruption presumptions of truth and objectivity in favour of a sensorial experience of the work. This chapter uses a comparison between *Commensal*, a film and video installation by Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel at documenta 14 in 2017, and *Caniba*, the feature-length, theatrically and domestically released version from the same year. One determination of this comparison was that, when released as a “conventional” film of ninety-minutes, with an introductory paragraph, a biblical quote, end credits and a musical closing theme, *Caniba* created a sense of narrative expectation in its audiences that was not present in the installation *Commensal*. This video and film installation was fragmented in to two separate components, one depicting the subject of both works: convicted murderer and cannibal Issei Sagawa and his brother in contemporary Tokyo, the other showing old home footage of the brothers as children. Both elements were looping continuously and were installed in the contextually eerie surrounds of a former tofu-processing facility. Additional to this analysis of *Commensal* as an installation is an examination of the effect that this very site has on the audience experience – taking into consideration the meanings created by the context of building itself as well as the that of documenta 14, the large-scale exhibition of contemporary art where it was presented in 2017.

Another significant difference between the installation space and the cinema space is the physical agency that the audience has. The cinema space carries a certain set of social conventions with it: the audience enters at a prescribed time, they sit together for the duration of the film and then they leave. Many installation spaces, especially in public exhibitions or at public institutions, allow the audience to come and go as they please. They may arrive and

choose the artwork for a short amount of time or for multiple screenings, drifting between different elements of the exhibition. Or they may choose to leave and not to engage with the installation at all. Early in the process of developing my methodology of participatory nonfiction filmmaking within a community I asked myself who the audience for the finished work should be, and what the conditions of exhibition would be. It was important to make sure that the community who I was working with would have easy and regular access to the work that was not controlled by any excessive external factors, while also making it possible for the public at large to access the work. I decided for these reasons that a regional art gallery installation would be the ideal way to present the results of my filmmaking activity within the community. This would also make it possible to continue the process of obtaining feedback from the community I was to work with and from a broader public as part of a programme of talks, events and discussions that could take place during the exhibition.

0.6 The beginnings of practice

In order to develop a methodology to engage with a community organisation on an inclusive, reflexive and participatory nonfiction filmmaking project I began by identifying existing methods that have progressively engaged with the representation of human subjects in a way that considers the ethical implications of the production and exhibition of these representations. These methods – participatory and experimental ethnographic filmmaking, participatory art practices and public video installation – when combined have the potential to effectively address some of the key procedural and ethical dilemmas that arise when making nonfiction film within a community. My next step was to identify a community or organisation that I could work with to test my methodology. My subsequent choice of a Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) community as a case study for this practice-led research

was in part due to the ubiquity and central importance that this community has in Irish rural life, but also due to a myriad of aesthetic qualities specific to that community that have the potential to make it a compelling subject for visual representation.

Chapter Three describes how I developed a relationship with the officers, volunteers and members of Clonakilty GAA community, and how I identified an aesthetic that could be effectively employed to represent the community to a public audience as well as within the community itself. Using an analysis of David MacDougall's visual methodology in making the *Doon School Quintet* (2004) ethnographic film project, I describe how the identification of what I call a "local aesthetic" early in the filmmaking process provided a focus for the visual aspect of my work. This chapter reflects on the development and evolution of my relationship with the GAA community, on how my filmmaking activities were planned and aided within the club, and on how through close consultation and collaboration with the community my objectives and goals were aligned with theirs. From the beginning, and by virtue of my insistence on ethical practice above all else, the evolution of my filmmaking practice on this project was determined by feedback and discussion with members of Clonakilty GAA Club. Chapter Three describes that evolution, and importantly it also describes the inevitable performativity of national, local and cultural identities that dominated my interactions with them.

The final outcome of my Performative Feedback Filmmaking project in collaboration with Clonakilty GAA Club became an exhibition of video installation at a nearby public arts institution: Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre in early 2022. The exhibition was designed to be a dialogic space as well as an exhibition space, where members of the public and members of various GAA communities could come to arranged events as well as informally to discuss issues related to the influence and position of the GAA community within Irish society.

Finally, Chapter Three reflects on the development of this exhibition and dialogic space, and on the results of discussions and feedback that took place.

Chapter One: Seeing Documentary as Participatory Art

1.1 Introduction

Anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch experimented with active subject participation in the production of his films. *Les Maîtres fous* (*The Mad Masters*, 1955), depicted a group of Hauka people in Niger engaging in spirit possession rituals, and acknowledged that the participants in the film were performing for the camera. Rouch's "ethnofictions" understood that, due to the many variables at play, film could never be an objective representation of reality. Instead, he embraced the most prominent of these variables, the subjects, as active participants in his productions. If it is impossible to faithfully represent a group of people from an authorial point of view, perhaps the most ethically responsible thing to do is to allow them agency in the production of their own image. These experiments were not without flaws, and more elaborate later experiments, such as *Chronique d'un été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*, 1961), made in collaboration with philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin, showed that representation of participants can be heavily guided by unconscious coercion and editing techniques. A separate art form that has taken up the challenge of ethical representation is participatory art. Also known as "dialogic art", it emphasises productive collaboration with groups of participants as a core principle. Central to the ideal of participatory art is the element of the unpredictable – removing the potential for absolute control away from the artist and opening up a space for dialogue. This art form challenges the notion of power in representation, and the notion of art itself as privileged or a commodity. This chapter will examine instances where documentary film and participatory art methods have overlapped and will propose that the two art forms have various common objectives. It will look at the work of Turner-Prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller, from *The*

Battle of Orgreave, his 2001 recreation of a miner's strike battle with police, which was documented by filmmaker Mike Figgis, to his 2019 film *Everybody in the Place*, a filmed lecture about UK rave culture in the 1990s, mediated through the participation of a group of secondary school students. It will also look at films that more closely identify as documentary, but with strong elements of participant influence, such *Island* (2017) by Steven Eastwood, about residents in a hospice who consented to have the ends of their lives documented on film. Finally, it will ask if an identification of this intersection of disciplines can create a new space for the consideration of all documentary films involving human subjects as works of participatory art.

1.2 Failures of participation

The tradition of human representation in nonfiction filmmaking arguably begins with Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922). At this early stage in the history of documentary filmmaking, Flaherty's method borrowed from ethnographic methods of immersion and dialogue with the subject of study. In the production of *Nanook*, he screened rushes of the film to his Inuit collaborators and consulted with them on narrative possibilities (Rouch 1974, 32). It could be argued that the aim of Flaherty's "participatory camera" method was not simply an attempt at objective representation, but also at creating a sense of authenticity in his production that was augmented by narrative fabrication and later by authorial editing. It is well known that scenes from *Nanook of the North*, though accepted as a pioneering ethnographic film, were largely "staged" by Flaherty, partly due to the technical constraints of early filming equipment (Rouch 1974, 32). This example, so early in the history of documentary, perfectly illustrates the complexity of the notion of objective

representation in nonfiction film, even where the subjects of the film are invited to participate.

André Bazin (1967) explained that early innovators of cinema and photography imagined that their inventions were destined to become a true and complete representation of reality (18). These innovators, such as Muybridge, Niepce and the Lumière brothers, were industrialists who foresaw potential practical uses for devices that could somehow capture or reflect reality, and not artists or poets, who perhaps might have more easily understood that all media, including those made by these new and exciting technologies, are creations that are to be interpreted by audiences and, therefore, always include a degree of subjectivity. As a corrective, Bazin asserts that film is a language, not a simple reflection of experience, and is articulated through uses of montage, synchronised sound, visual messages, juxtaposition, allegory (40). Bazin's (1967) "myth of total cinema" may never be realised – cinema itself may never be "invented" (21). In 1961, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's experimental documentary *Chronique d'un été* attempted to create an "authentic" representation of everyday life in Paris, while also finding a way to discuss the sensitive issues of the Algerian War and the legacy of the Holocaust (DiLorio 2007, 26). A group of young Parisians were invited to participate in the production of *Chronique*. Using portable cameras and sound equipment, these participants went out into the streets of Paris to craft a film of their own, guided by a simple premise – they would ask members of the public, "*Êtes-vous heureux/se?*" ("Are you happy?") – and by the experience of Rouch and Morin. In an extension of Flaherty's "participatory camera" method, the group then openly debated their feelings and opinions of their own representations at screening sessions, which were also filmed. *Chronique d'un été*'s innovative use of portable equipment, every-day settings, observational method and working-class participants introduced a new style of cinema that became known as *cinéma vérité*, and it is without doubt that it has had a seminal role in the

development of nonfiction filmmaking ever since, but the effectiveness of its apparently transparent participatory approach in creating an “authentic” representation of the lives of its participants is debatable, as many scholars have noted (Morin 1962, 229). Sam Di Iorio (2007), for instance, argues that *Chronique d'un été* is essentially a document of the failure of Bazin's myth of total cinema, and of the potential of film as a method of direct communication (42). Di Iorio explains that, while the conceptual framework of *Chronique d'un été* made it possible for the participants in the film to influence the production, and perhaps even the editing, in practice it worked very differently. The participants were routinely provoked into reacting in certain ways, especially by Rouch, and the film was heavily edited to conceal these interventions. In some cases, scenes that were shot months apart were placed in sequence, giving the appearance of a linear progression of time, and a round-table discussion of the Algerian War was heavily edited so as to avoid controversy (26). This failure of *Chronique* was perhaps the point of the film, as it had the potential to finally unburden cinema, and in particular nonfiction cinema, of the promise of objective representation, and this perhaps is a greater challenge than that of creating the perfect objective film. A closer look at certain films in the earlier career of Jean Rouch may suggest that he was already disillusioned by this false promise of film years before *Chronique d'un été*. Having sold the footage of the first silent film made in Niger, *Au pays des mages noirs* (1947), the buyers, Les Actualités françaises, added their own narration and music (Rouch 1975, 55). Feeling that this treatment exoticized the subject of his film, he vowed to have creative control over his own productions in the future, and especially the soundtrack (55). But perhaps the film that can tell us most about Rouch's vision of a subjective, participatory and dialogic film representation of an unexoticized other is, as I will argue, *Les maîtres fous* (1955).

1.3 Ethnography as dialogue

By the mid 1950s, Jean Rouch had gained a reputation as an anthropological filmmaker with a special interest in documenting and studying possession rituals in certain communities in Western Africa. On the surface, *Les maîtres fous* is a straight ethnographic study of such a ritual, contextualised for a European audience with a voiceover by Rouch himself. The film depicts members of the Hauka cult of the Songhay people of Western Africa in the important colonial post of Accra, the capital of the Gold Coast in modern-day Ghana. The political and territorial holdings of the Songhay people were devastated by the coming of first English colonisation from 1874 and, subsequently, by the French from 1898. The Hauka cult of the Songhay people emerged as a coherent political and spiritual religious movement in western Niger in the following years, and versions of it spread quickly through Western Africa. Central to the Hauka's spiritual practice were possession ceremonies like the one Jean Rouch filmed in 1954 for *Les maîtres fous*. These ceremonies used the deliberate appropriation of the paraphernalia and regalia of the regionally dominant colonial systems as cultural and political resistance.

After documenting aspects of their daily lives in the city, the film follows members of the Hauka to a rural compound where they meet annually to perform a possession ceremony, which is a spectacular display of trance ritual that includes foaming at the mouth, glossolalia and animal sacrifice. This ritual is encased in an elaborate theatrical narrative in which the bodies of the Hauka are possessed by members of the Gold Coast's colonial administration: "the governor general", "the doctor's wife", "the engineer", etc. A day after the ritual, the cult members return to their ordinary working lives in Accra. Rouch's voiceover interprets the ritual for the viewer; he explains the proceedings in detail, decoding all of their bizarre actions that, out of context, would otherwise seem chaotic. At the end, he muses on the therapeutic

effect that this ritual may have for its members, perhaps helping them to absorb the hostile effects of the menial and demanding work they must do to survive in the capital city. The opening credits of the film reveal that the Hauka priests themselves had approached Rouch to initiate the project: “This film was shot at the request of the priests, Mountyeba and Moukayla, proud of their art.”

Diane Scheinman (2014) pointed out that at the time of making *Les maîtres fous* Rouch had been aware of the issue of the need for subject participation in anthropological ethnographic studies (183). Mountyeba and Moukayla, the Hauka priests, had certain ulterior motives for their invitation, intending to utilise the potential of cinema for political purposes – to reach as many people as possible and mobilise a new surge of Hauka membership. They were invited to view rushes of the film, and one of the priests helped Rouch at the editing stage by interpreting some of the actions of the group and “translating” the glossolalia. The Hauka were considered a politically dangerous organisation by the colonial administration in the Gold Coast, and Rouch must have understood this, and that his film may provoke further political tensions. At the possession ceremony filmed for *Les maîtres fous*, the group sacrificed and ate the flesh of a dog, which was a rare occurrence during Hauka ceremonies, but one that was deliberately performed in front of Rouch’s camera in order to provoke the disgust of the British (Rouch et al. 1977, 189). Scheinman (2014) suggested that Rouch seized upon this opportunity to make a film in dialogue with the Hauka that would utilise an existing political tension, creating a film that ultimately became a space for the Hauka to voice their critique of the colonial system (187). By dressing up, carrying out sacrifices and being possessed by the spirits of “the governor general”, “the doctor’s wife” and “the engineer”, the *Hauka* expressed their resistance as metaphors of the cultural hegemony that had been imposed upon them (187). *Les maîtres fous*, therefore, can be seen not simply as a work of participation, but one that deliberately set out to establish a provocative dialogue between

filmmaker and subjects, but also a dialogue between the colonial administration and some of those who were subject to it. Here, Scheinman evoked Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "dialogism". According to Bakhtin, "[a] word, discourse, language or culture undergoes 'dialogisation' when it becomes relativised, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things" (Scheinman 2014, 427). Scheinman argued that *Les maîtres fous* is a work of dialogic filmmaking precisely because it is aware of the different readings that will be made of it by audiences in various different contexts, because the meanings of the sound and images are essentially subjective. Rouch's method when planning and producing *Les maîtres fous* was to open up a space for this dialogue to happen, rather than simply building and delivering a message, in what Bakhtin would call a "monologic authority" over the text. It would seem that Rouch deliberately handed over some, or arguably most of his authorial power to the Hauka in *Les maîtres fous*, but in a manner that was simply procedural, not performative as it was in *Chronique d'un été*.

In an essay, Jean Rouch (1974) explained that anthropological rigour and a desire to honestly represent the group of people he was filming in the first place dictated how he made his films (29). He insisted, for example, that there be a minimal crew on an ethnographic film shoot, that the sound operator must be fluent in the language of the people being filmed, that the camera must be operated by the ethnographer as an extension of their own body and that no-one else should be present. He was ever aware of the effect that the ethnographer's presence had on a situation: "Every time a film is made there is cultural disruption", and emphasised the importance of integration and consultation with the group involved (37). The first and most important audience for his films were the subjects themselves, and their reactions and feedback became valuable new knowledge in the study:

Finally, then, the observer has left the ivory tower; his camera, tape recorder, and projector have driven him, by a strange road of initiation, to the heart of knowledge itself. And for the first time, the work is judged not by a thesis committee but by the very people the anthropologist went out to observe. This extraordinary technique of “feedback” (which I would translate as “audiovisual reciprocity”) has certainly not yet revealed all of its possibilities. But already, thanks to it, the anthropologist has ceased to be a sort of entomologist observing others as if they were insects (thus putting them down) and has become a *stimulator of mutual awareness* (hence dignity). (44; emphasis added)

By understanding how film, at least in its form as mode of entertainment or commercial endeavour, has the power to misrepresent and to unfairly exoticize, and by working to devise a method of ethnographic filmmaking that strove instead for “mutual awareness”, Jean Rouch seemingly invented a form of collaborative project-making that is still in use today. His motives were based on scientific rigour and sensitivity to cultural disruption, and did not necessarily stem from political or ideological concerns, but avant-garde artists whose motivations were more overtly political in the 1950s began using very similar methods of public engagement and participation.

1.4 “I’m not in charge anymore really”

A contemporary and fellow Parisian of Jean Rouch was Guy Debord, who around the time that *Les maîtres fous* was being made was developing ideas that would become central to his leadership of the group of Marxist avant-garde artists, writers and intellectuals known as the Situationist International. There is little to suggest that Rouch and Debord ever interacted

or that one was influenced by the other in any way, but some of the ideas of the Situationists when it comes to the making and experience of art could be seen as closely related to values inherent in Rouch's participatory methods. Rouch was firm in his belief that his films should not be considered as commercial products (1974, 36). Again, there is little to suggest that this belief stemmed from an anti-capitalist mindset; rather, he believed that scientific integrity and honesty towards his subjects would be compromised by the tropes of commercial cinema (music, credits, prescribed duration, etc). Both Rouch and Debord were aware of the tendency of commodification to sully or contaminate scholarly and artistic work; in essence, they were in danger of becoming spectacle and losing their potency. As we have seen, collaboration and participation were core values of Jean Rouch in his work as an ethnographic filmmaker. The Situationists International, as an ideological group of avant-garde intellectuals, opposed traditional values associated with the production of artistic objects, such as single, monolithic authorship and the production of commodifiable objects (Bishop 2012, 82). Art was inherently political and social for the Situationists, and if its true potential were to be harnessed it would have to be radically separated from commerce and systems of capitalist governance. Instead, art should be made collaboratively, through cooperation, and should take forms that could not be bought or sold, like a type of public game (Bishop 2012, 82). A "Situation", as they called it, was a shared, performative art form that took place in a moment, had no single author and delivered a deafening message. Claire Bishop (2012) identified this as an important starting point for what later became known as "participatory art", or also "dialogic art" (83). These terms cover a spectrum of practices, usually within the context of contemporary art practices beginnings in the 1990s. Bishop explained that the position of the artist in a work of participatory art is a departure from a long tradition:

the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a “viewer” or “beholder”, is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*. (2)

These words describe practices that began to be used in earnest by contemporary artists in the 1990s, and to some extent continue in an evolved state today, but they could just as easily be used to describe the methods that Jean Rouch developed to make ethnographic films in Western Africa in the 1950s and 60s, though he would probably not have described his work as “art” or himself as an “artist”, based on the common uses of those words at the time.

The work of British artist Jeremy Deller, meanwhile, has been at the fore of a surge of interest in participatory art practices since the mid-1990s. His work often addresses moments in (mainly British) history where subcultural or organised workers’ groups articulated themselves in front of political powers, and to achieve his aims he compiles diverse groups of people in participatory projects. A key element of Deller’s work is the unexpected. He may be considered a facilitator of certain projects, rather than an artist, for how he handles over control of certain aspects of his work to his participant groups. For one of his best-known works, *The Battle of Orgreave*, he organised a large-scale re-enactment of a battle that took place between striking coalminers and police near Sheffield in 1984. 8,000 police in riot gear, and many mounted, clashed with 5,000 miners at Orgreave in March 1984 in what is now understood as a direct order by Margaret Thatcher, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, to weaken the power of the post-industrial trade union movement in the UK. Deller’s project brought former miners, many of whom were present at the original battle, together with local residents and a number of historical re-enactment societies to restage the

event at its original site in Orgreave. Over a thousand people were involved in the project including researchers, direct participants and organisers, and a film of the event was made by Mike Figgis. At one point in Figgis' film, Jeremy Deller is filmed walking across a field, heading toward the site of action. The filmmaker asks him: "How's it going?" Deller answers, "It's going... interesting. This is the first time we've actually got these two groups together, and it's difficult to say what's going to happen. Well, look at it, I'm not in charge anymore really. As you would be in a real situation like this, you'd be a bit excited and a bit worried as well." The emotional investment of the ex-miners involved in the *Battle of Orgreave* is obvious in interviews in Mike Figgis' film; after all, it is *their* narrative that Deller was facilitating with this project. Press coverage after the original battle in 1984 blamed the clash on unruly miners, rather than on the political decision to send mounted police to confront the strikers, and Deller's project allowed the miners and locals an opportunity to publicly air their version of the battle.

Les maîtres fous and *The Battle of Orgreave* present various similarities. First, and most obvious, is the element of participation that is central to both projects. Second is a primary consideration for the motives of the participants – both groups were invested in the project because they saw it as an opportunity to further their own causes. Third is the element of the unpredictable; after initial planning and consultation, both Rouch and Deller found themselves at a stage where they were simply present in front of the events as they unfolded, unable to control them. This element of contingency is a key to diluting the impact of authorial control in both *The Battle of Orgreave* and *Les maîtres fous*, where the interplay between the artist/filmmaker and their participants becomes another deciding factor in the outcome of the work. Further comparisons could easily be drawn, but one important element common to both projects, and perhaps the active agent in a successful participatory or dialogic

project, is a form of *antagonism* that separates this type of practice from others that also emphasise inclusion, collaboration and social provocation.

In 1997, Nicholas Bourriaud's collection of essays in *Relational Aesthetics* identified a form of participatory, often community-based art that is entirely beholden to the decisions of its participants and includes an emphasis on the audience as active community members (73). Relational aesthetics, and the work of artists such as Gillian Wearing, Liam Gillick and Douglas Gordon who practiced its methods, became very influential in contemporary art circles and art education into the mid-2000s. In a critique of relational aesthetics methods as viable tools for interrogating the myriad complex relationships that constitute society, Claire Bishop (2004) suggested that an element of antagonism is vital to a participatory art project in order to extract questions and insecurities that are meaningful as artworks (69). Instead of using a collaboration between artist, audience and/or participants that amount to a "temporary utopian community", or a harmonious reconciliation between systems, Bishop explained that it is important that *tension* be sustained (54). Uncontrolled tension, one would imagine, could be terrifying to an artist working with groups of people (here, we might recall Jeremy Deller's trepidation at the moment when the entire project of his *The Battle of Orgreave* seemed to be falling out of his hands). Bishop's concept of relation antagonism relies on the political theories of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), who identified antagonism as a vital element of a healthy functioning democracy (108). Laclau and Mouffe drew on Jacques Lacan and Immanuel Kant to explain that antagonism forms a part of an overall dialectic system that sustains democracy, but must be distinguished from both *real opposition* and *logical contradiction* (111). Individual identities within antagonised relationships in this dialectic are subjective and so are constantly shifting. Real opposition concerns firm identities and so the relationship between them is non-productive (or, perhaps, even destructive), and contradiction between parties does not constitute an antagonism because single identities are capable of

holding mutually contradictory beliefs (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 111). An antagonism within the relationship between individuals or ideologically focused groups of people is therefore one that destabilises ideological positions: the presence of the other provokes precarity of identity in both. Bishop took aim at various practices of relational aesthetics, pointing out that, without an element of injected antagonism, the political potential of a work of participatory art may fall flat, but a case may also be made that efforts to over-politicize the relationship between the artist, the participants and the audience may miss opportunities that careful placements of antagonism might offer. Here, we can return to *Les maîtres fous* to discover the antagonisms that activated this film, and to begin to find them embedded in the film's conceptual underpinning. Jean Rouch wrote about the "provocative" influence of the camera (and its operator) on a filmed situation (Fulchignoni, Rouch 1980, 155). His training in ethnographic practices had taught him that filmed situations are always constructed, and that meanings are always changing depending on context, and so instead of aiming for a noninterventionist "fly-on-the-wall" approach, he encouraged and embraced the stimulating and catalysing effect of the presence of the camera. The result of this in *Les maîtres fous* was that the Hauka's arranged ceremony was much more than just that; it was also a self-conscious demonstration of the power of taboo, mockery and ultimately of the insubordination of the Hauka's spirits to the colonial government. When first shown at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, *Les maîtres fous* was received with horror and outrage from its European audience, who considered it insulting to the colonial system of the time, while African audiences were insulted that European audiences were being presented with images of Africans as crazed savages (Cooper 2002, 483). This negative first impression on either side of the colonial divide may have engaged in mockery of systems of power and pointed to an ethically problematic representation of an exoticized other, but, as Sarah Cooper (2002) argued, this capacity for dualistic reading is precisely what makes the film so politically volatile (494). By "performing

a separated relation between colonizer and colonized”, *Les maîtres fous* antagonised the tensile relationship between both (488). In common with Jeremy Deller’s *The Battle of Orgreave*, Rouch was not simply an impartial observer in this situation; on the contrary, he was as active facilitator of an antagonism that ultimately determined the meaningful political questions that *Les Maîtres fous* asked.

1.5 *Ausländer raus!*

An example of a work of participatory art that, rather than placate or antagonise the project’s relational structure, chose the path of direct opposition and provocation is *Please Love Austria*, a 2001 project by German theatre director, performance artist and filmmaker Christoph Schlingensief. In response to the election of a number of members of the ultra-right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) to Parliament, Schlingensief set up a “concentration camp” made from shipping containers in the centre of Vienna for one week, and housed a number of asylum seekers inside it. Video of the inside of the camp was streamed live on the Internet and visitors to the website could vote to have a pair of asylum seekers deported each day in the style of a reality television programme such as *Big Brother*. A large banner on top of the containers read: “*Ausländer raus!*” (“*Foreigners out!*”). If the aim of *Please Love Austria* was to provoke a reveal of the dominant political attitude towards immigrants in Europe, and to expose latent xenophobia in ordinary people, then it succeeded. As a work of provocative performance, or as a social experiment where the objective was to prove that there are inequalities in Austrian society, also it works. Passers-by rant and argue, the camp is raided by a band of “hippie” liberators and attacked by firebombs. The experiment spiralled almost to the point of going dangerously out of control. However, the “asylum seekers” themselves at the centre of the project have no voice in the film beyond

acting as the symbolic element of contention. Schlingensief had a message that he wanted to deliver, and he was confident that the potential participants in his project would do his bidding (and they did). But the point here is that, in provoking anger and exposing hatred, *Please Love Austria* was using a strategy of direct opposition, which, according to Laclau and Mouffe, is a blunt, non-productive instrument, losing out on opportunities for careful dialogue that are socially and politically provocative in different and, perhaps, more productive ways.

1.6 Everybody in the Place

It could be argued that these practices – relational aesthetics, group performance, dialogic and participatory art – grew out of responses to the inadequacy of the empirical document to represent people’s lives, events, cultures, issues and situations. Participatory art is a hybrid form of representation, usually including performance, installation and situation, and central to its hybridity are elements of documentary, whose first and most practical function is to create a record of the artwork. Some contemporary artists famously forbid any documentation or reproductions of their artworks, such as German performance and participatory artist Tino Sehgal, but for most the documentation of a performative or situational artwork is the only means by which it can be widely disseminated, creating an often paradoxical and complicated relationship between participatory art and documentary film (Van Saaze 2015, 55). In recent years, however, this relationship has begun to evolve to take on a more reciprocal form. When commissioned by contemporary art magazine *Frieze* to make a documentary about 1980s rave music culture in the UK, Jeremy Deller, as an artist committed to participatory practices, decided to mediate his narrative on the politics of rave culture through the participation of a group of sixteen- to eighteen-year-old politics students

at a London secondary school. *Everybody in the Place: An Incomplete History of Britain 1984–1992* (2018) is both participatory art and documentary, or perhaps more accurately it is participatory art *as* documentary. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Deller explained that, rather than make “the standard BBC Four documentary where it’s middle-aged men talking with their record collections behind them, then some unattributed archive and a voiceover”, the participatory element of this project allows it deliberately to avoid the trap of a single point of view on contested historical and political issues (Muggs 2019).

Everybody in the Place is set inside a standard classroom filled with about fifteen students. It begins with a teacher introducing Jeremy Deller to the class, who stands beside a large television, and proceeds to deliver a didactic and animated presentation on a range of subcultures from 1980s UK, all centred around electronic music and the political effect that it had on Britain at the time. An invisible film crew records the expressions and reactions of the students from a variety of camera angles, and Deller presents his “incomplete history of Britain” that includes long clips of rave parties or excerpts from news reports. At various stages in the film, the students interrupt Deller to ask questions or make comments, and are given the opportunity to play with synthesisers and other equipment associated with 1980s electronic music. Deller’s take on his subject is obvious from the outset. He draws comparisons between the development of electronic music by African Americans in Detroit in the 1970s with Marxist theories on control over the means of production by the proletariat, and while his presentation is interesting and well researched, the presence of the students, all of whom were born after 2000, is the activating antagonistic feature of this film. Deller’s contextualisation of rave culture in the rise of neoliberal politics in Britain seems to come as a shock to these millennials, whose understanding of this culture and music perhaps is developed from nostalgic and “retro” references in popular culture. In one scene, Deller presents a still from a 1980s newsreel showing a conservative-looking elderly man and asks

the class what they think this man's opinion of a group of new-age travellers drinking on the street might be. The students are shocked to realise that this man, who may have fought in World War Two, shows to strongly believe in their individual liberties. Deller explains:

People of that generation could be brilliantly pro-Europe, anti-authoritarianism, and that – obviously – shocked a lot of the students watching. If there was something that came out of it for these kids watching, it was recent history in Britain being a little less predictable and a little more chaotic than they thought.
(Muggs 2019)

At other times, questions posed by the students take Deller by surprise, challenging his formulated opinions. Throughout the presentation, a tension hangs in the air. If Jeremy Deller were to answer the question that Jean Rouch tells is essential for (ethnographic) filmmakers, “For whom, and why, have you made this film”, he may have a number of answers (Feld 2003, 43). Without the antagonistic presence of the students, the audience of his film may have been limited to the middle-aged survivors of 1980s acid house and rave culture, eager for a meaningful but nostalgic spotlight on their past. The students may have learned something during Deller's presentation, but perhaps their generation prefers to look to the present and future for cultural satisfaction. But the bringing together of two generations in a simple, but ultimately *antagonistic* tension is the key here, and opens the film as a place of dialogue on the changing political landscape in the UK over the last half century.

1.7 For whom, and why?

The examples discussed in this chapter of participatory ethnographic filmmaking by Jean Rouch and participatory art projects by Jeremy Deller intentionally employed existing political tensions and antagonisms to create varying types of transformative situations for their collaborators. In all of these examples, the artist or filmmaker acted against modernist principles of the artist as self-fulfilling individual producer of objects for public or commercial consumption, and instead allowed themselves to become facilitating agents of a temporary community engaged in using the various technological and artistic means that they had at their disposal for political, practical and social change, reconciliation or understanding. In these examples, the filmmaker or the artist, Rouch or Deller, achieved the objective of their collaborative work by positioning themselves as an active but equal member-producer of the community. In his essay “The Author as Producer”, Walter Benjamin (2003) described the Russian revolutionary writer Sergei Tretyakov as an “Operative Writer” (86). His practice, while researching for the novel *Commanders of the Field* (1931), involved “calling mass meetings, collecting money to pay for tractors, persuading individual peasants who worked alone to enter the kolkhoz, inspecting reading rooms, creating wall-newspapers and editing the kolkhoz newspaper, being a reporter for Moscow papers, introducing radio and travelling movies” (Benjamin 1935, 86). Tretyakov’s motivations were undoubtedly political, but Benjamin recognised the potential for something approaching a collaborative practice whose intention was not to impose narratives on working people but, instead, to work within the community to develop a richer understanding of them for a reading public. In the same essay Benjamin challenges authors to ask themselves, “For whom do you write?”, a question adapted and echoed in 1974 by Jean Rouch when writing about his ethnographic filmmaking. Rouch answers his own question that his first public is the other – those whom he has filmed,

indicating that those who appear in his films are of primary concern in the process. In both of these articulations, Rouch and Benjamin are engaging in the semantics of ethical participatory practice, and both allude to crucial questions about the objective of artworks that involve the willing participation of other people: who is benefitting more from the process, and how?

Calvin Pryluck wrote in 1976 that the problem of describing and understanding ethics in documentary practice begins with the issue of obtaining consent (255). Consent could be obtained from a participant by asking the simple question, “Do you have any objections?”, a tactic used for instance by the Maysles brothers on doorsteps during the production of their 1961 film *Salesman*. This informal method, however, is open to all sorts of potential for coercive pressure to consent. The subject, indeed, is “put on the spot”, is not given any information about the subject of the film or their place in it and doesn’t have time to consider the consequences of their participation before making approval (Pryluck 1976, 257). The reality is that appearing in a film can have negative consequences for a person, their family or career and so, in a situation of participatory practice, consent should be sought using full transparency and disclosure of objectives, and of artistic and commercial intentions if there are any. For his 2018 documentary *Island*, British director and artist Steven Eastwood approached a number of hospices in the UK with the request that he could discuss the possibility of filming the lives of terminally ill patients in their care. The resulting film, made at a hospice on the Isle of Wight, comprises of the intimate portraits of four individuals with terminal illnesses (and includes a seven-minute shot of one of the participants dying on camera, having previously explicitly asked the filmmaker to film and include his death). Eastwood’s (2021) original objective was to tackle the issue of dying as a great taboo of Western society. However, as the filming process developed, the relationship between Eastwood and the four individuals became less of a monolithic observation, and more of a conversation, a dialogue – about how the film was affecting the last days of their lives, about

how the process affected the filmmaker and about the marginalization of illness and death in society (Eastwood 2021). The intimate, consensual conversations about death, family and spirituality that happen between Eastwood and his collaborators in *Island* would not be possible if it were not for their absolute consent and participation, which, in this case, is implied and based on the privileged position of trust granted to the director.

The presence of the filmmaker is felt throughout *Island*; the participants address him directly or refer to him by name. All of the resulting conversations seem to be between the participants and the filmmaker as trusted friends, not between them and a potential audience or the public beyond the camera. All along, the audience is made aware of the filmmaking process. In an example early in the film, Jamie, one of the participants, is heard speaking on the phone: “Steve is here... I’m in the kitchen and he’s setting up the camera.” In another scene, Alan, also a participant, is smoking a cigarette while lying in a bed outside the hospice. We see the hand of the filmmaker come in to hold the cigarette for him to help him smoke. And perhaps most poignantly in a seven-minute clip near the end of the film we watch as Alan is taking his final breaths. The camera is on a tripod facing him, but we hear the filmmaker snoring lightly on a chair next to him. When Alan finally, quietly passes away, a nurse comes to wake the filmmaker, who asks to be left alone with Alan for a last few minutes. Ultimately, *Island* is a film about the relationship between the filmmaker and his participants. His presence in these situations is both a privilege and an intrusion, and so he is ethically obliged to expose himself and move between the camera and the subject. The reflexive presence of the filmmaker in the body of the film is a vital element to an ethical practice of participatory filmmaking. Garnet C. Butchart (2006) describes this “doubling the visual mode of address” as a demonstration of the real and only “truth” that a documentary film can claim; that it is simply an expression of experience by experience (438). The participants in *Island*, especially Alan and Jamie, saw the process of making a film about the

endings of their lives as an opportunity to be able to express something about their philosophical beliefs (Eastwood 2021). Though not an overt intention or declared methodological approach of the filmmaker, *Island* demonstrates many of the qualities to which a work of participatory art aspires: it is dialogic in process, open to contingency in production, and its concern was obviously and necessarily as much for the participants as for an audience. The process of making the film was controlled first by the process of obtaining consent from the participants through the mediation of the hospice, then by the ethical obligations to allow the participants agency in the process, and finally by showing the filmmaking apparatus to the audience in the final edit of the film (Eastwood 2021).

1.8 Conclusion

The distinction between a work of art as a single, commodifiable object resulting from monolithic authorship and a work of art as a stimulator of dialogue resulting from a long process of coproduction as part of a participatory exercise is central to my argument in this chapter. I have argued that the definitive participatory art practice of Jeremy Deller in his projects *The Battle of Orgreave* and *Everybody in the Place* demonstrates a willingness to enact provocative antagonisms in a situation, not to simply create consumable tension, as might happen in a standard reality television programme, but instead to open a space for a productive, and often-political, dialogue to happen. These values are found in the “ethnofictions” of Jean Rouch, starting from *Les maîtres fous* in 1955, and are also detected in many of his films including *Moi, un noir* (*I, a Negro*, 1958), *Chronique d’un été* and *Jaguar* (1967). There are examples of recent participatory artworks where these methods are used, often within the context of publicly funded contemporary art projects, including British artist Lucy Parker’s 2019 film *Solidarity*, about men who were the victims of workplace

blacklisting because of their associations with trade unions. As part of the research for this documentary, Parker made a series of short films comprising of filmed conversations with groups of men, where she would sit with them around a table in a community centre or pub and engage in a discussion on the issues addressed by the film. Parker's method of making a film about a social issue was to facilitate conversations and meetings that served both as generative instances for the people involved and as informative artworks for a wider audience. Another Turner-Prize winning artist, Phil Collins's 2018 participatory project and documentary *Bring Down the Walls* turned an abandoned firehouse in New York into community space during the day for open discussions, workshops and talks on the topic of the "prison industrial complex" and the politics of incarceration in the United States over the course of a month. At night, the space became a nightclub, playing the House and Techno music relevant to the history of the demographics most affected by mass incarceration in the United States. In all these examples, a film was produced as a part of the process to document the project, but in the case of *Les maîtres fous* the order was different: it began its life as a film and, by virtue of the need for ethical practice and an awareness of the subjectivity of the filmed encounter, it became centrally a participatory process. Despite the intentionality behind the process or the subject of the film or art project, the common element in the examples I have explored in this chapter is that they avoided a single monolithic message in favour of the creation of an environment for dialogue promoted by a polyphony of voices. With this in mind, I propose that for filmmakers there is an ethical obligation to consider that all actuality or nonfiction films that have the real lives of humans as their focus should engage with the principles behind these and similar examples if they are to fulfil a function as progressive and politically effective artworks.

Chapter Two: The Particularity of Experience and Spectatorship in the Installation Space

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter One I examined the intersection of participatory art practices and ethnographic filmmaking as a means to consider the development of a new form of co-produced, participatory filmmaking practice. This chapter examines the potential of the art installation as a space for experiential and sensory mediation of documentary film in order to consider the means for public exhibition of this new form of filmmaking, which, I argue, is equally important in the creation and mediation of meaning. Using the installation *Commensal* (2017) by Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor as a case study, I discuss the contribution of contemporary art to discourses on spectatorship and audience experience of nonfiction film. Taking *Commensal* as a starting point, I examine how the experience of the visitor to the art installation might differ from that of the audience member at a cinema. How does the space, institutional context and institutional mediation of a nonfiction film installation contribute to the contamination of boundaries between fictional storytelling and objective truth? By comparing *Commensal* and *Caniba* (2017), the feature-length theatrical treatment of the same subject by the same filmmakers, I will propose that presentation and screening in the context of the installation space offer new forms of mediation for some nonfiction film works that are experiential as opposed to spectatorial. I will use the concept of the *dispositif* as mobilised by Ella Barclay and Alex Munt (2019) in their examination of artist's moving image work in the gallery to identify how a physical, sensory and socio-political experience can define an audience's mediation of documentary moving-image work as presented in the art exhibition space (364). Further, I will explore how the context of the

contemporary art exhibition space can create sets of meanings for works of documentary film or video which are potentially at odds with meanings created by the same works as adapted for and experienced in a cinema auditorium or on a domestic screen.

Documenta 11, the major contemporary art exhibition that took place in Kassel, Germany, in 2002 is often characterised as the moment when contemporary art took a distinctive “documentary turn” (Balsom 2014, 162). In curating the exhibition, Okwui Enwezor (2014) was advocating for the use of documentary and archival material within contemporary art practices not simply as objects of evidence, but as elements of interchanges between indexical forces, institutions and audiences, while also deliberately troubling definitions of documentary and the place that it held in the hierarchy of artistic forms (37). Since documenta 11, what is sometimes still referred to as documentary is a common element in works of contemporary art, often in the form of moving-image video and film installations, which have become a common feature of exhibitions in contemporary art galleries, museums and art spaces since the 1990s (Barclay and Munt 2019, 364). These new contexts of presentation and exhibition continue to contribute to conversations around the expansion of the epistemological function of the documentary form. Elizabeth Cowie (2009), for instance, has suggested that the gallery space has created a new way to see documentary as something that is self-referentially critical: “For it is in its facility or factness that documentary is an art object, and thereby engages us to reflect on the possibilities and impossibilities of knowing reality really, and on the construction of our audiovisual discourses of knowledge” (126). It was these critical capabilities of that first seemed to attract contemporary artists to documentary formats and methodologies.

While the “documentary turn” took place during and after Documenta 11 in 2002, there has been a line of predecessors who recognised that documentary film could have a function outside of the indexical, commercial or didactic. Artists such as Chris Marker and

Harun Farocki began to straddle the film and art worlds in their work from the 1980s. Farocki's 1983 observational film *Ein Bild (An Image)* demonstrated an innovation in adopting a filmmaking methodology developed as a tool for anthropology, instead as a critical method (Pantenburg 2016, 144). Shot for the German television program "Projektionen 83", *Ein Bild* is a meticulous documentation of a studio photo shoot of a nude model for an issue of *Playboy* magazine. Over twenty-five minutes the film shows the photographer and production designer direct a nude model through a series of mundane processes and movements. They move lights and limbs as they engage in long discussions about angles and poses. Crucially, and in a demonstration of a critical faculty of documentary-as-art, the final image made by the photographer is not shown in *Ein Bild*, and so the function of the film is to document the retrospective deconstruction of the image, breaking its eroticism into pieces.² The film is an example of an expanded function for documentary that uses epistemological and theoretical visual language as ideological critique (Balsom and Peleg, 2016, 18). During and after Okwui Enwezor's 2002 Documenta 11 (which was the first of these large-scale exhibitions to be curated by a non-Westerner), this "expanded field of aesthetic possibilities" became central to contemporary art practices (Balsom and Peleg, 2016, 16). An example from that exhibition of a new way of using ethnographic filmmaking methodologies can be found in Craigie Horsfield's four-channel, eight-hour video installation *El Hierro Conversation*. For this project, Horsfield collaborated with a community on El Hierro, one of the Canary Islands, to document traditional religious rituals and cheese-making activities in the context of cultural and colonial histories. Though using observational methods established by a long line of ethnographic filmmakers and documentary filmmakers, Horsfield made use of the expanded field of documentary in the art

² Farocki was inspired in making *Ein Bild* by Jean-Luc Godard's 1968 film, *Sympathy for the Devil*, in which Godard films The Rolling Stones rehearsing and recording a song over and over, but never plays the final recording. This method, both on *Ein Bild* and *Sympathy for the Devil* denies the audience the closure that they might be expecting, focusing instead on the process as a central element of the film.

exhibition to avoid the need for editorial curtailment of footage. The uninterrupted cheese-making sequence contained what Horsfield described as “the actual routine and rhythm within it”, which takes over two hours, and which could not effectively be communicated in a five-minute edited sequence (Horsfield 2009). This form of documentary where an activity is documented and screened in real-time cannot be confused with journalism or entertainment, and in many senses, it could be deemed closer to achieving André Bazin’s myth of objective cinema (Bazin 1967, 21). At the most recent Documenta exhibition in 2022, Kiri Dalena’s five-channel installation *Pila (Lines)* (2022), made in collaboration with a community in the Philippines during the 2020–2021 Coronavirus lockdowns demonstrated a similar use of long, uninterrupted observational filming, screened in long-form, this time with the added element of community co-creation as a central methodology. These artists, working at a high level within a contemporary art mandate of critical reflexivity of medium have shown that documentary formats are more fluid, more malleable, and can sometimes achieve the assumed goals of documentary filmmaking more readily in the contemporary art context.

In my exploration, as mentioned, I draw a comparison between the video and film installation *Commensal* as seen at the documenta 14 exhibition in 2017 and its feature-length documentary counterpart *Caniba*, which was screened at film festivals and theatres throughout 2018 and 2019 and was subsequently released on DVD and on a subscription streaming service. This comparison partially relies on an analysis of the experience of certain particulars present at the installation space for *Commensal* at documenta 14, including the repurposed factory in which it was screened, the separation of film and video elements and the context of a major international contemporary art exhibition.

Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor are perhaps best known for their 2012 experimental documentary *Leviathan*, which was a feature-length, ethnographic-style, immersive audio and visual account of life (and death) aboard a commercial fishing trawler.

As core members of the Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL) at Harvard University, the pair engage in experimental forms of ethnographic research, situating their work in the area where visual anthropology, documentary film and contemporary art practices overlap, as indicated on SEL's website. In an interview with Scott MacDonald, Lucien Castaing-Taylor explained that the SEL experiments with new forms of ethnographic representation that deprioritise text and language in favour of a "phenomenology of aesthetic experience", as described by John Dewey in his 1934 book *Art as Experience* (MacDonald 2015, 402). The question is whether these phenomenological objectives of the SEL are better achieved by the presentation of their experimental documentary film or as gallery installation.

2.2 *Commensal* as experience

The film and video installation *Commensal* was first presented at documenta 14 in Kassel, Germany, in 2017. According to the *documenta 14 Daybook*, the installation explored the "complicated" story of Issei Sagawa, who gained notoriety in 1981 when, as a student in Paris, he murdered and partially cannibalised René Hartevelt, a fellow student (Peleg, 2017). In September 2017, Paravel and Taylor also theatrically released *Caniba*, a feature-length documentary on the same subject and made from the same source material, adapted to the theatrical format.

Both *Commensal* and *Caniba* are made according to the formal approach of "sensory ethnography", which Paravel and Taylor have become known for since the production of their film *Leviathan* in 2012. Their work was described by Hila Peleg (2017) in the *documenta 14 Daybook* as "non-narrative epics [which] are meditative and trance-like journeys into unseen and alien aspects of our environments; they unearth a different order for the principles of knowledge and cinematographic language, one that is non-signifying and

non-hierarchical”. Using the ethnographic principle of long engagement with participants as a starting point, one innovation of the Sensory Ethnography Lab is that it privileges sensory and “somatic” over textual or discursive experience and knowledge: “We are somatic creatures before we are linguifying ones. Independently—we didn’t know each other then—we both felt a desire to retreat from language, and limit ourselves to images and sounds” (Peleg et al.). *Commensal*, as an experience, could be read as exemplary of this approach, especially when taking into account the situation, site and location of its installation. It is one example of an artwork where the core principle of sensory ethnography to provide sensory experiences through cultural practices have been brought into the site-specific contemporary art context.³

Site-specificity in contemporary art has its roots in a crossover between sculptural practices and conceptual art, and can take various forms, from work that is designed for certain specific architectural spaces and features, to artwork that addresses the socio-economic or political aspects of a specific place.⁴ While the story of Issei Sagawa and his brother Jun as mediated by the work by Paravel and Taylor was not necessarily conceived solely for Kassel, *Commensal* was designed as a one-off installation for documenta 14, presumably as a result of an extended conversation between the artists and the artistic director Adam Szymczk. As I will explain, site-specificity in the case of *Commensal* links the artwork directly to the city, the exhibition and the building in which it was installed in terms of experience.

Tofufabrik, the site of the installation, is situated on the margins of Kassel’s city centre, where the large-scale international, non-commercial, curated exhibition of

³ Lucien Castaing- Taylor has previously adapted elements of documentary work to be screened as part of contemporary art exhibitions, including *Hell Roaring Creek* and *Bedding Down* (2012) which were adapted from the film *Sweetgrass* (2009) made with Ilisa Barbash and *Somniloquies* (2017) made with Véréna Paravel.

⁴ For a full discussion in site-specificity in contemporary art see Kwon (1997)

contemporary art has been taking place every five years since 1955. Now an artist-run space for music and exhibitions, the building was originally used to process bean curd, and the interior of the building still demonstrates some of the fittings and paraphernalia associated with industrial food production such as white tiled walls and heavy plastic strip curtains. Walter Benjamin (1968) wrote that architecture was perhaps the first form of art that was widely, publicly consumed and, therefore, that its experience is passive, often collective, and distracted (239). In curating a work of art within a specific building it should be assumed that the building itself will provide a certain context, as opposed to the “white cube” of a gallery or art museum, which are often set up as a generic receptacle that removes context from the work of art. The installation site for *Commensal* at a former food-processing plant was a deliberate curatorial framing of an artwork within a certain space. It lends a layer of connotation to the work that further alters the visitor’s experience: the interior of the food-processing factory might as well have been an abattoir, where we as audience were invited to participate in the recalling of heinous crimes and the collective judgement of the criminal.

Though part of a prestigious international exhibition, the site for this installation on the margins Kassel removed it from the context of the art museum. The repurposed site or site-specific installation differs from the art museum in the way it contextualises the artwork, and in this case in the way that it has isolated the artwork from the rest of the festival. Anna Raczynski (2013) has explained that, when aspects of sculptural practice were adopted in the presentation of video artworks, “the context and the content became interchangeable” (129). The spaces around and outside the projection(s) or screens are recognised as important elements of what is effectively now a sculptural space, which the interaction and movement of the spectator activates to become a space of participation and performance. While acknowledging that the documenta exhibition is itself a privileged cultural space on a global scale, it must be remembered that it is also primarily a space for artistic experimentation, and

the works that are installed in various repurposed spaces (as well as in conventional museum spaces) in the city of Kassel may set precedents for future artistic works. In the case of *Commensal*, the specific site chosen, as well as being a former industrial facility, is now in the hands of a group of artists who have in effect taken control of the means of artistic production for themselves. The self-described “experimental” objectives of the SEL sit well within the context of this artist-run gallery, which is traditionally a space for experimentation outside of the artistic establishment. All these layers of context cannot be overlooked when considering a work of art that outwardly claims to privilege an experience based on the sensorial and experiential over the intellectual and discursive.

The installation itself consisted of two moving-image elements, a 16mm archival film projection and a digital video projected in an adjoining room. Entering the installation space through the former factory’s plastic curtains, the audience was met with the silent 16mm film projection showing archival home footage of Issei and Jun as children in Kobe, Japan. This footage, which was 42-minutes long and looping, portrayed what seemed to be a happy and rather privileged family, with the two brothers play-fighting and dressing in costumes. The only sounds affecting this silent film installation was the whirring of the film projector and the sound spilling from the video installation in the adjoining room.

Further into the installation, the main element was a looping, 27-minute video with sound projected in a large tile-lined room, which was fitted with two short rows of cinema seats. In it, the faces of Issei and his brother are portrayed in extreme close-up, the image drifting in and out of focus, as they talk to each other and out into the room regarding pain, sexual and physical desire, guilt and the crime of 1981. At Tofufabrik, the sound of the voices of the two men from the video reverberated against the walls of the room, where certain lights had been left on, presumably so that the audience might absorb a sense of the space along with the subject of the installation.

The site-specific moving-image installation differs from theatrical film presentation in a number of fundamental ways. As both, in a sense, sculpture and film, it is a hybrid exhibition form, but one that can produce very different effects to the experience of watching a film in a cinema theatre. The visitor to the video installation has a different spatial awareness to the spectator at the cinema; as Catherine Elwes (2015) put it, this is “a phenomenological sensitivity to all that is actual and present within a bounded space” (1). On entering *Commensal* in August 2017, my first instinct was to interact with the whirring film projection in a darkened space, while I used my other senses to augment my vision as I searched around to take hold of my bearings. The unspoken social contract of the contemporary art installation is that I enter silently and move about while regarding each piece of art without deliberately affecting the experience of others with whom I might be sharing the space. Stepping into the second part of the installation, the choice was to remain standing, move slowly around the room, or sit and fully engage with the video, not knowing at what stage of the looping video I entered, or if it mattered. Though the images of the video projection and the sounds coming from the speakers contained the substance of the installation, the uncanny presence of the building around me inevitably became an element of my experience. Unlike cinema screenings and some video installations whose aim is to create a darkened, generic space for projection, at Tofufabrik the interior of the former food-processing plant was an active contextual element of the installation. On that occasion, I chose to sit and absorb the video and sound.

The video element of *Commensal* consisted of a two-part interaction between Issei and Jun. The two-metre-tall projection showed the face of an ailing Issei in extreme close-up, close enough to see remnants of food on his face, and when the focus shifted, to see the eyes of his brother. Sagawa blankly stares into the lens and out into the installation space, often hesitating for minutes before making sometimes frightening statements:

It's because I ate Renée... I know I'm crazy. I think mad. Really. Because... A calm mind, and sexual... desires. I couldn't contain myself... within... that peace. I tried to make myself believe... it was her body. In vain.

In the footage, Jun attends to an apparently incapacitated Issei, feeding him chocolate. In moments of conversation, Issei describes his crime, his desire to be eaten by the woman he murdered, asking his brother to cause him pain, switching between speaking Japanese, English and French, an indication of his awareness of the presence of the filmmakers (Paravel is French and Castaing-Taylor is English). The next scene shows close-up images of a manga comic that Issei made about his crime. His brother turns the pages and expresses his horror, surprise and disgust as he does so: “this is a piece of shit”. Through this scene, the visitors to *Commensal* were given for the first time visceral and visual context for the subject of the installation: the crime of Issei Sagawa, his unrepentant obsession with his victim, his profiteering from it all. These context-creating scenes are punctuated by long, uncomfortable, blurry considerations of Issei's face, the accompanying sounds of his mouth chewing, the buzzing of an appliance in the room, faint sounds from the street outside. The visitor to *Commensal* who chose (as I did) to remain and experience the installation, became physically absorbed in the engrossing presence of Issei as mediated by the context of Tofufabrik. This is an example of an expanded documentary practice that blends the aesthetic and socio-historic properties of the city, exhibition and space with “aspects of the real” (Frankham 2022, 1). Bettina Frankham (2022) gave the type of work where documentary and video-art practices overlap the term “critical aesthetic practice”, where the sensory and aesthetic experience of the “documentary-like work” are an integrated part of the communication strategy (4). A critical aesthetic practice is one that considers the conditions of presentation and the potential

effect that they might have on the audience experience as integral to the artwork (Frankham 2022, 2). Frankham draws on the work on sensory ethnography by C. Nadia Seremetakis and the work of John Dewey on aesthetics to establish a link between the sensory and the aesthetic and proposes that critical aesthetic practice engages a type of knowledge that is gained through interactions between the senses and intellect – that an artwork can be an aesthetic (and therefore a sensory) experience in itself (Frankham 2022, 10). This practice not only enhances the sensory experience and adds additional meaning to the artwork, but, as I will discuss later in the chapter, it also creates a space where documentaries can be read as subjective and aesthetic artworks, dispelling an expectation in engagement in the fantasy of “knowing reality really” (Cowie 2009, 128).

The combination of elements that comprises a multi-screen, site-specific installation or, as termed by Ella Barclay and Alex Munt (2019) in their adaption of the Bellourian concept, the *dispositif* of the installation determines the specific subjective experience of the visitor (363). The elements of this *dispositif*, including the socio-historical conditions of the site, the aesthetic properties of the space and the contents of the artwork, amount to a sensory experience, while the multiple screens in this film and video installation also make it a navigable experience: the visitor is mobile, interacting with the work according to their own will (363). Writing about the forty-channel video installation *Küba* (2005) by Kutlug Ataman, Elizabeth Cowie (2009) described it as a documentary, fragmented into its constituent parts, that can never be experienced in the same way by the same visitor or by other visitors twice:

the visitor moves between the forty arrayed screens to a particular television,
and specific story: each time the same kind of encounter, but each time a
different telling of a different story. Seeing the same difference an new

difference each time, she creates her own edited version of these stories as she moves from chair to chair. (126)

The experience is personal and interactive; possible readings of the message of the installation are myriad, dependent on the physical movements and choices of the visitor. Catherine Elwes (2015) goes further to argue that this interactive relationship that the visitor has with a moving-image installation creates a new way to relate to an artwork:

installation and the moving image dramatizes and focuses our relationship to cultural by creating a separate space of interaction, and ante-room to reality, a play room in which visitors can explore and seek new ways of participating in our increasingly fragmented, polyphonic and mediated environment. (151)

This “newly emancipated spectator” is free to come and go, to navigate the work rather than sit and consume it, or instead, as a visitor to an exhibition like documenta, which takes place throughout an entire city over a period of months, they may choose to return for a second or third interaction (156).

But this ease of movement and endless agency of choice cannot always be assumed to be an idealistic, emancipated means of interaction with moving-image artworks. It has been noted that the freedom of movement of the spectator may even become a negative factor in an overall experience of an artwork. Erika Balsom (2014) has observed that the perpetual movement of the spectator at a large-scale exhibition such as documenta or large-scale biennales, where the next enticing artwork is always around the corner, mimics the movements of the consumer in the shopping centre, and so is complying to the systems of power which contemporary art often aspires to critique:

in recent decades the institution has become increasingly permeable and malleable in an effort to maintain relevance. It has begun to value flexibility and mobility rather than permanence and stasis. In this paradigm, to circulate and participate are by no means activities of resistance, but in fact precisely what is demanded of us in the experience economy. (51)

The spectator becomes a passive consumer of art in this scenario, drifting through spaces and galleries and moving on to the next artwork if their interest is not sufficiently grabbed. The seeming agency that the audience is given is overshadowed by a kind of choice paralysis, or what Elwes (2015) calls “spectatorial attention deficit” (156). By contrast, the traditional spectator of film mostly sits silently in their seat in the darkened cinema, and they have almost no choice once seated but to engage with the sound and images that are put in front of them, at least on some level.

The idea that the role of the traditional spectator of film is simply that of a passive agent has been a persistent, and contested, trope in film theory since at least the writings on the apparatus and on cinema and psychoanalysis of the 1970s. Roland Barthes (1975), for example, suggested that the entire experience of cinema-going is hypnotic, even before the cinema-goer enters the building, that what he calls the “cinema situation” is a “lure”, a cocoon of signifiers and signified (104). For Barthes, the cinema experience is comparable to a dream or hypnotic state, which is not just associated with the film but with the entire apparatus surrounding it, and only begins to wear off long into its aftermath, after the spectator has left the cinema theatre. Jean-Louis Baudry (1976) went slightly further and suggested that the cinema experience can be compared to a prefabricated out-of-body experience. This is made apparent when the technical apparatus (the film projector) breaks

down. Baudry noted that “the disturbing effects which result during a projection from breakdowns in the recreation of movement, when the spectator is brought abruptly back to discontinuity – that is, to the body, to the technical apparatus which he had *forgotten*” (42). On the other side of a dichotomy are the active spectators who, according to Richard Rushton (2009), are considered to be the “hoped-for products of an avant-garde cinema” (47). In response to 1970s film theory’s focus on the passive spectator, writers such as David Bordwell (1985, 29) and Teresa de Lauretis (1984, 56) have pointed out that, in various actions of decoding and perceiving information coming from the screen, the spectator always is critically in control of the production of meaning. Jacques Rancière’s (2008) proposal for an “emancipated spectator” is not concerned with innovations in how the theatrical space is used, or with how much physical agency the spectator has; rather, the spectator has their own power over the presentation in that they may choose to interpret it in their own way – the spectatorial agency is realised as intellectual and interior rather than something sensory or exterior. He writes here in relation to the spectator of live theatre, but the principle can also be applied to the cinemagoer:

She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way – by drawing back, for example, from the vital energy that it is supposed to transmit in order to make it a pure image and associate this image with a story which she has heard or dreamt, experienced or invented. They are both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them. (13)

Members of the Sensory Ethnography Lab describe how their methodological approach is rooted in being less interested in the discursive or verbal, and more interested in the communicative potential of sound and image as they are processes by the bodies of

audiences, rather than the intellect. As already mentioned, Lucien Castaing-Taylor considers that humans are “somatic creatures”; that we often experience the world around us in nonverbal means through our bodies before our minds attempt to create meaning through referent and logic (Peleg et al.). Speaking about her 2010 film *Foreign Parts*, made in collaboration with J.P. Sniadecki, Véréna Paravel describes this conscious move away from the intellectual in her filmmaking: “I’m less interested nowadays in working with words – especially of the academic, discursive kind – than I am with sequences of images and sounds. We are, after all, imagistic creatures before we are linguistic ones” (MacDonald 2019, 469). Lucian Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel consciously take this formal approach with them when filming, and they also consider this to be a crucial point of reference when thinking about how an audience will engage with their work. Speaking about his installation work in a 2015 interview with Scott MacDonald, Castaing-Taylor identified that his desire is to achieve more from his audience than he would in theatrical presentations:

the motivating factor is a desire to get more from your audience, a deeper and a different kind of spectatorial attention to the work, one less attuned to narrative chains or meaning than to sheer manifestations of being and to forms for figural expressivity that are more ambiguous and opaque than narrative’s proclivity for discursive clarity usually allows (MacDonald 2015, 397).

Castaing-Taylor’s ambition is to bring audiences deeper in to the sensorial and somatic experience of the work that he makes, using a methodology focused also on the sensory and the bodily. Ranciere’s emancipated spectator may have the agency to interpret the material

that is presented on an intellectual level however they wish, but the audience at a moving-image installation is given an added level of agency by virtue of how they might (or how their bodies) subjectively interpret the work on a more primal, physical level. I argue that the experience of a work of site-specific, moving-image installation is something distinct from both the paralysed browser at the art fair or public art museum and the passive spectator/audience member at the cinema. Each of these figures holds the potential for spectatorial emancipation in their own right, but within the public moving-image installation space we have the central elements of what Guy Debord (1957) would have called a “Situation” as opposed to a spectacle, where, as I have described earlier, the audience intervenes or participates to some extent in the work by their agency of physical presence and engagement (106). Debord links the experience of the spectacle directly to passive consumption, suggesting that it does not itself deliver anything, but is a depiction of what society could deliver, separating “what is possible from what is permitted” (15). The participant in the Situation, on the other hand, is truly emancipated. In the video installation seen as Situation, they participate in the experience by their presence, movement, their navigation between and interaction with each of the screens, and perhaps by their reconfirmed presence, emphasised by their ability and choice to leave, then return again and again if they wish.

2.3 Contaminations of boundaries

Since the already mentioned “documentary turn” in contemporary art after documenta 11 in 2002 there has been a proliferation of artists using moving image material and other “documents”, but often with a different imperative to that of the conventional filmmaker. The artist, working in a field that often prioritises experimentation above all else, can move back

and forth between fictional storytelling and documentary truth. The documentary within contemporary art is a mode by which artists manage their message; nonfiction-based contemporary art is just that – it will never be *just documentary*, but it carries elements of documentary and elements of aesthetic experience to become, in Bettina Frankham's (2022) words, “documentary-like” (2). The positioning of documentary work within the art context moves it to the intersection between the two disciplines, so expanding on the meanings created by nonfiction material to include the aesthetic conditions for its presentation as well as the content. The function of documentary within contemporary art was articulated by Okwui Enwezor (2004) when writing about documenta 11, where he positions documentary not a means to itself, but just as a tool within a larger artistic discourse:

Each of these artists in documenta 11 employ the tools of the documentary and the function of the archive as procedures for inducting new flows and transactions between images, texts, narratives, documents, statements, events, communities, institutions, audiences. And each confounds the role of the documentary in establishing a hierarchy between images and artistic forms, between ethics and aesthetics, politics and poetics, truth and fiction. (37)

Through their work, contemporary artists and experimental filmmakers have actively found ways to directly reassess the purpose of documentary, articulating that documentary can have a function outside of perceived objective truth-telling. The “documentary-like” work of contemporary art can seek for new ways to articulate new forms of aesthetic and epistemological truths, some of which may be sensory, anecdotal or attitudinal. Examples

include the Lebanese artist Walid Raad, who created an extensive fictional archive of photography, film, writings and objects named *The Atlas Group* (1989–2004), whose aim was to “research, document, study and produce audio, visual and literary artefacts that shed light on the contemporary history of Lebanon”, in so doing raising questions about how documents are used to produce specific historical narrative (Raad). *The Casting* by Omar Fast (2007) is described by Erika Balsom (2014) as displaying a “contamination of media” (170). This two-channel video installation simultaneously shows interviews with actors in casting sessions and fictional re-enactments of stories described by the actors in what becomes a reflexive feedback loop, contaminating the boundaries between fictional storytelling and documentary testimony. The context of contemporary art, thus, becomes a space for mediating documentary material as a fluid, constituent element of a message, rather than simply as a source of verified information. In the examples mentioned above, documentary material is used either to highlight its subjective nature, or in the presumption that the audience will read it as subjective. In the realm of traditional nonfiction film genre, historical attempts which have been made at conceiving of techniques in documentary filmmaking that aspire to objective readings have exposed that the intentionality of authorship often becomes a defining factor. Erika Balsom (2004), commenting on Christian Metz’s (1983) assertion that every film is a fiction film, notes that every type of film “unrealises” what it tries to represent, potentially turning it into spectacle, and that certain types of film, such as *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema, have:

attempted to combat this necessary unrealisation by cultivating formal techniques that would aim to collapse image and referent in the production of objective truth. This denial of mediation is however eminently ideological, as it aims to dissimulate the processes of unrealisation that are always at work. (170)

Here, we can stretch Balsom's "certain types" of film to include ethnographic filmmaking, which through intentions of anthropological rigour has cultivated formal techniques such as long-term, non-interventionist observation and long takes. The formal aims of ethnographic film, then, in its original capacity as secondary scientific source material, could also be seen as ideological. It is this problematising of conventional ethnographic filmmaking that the Sensory Ethnography Lab have embraced through experimentation with formal techniques and presentation of work within the contemporary art context. Their use of principles of ethnographic research as a conceptual starting point within the context of a contemporary art exhibition might be seen as a challenge to both the institution of the museum and to the practice of ethnography. In writing about the contamination of boundaries between ethnographic filmmaking and surrealism in Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread, 1933)*, Laura Rascaroli (2017) points out that the film "self-consciously locates itself in a generic in-betweenness to carry out a subversive critique of Western discourses of authenticity, science, technology exoticism, imperialism, and race" (76). This tactic of positioning *Commensal* as a nonfiction film/video installation *in-between* ethnography, seen as empirical record, and contemporary art installation, seen as subjective experience, may then be read as a critique of both institutions, and a useful strategy to create a set of ambiguous expectations in the audience. Speaking about the work of the Sensory Ethnography Lab, Lucien Castaing-Taylor points out that the objective of their work is to simply produce experience: "The SEL is concerned not with analysing, but with actively producing aesthetic experience, and of kinds that reflect and draw on but do not necessarily clarify, or leave one with the illusion of 'understanding' everyday experience" (MacDonald 2015, 402). Their work could be labelled as documentary because of its roots in observational ethnographic filmmaking. As theatrical, feature-length films with beginning and end credits,

both *Caniba* and *Leviathan* have often been described as documentaries, or “experimental documentaries” (Russell 2015, 27). The video and film installation *Commensal* was made from the same original and archived material as *Caniba*, but there is no reference to it as documentary in the promotional and critical materials from documenta 14. Rather, within the contaminated boundaries of the contemporary art space, it is both an aesthetic, sensory experience and documentary-like testimony.

2.4 *Caniba* as narrative

Issei Sagawa was never found guilty of the crimes he committed in France; instead, he was deemed innocent by reason of insanity, and only served a short period in a French institution. Significantly, this context was not immediately given to the visitor to *Commensal* at documenta 14 and was only available to discovery when searched for in the bulky (and difficult to navigate) exhibition catalogue. The ‘theatrical’, feature-length version of *Commensal* was first shown at the Venice Biennale cinema programme in September 2017, then released generally on 19 October 2018. In 2020, the film was released on DVD, Blu-ray and on the Apple TV streaming service. This version of the work adds layers to the story that were not present at the installation. A paragraph before the opening title explains the background to the crimes of Issei Sagawa, with the added disclaimer that “this film does not seek to justify or legitimize that crime”. At the end of the opening credits of *Caniba*, the audience is presented with a quote from the Gospel According to John, in what might be seen as an attempt at establishing an ambiguous moral standpoint for the filmmakers:

Verily, verily I say unto you,

Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man,

And drink his blood,

Ye have no life in you.

He that eateth my flesh,

And drinketh my blood,

Dwelleth in me, and I in him.

After this paragraph, the viewer is introduced to the Sagawa brothers through close-up shots of their juxtaposed faces. The voice of Jun drifts in and out as he helps his brother to eat; the sound of the fridge in the room and the traffic outside tells us that they are in an urban apartment setting – all this introducing the audience to the scene and the players. After eleven long minutes of close-up, in-and-out-of-focus shots, uncomfortable closeness and relative linguistic silence, Issei begins to talk about his crime and his fetishistic desires, as the camera searches for a reaction in the eyes of his brother. This introduction to the story and the characters continues as they talk about their family and childhoods, desire and disappointment. The middle section of the film brings the audience on a journey through the psyches of both the Sagawa brothers. Here, in a break from the close-up footage of limbs and faces, the audience watches a selection of close-up screen-recordings of scenes from the pornographic film in which Issei acted, then a flick through a disturbing manga comic book that Issei made about his crime, Jun demonstrating his own masochistic sexual fetish by tying his arm up with barbed wire for the cameras of Paravel and Castaing-Taylor, as he talks about

this activity openly and frankly, followed by some home footage of the brothers as children as seen in the *Commensal* 16mm film installation, but this time the accompanying sound is the ambient noise of the brothers in their room as if they too were watching the footage. The beginning is textual, informative and context-creating; the middle section is at times grotesque, horrifying and transgressive in its display of desire, pain, memory and loss of innocence, while the end section brings us back to a sense of stability, with scenes of an almost pleasant nature, where Issei's female carer makes him smile with a story about how she dressed up as a zombie, and finally leaves the stuffy, enclosed space of the (unseen) apartment to take him for a walk in the park. The final scene, then, shows Issei staring lovingly up from his wheelchair at his female companion, as he utters the words, "This is a miracle." Here, the image fades to black, the sounds of the park fade away, and the music of "La Folie", a song by British post-punk band The Stranglers inspired by Issei's story, begins to play, with karaoke graphics appearing against the black screen in pink and yellow text.

An obvious conclusion from a comparison of the two versions is that the filmmakers/artists of *Commensal* and *Caniba* have crafted two very different pieces of work which ultimately oppose each other's philosophical objectives: *Commensal* as a work that is to be absorbed by the senses and experienced, and *Caniba* as a story to be followed and consumed. An initial clue to the intentions of the filmmakers can be found in the definitions of the titles of the two works. *Commensal*, when used as a noun, can mean simply a companion at a table, somebody we eat with. When used as an adjective, it can describe a reciprocal arrangement between two biological organisms, each effectively living off one another, but without harming the other. This title, then, is suggestive of reciprocity, we assume between Issei and his brother, though the relationships between Issei and his victim, and between Issei and the installation's audience, are possibly also alluded to here. The title *Caniba*, on the other hand, is more leading and less suggestive. It is a direct reference to the

act of eating the flesh of another human, and so to a one-directional act of consumption. This use of words cannot be seen as accidental. In a transcription of a public conversation with Hila Peleg posted on the documenta 14 website, Paravel and Castaing-Taylor acknowledge that, although their objective as collaborative filmmakers is to “retreat from language”, *Commensal* and *Caniba* are both in effect a portrait of a person that is mediated through language as well as gesture:

In *Commensal* (2019), our piece with Sagawa-san, we attend as much to what he seems unable to say as to what he does; it is very much at the outer limits of language. But the interplay between articulable and nonarticuable, both linguistically and ethically, remains at its core. (Peleg et al.)

Language, therefore, is treated here not just as a medium to deliver a message, but also as a channel of meta-intellectual sensory information. This certainly seems to be the case in the installation, where the words spoken by Issei and his brother Jun blended, together with the sounds of eating and the ambient sounds from the street outside, into a set of mumblings that were just coherent enough to allow the viewer access to a basic kind of narrative, one that contains just enough information as to provide context to the images, all of this reverberating violently against the shiny walls of the former tofu factory. The looping of the video and film aspects of the installation, then, which deprives the visitor of an obvious beginning or end, further compounds the impossibility of a more complex narrative. As I have already established, *Commensal* was intended as a sensory experience and the conditions for its presentation contribute to this reading of the artwork.

Caniba, on the other hand, as it would appear in a cinema auditorium or on a domestic screen, classifies itself as a film with a story, a *documentary*, using introductory contextual

information, a biblical quote and end credits, but most of all using what amounts to a narrative structure. Narrative in film does not always necessarily follow a predetermined trajectory but can conceal itself within certain innovations. *Caniba*, as a feature-length film, aims to be formally experimental and unconventional, and in many ways it is, however I would argue that a kind of conventional narrative can be found lurking inside it. Writing about the three-act structure of typical feature-length fiction films, Laura Mulvey (1987) described it as a threefold narrative that is fluid within, but that is ultimately conservative, where the first and third components are static and not subject to change, while the middle section can be as unconventional as it desires to be:

In the middle section, the drama and pleasure consist in the eruption of events that disorders the laws of everyday normality... this phase celebrates transgressive desire and organises it into a stylised cultural form: narrative. Just as the middle section erupts into action with disorder, so the end must integrate disorder back into stability. The rule of law closes in the space for transgression and disruption. (13)

She proposed that avant-garde cinema should aim to conceive of a way to end a film *without closure*, thereby allowing the transgression of the middle section to flourish into an examination of the mythology and symbology of a story. The narrative structure of *Caniba* appears to follow this threefold form, thereby aligning it more closely with a conventional form of fictional production than experimental documentary. By contrast, *Commensal* did not include any end scenes, or pursue any sense of narrative resolution due to the constantly looping film and video. Instead, it used the experimental potential and flexibility of the

installation space to simply hover endlessly over the interactions of Issei with his brother, avoiding even a hint of a linear, dramaturgical reading.

In their “Beyond Story” manifesto, Alisa Lebow and Alexandra Juhasz (2018) discuss the recent rise in widespread consumption of documentary films, especially in the context of the consumer-based funding structures and marketing of documentary productions (1). In this manifesto, and in a subsequent article published in *World Records*, they explain how, in order to meet an increasing dependence on “rubrics, numbers and profits”, the documentary industry has developed an over-reliance on the identification of characters and storylines, so much that “storytelling has become for today the unquestioned modality for documentary” (12). Of course, this is not to make the claim that documentaries with character-driven narratives are all commodified and lack political, aesthetic or critical faculties, but that more experimental and innovative forms of documentary are suffering from a lack of financial support and exposure due to this trend. This phenomenon, which a recent *Time Magazine* article termed “docu-mania”, has partly risen as a result of the success of stand-alone and series documentaries on streaming services such as Netflix, Apple TV and Amazon Prime (Berman 2021).

Lebow and Juhasz (2018) argue that this model’s over-reliance on character-driven storylines has resulted in a formulaic, narrow conception of what documentary is and can do: “said characters’ actions being arranged through a set recognizable spatial/temporal templates that cohere only nominally to lived reality given that they are arranged through a cause effect logic that does not remotely resemble reality as it is experienced” (2). The transgressive possibilities for artistic mediation of realities are being squandered in this market-driven climate of documentary consumption, and at the front of this erasure of possibility is an insistence on character-driven story and narrative. But, perhaps, this is not necessary. In their manifesto, Lebow and Juhasz seem to be suggesting that a new, experimental reality is

possible for documentary film. While this might come about, however, the realities of the marketplace as determined by/determining the desires of audiences are shaping the narrative forms that even arthouse and experimental documentaries are being forced into taking.

Erika Balsom (2014), on the other hand, has speculated that film or video installation by its nature has the potential to experiment with new forms of narrative: “The gallery space, with its rejection of start-to-finish viewing and possibility for multiscreen environments, seems especially poised to pioneer the creation of these new narrative forms that might integrate experimental strategies and problematise closure” (162). By avoiding closure, the image of the criminal created by *Commensal* was not tidily dismissed at the end. In contrast to *Caniba*, the installation version seems a closer fit to the filmmakers’ aspiration to produce an aesthetic that “does not necessarily clarify, or leave one with the illusion of ‘understanding’ everyday experience” (MacDonald 2015, 142). Closure, as an established element of a conventional narrative, creates an order within the experience of watching *Caniba*, ultimately returning the audience from their anxiety to a safe sense of stability based on a collective moral judgement of guilt. Instead of suggesting that there may be a life outside of (and after) the film for Issei Sagawa, which the audience must imagine as the characters walk away from the camera lens, the image of the crime, the abnormal desire that prompted it, and the reciprocal arrangement of trust between the brothers remain fixed and without development in the installation. Unlike *Caniba*, *Commensal* avoids the trap of becoming just another story.

2.5 Conclusion

When I visited *Commensal* in 2017, I was familiar with the prior work of the Sensory Ethnography Laboratory. My intuition on seeing the installation was that it was the best

example of what the experience of a work of sensory ethnography filmmaking, as I understood it, could achieve. The release of the feature-length documentary compiled from the same material provided the rare opportunity of a direct comparison with the installation. Comparing *Commensal* to *Caniba* confirmed my intuition, and also allowed me to ask about the potential of the installation space as a medium for nonfiction and documentary films – in particular, films that are made with the intention of actively communicating by sensory experience rather than by orally, visually and narratively descriptive means. My analysis of the experience of *Commensal* at documenta 14, and the particular elements of the contemporary art installation space, revealed that it is more often than not a space of embodied experience, due to its intentional innovation of form and agency of spectatorship. The unique conditions of the experience of the installation space, within the context of its architecture and the socio-historic meanings created by the exhibition and the city, create a new type of experience of a nonfiction work, one that has the genuine potential to subvert the expectation that must carry a semblance of “knowing reality really”, to again use Elizabeth Cowie’s words. As I have described, the meanings created by *Commensal* are clearly different by those created by *Caniba*. While the former can be considered as an experience of subjectively being in the presence of Issei Sagawa and his brother Jun, in their apparent psychological diversions from the norm and their intimate familial relationship, the latter can be described, conversely, as a story about a man who committed a heinous crime and who carries on indulging in his fetishes while living with his brother in a small apartment. The narrative order of *Caniba*, its packaging as a documentary and the conditions for its experience by an audience either in a cinema auditorium or on a domestic television screen determine that it is read in a different way.

By presenting the “complicated” story of Issei Sagawa *both* as conventional documentary and contemporary art installation, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel

have inadvertently confirmed the radical potential of the video installation space for nonfiction filmmaking. Of course, the economies of distribution of moving-image artworks and experimental cinema make it impossible for a larger audience to experience *Commensal* as I did in Kassel in 2017; all the while, we can now consider the installation at Tofufabrik as an example of a successful experiment of sensory nonfiction presentation that revealed the potential for this use of such spaces on a more widespread scale.

Chapter Three: Performative Feedback Filmmaking

3.1 Introduction

The two previous chapters have laid down the two fundamental principles that guided and informed the development of the Performative Feedback Filmmaking methodology that I put into practice in the field between 2019 and 2022. The research that informed Chapter One's investigation of the ethically motivated, participatory methods used by Jean Rouch in the late 1950s and early 60s, and how participatory methodologies have been used by contemporary artists from the 1990s, was directly applied to the observational filmmaking and feedback processes that I employed over three years of fieldwork with the Clonakilty GAA community. Rather than blindly engage in an optimistic effort to engage this community in a fully participatory and democratic process in an attempt to avoid ethical complications and the possibility of exploitation, this research allowed me to understand the nuanced complications of utopian artistic aspirations. It allowed me to access some of the myths and unfounded claims of ethnographic filmmaking methods, but also identifying instances in the ethnographic filmmaking of Jean Rouch, the participatory art practices of Jeremy Deller, and the documentary filmmaking practices of Steven Eastwood and Lucy Parker, among others, where creative use of subject participation was pivotal in avoiding the ethical pitfalls that so many documentary and ethnographic films can find themselves falling into. This research began during the early stages of my filmmaking fieldwork and it directly informed my practice as it progressed over the next two-and-a-half years.

Through a comparative analysis of two very different forms of essentially the same work, the video and sound installation *Commensal* and the feature-length documentary *Caniba* by V er ena Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, the research I engaged in for Chapter

Two was foundational in the development of the video installation that served as the public outcome of my fieldwork. It became very important early on in my research to give equal consideration to the presentation of exhibition as to the production of this work. Chapter Two investigates how the context for presentation of nonfiction film and video can influence the meaning of the works themselves. It concludes that site-specific installation can more readily create a context for documentary video that accentuates experience over narrative. In developing the Performative Feedback Filmmaking methodology, I aimed to avoid imposing an editorial narrative on the material that I filmed, and instead intended that certain feedback processes that were put in place would determine how the piece was to be finally edited and presented. A version of this research has since been published in the *Studies in Documentary Film* journal (Holly 2022).

What follows in this chapter is a description of how the research that was carried out for Chapter One and Chapter Two was applied and integrated into my participatory filmmaking and exhibition practices between 2019 and 2022, and an explanation of the specific conditions of these practices. Some of this this chapter has been compiled from a combination of early research on the GAA, its function and position in Irish society, and the aesthetics that define it as a cultural phenomenon. After every meeting or video shoot that I had with members of Clonakilty GAA Club I wrote a journal entry, which described what had happened in as much details as possible, my reflections on the progress of my project and personal observations of my efforts to integrate in the community. As a result, and in contrast to the previous two chapters, much of this chapter is written from a personal and reflective point of view. This style of writing derives directly from the written observations in my journals and reflects the observational and contingent filmmaking methodology that I employed in my fieldwork, which itself borrows heavily from ethnographic field practices. At the same time, it provides a personal and subjective point of view on my sometimes-difficult

attempts to integrate with the Clonakilty GAA Community. This point of view is crucial to a path to describing the effect of the unanticipated difficulties in applying a methodology based on firm theoretical principles and combinations of artistic practices to working with a community in the field. In the following description of my interactions with the Clonakilty GAA Community, all names and identities have been anonymised.

3.2 The GAA community

In his visual anthropological study of The Doon School, a boys-only boarding school in India between 1997 and 2000, David MacDougall (2005) employed an approach that endeavoured to use sound and moving images to focus on the “social aesthetics” of that place and its community (95). The aesthetics of a place of living and working such as a boarding school, modelled on the English public school system, can play an important part in the design and function of the community itself, and in the social interplay that defines it. MacDougall identified various aesthetic elements within the school that could, when considered visually, serve as an alternative way to represent social experience (95). One example he focused on were school uniforms and the functions that they served in the school as markers of grade and social position, as indicators of social relationships, as symbols of discipline and power, and as spaces of subtle articulations of individualism (110). This filming of social aesthetics at the boarding school for MacDougall then relied on considerations of certain symbolic visual elements such as school uniforms, study desks, tableware and eating utensils, and how the social life of the place was expressed through them. Filming social aesthetics came to define MacDougall’s visual methodology in making the *Doon School Quintet* (2004) and it demonstrated how effective the technologies of film and sound recording can be in anthropological study.

Having grown up in rural Ireland I was very familiar with the Gaelic Athletic Association and with the importance that it has in the social life of rural communities. Another factor of the Gaelic Athletic Association that make it a compelling subject for a visual study is the specific and unique aesthetic design of that community, which in many ways has come to define its presence in the broader social life of Ireland and Irish communities abroad. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was formed in 1884 as a cultural and sporting organisation, and its formation coincided with a movement to reimagine and revive Gaelic literature and language as a counter-hegemonic force against the cultural and political influence that the continued British colonial system was having on Ireland (Hughes & Hassan 2015, 5). The three sports that the GAA organises are Gaelic football, played on a field with a large ball between teams of fifteen players a side, hurling, which is played with sticks, or “hurls” and a small ball or “sliotar”, also on a field between teams of fifteen players, and handball, played in an outdoor court between two players using a small ball. At the national level, the GAA organises hugely popular inter-county games championships which are attended by thousands and often watched on television by millions. These national competitions are most often the focus of the sports reporting on GAA activities, but the local or “club” organisational structures are the core of the impact that the GAA has on everyday Irish society. Despite there having been an increasing interest in female-played Gaelic games in Ireland over the last decade, all the players of all teams both on the local and national levels under the official GAA organisation are men. The female sports are organised by separate but affiliated organisations: The Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA) and The Camogie Association. The players and teams from these organisations share facilities and equipment with the GAA players, but even though talks and negotiations have been taking place to organise both the male and female sports under the GAA banner, as of early 2023 these originations remain separate.

Today, there are over 2,200 GAA clubs across the thirty-two counties of the Island of Ireland: it is rare to find a rural town or village that does not have a GAA presence and, in many cases, “the club” is at the centre of the local social, cultural and sporting life. The organisation has a membership of almost one million worldwide. The success of the GAA as an organisation on the local or club level is due to several factors, including its institution as a non-professional, volunteer-run organisation. All organisational and official roles are voluntary, and players are prohibited from receiving payments or remuneration by penalty of expulsion from the organisation. Children as young as seven- or eight-years old begin training as part of football or hurling teams in summer camps which are organised by the local club and run by local parents, and the programmes of play span the generations through to senior (adult) teams, which are the focus of regionally organised intercommunity competitions (Gaelic Athletic Association 2019, 4). Additionally, much of the success of the GAA on a local level can be attributed to its alignment with other institutions within Irish civil society, such as the education system and Catholic schools, regional and municipal administrations and the Catholic Church, from which it takes its lines of delineation between clubs along parish lines (Hughes & Hassan 2015, 5). According to official GAA guidelines, a player may only represent the club from the area that they are permanently living in (Gaelic Athletic Association 2019, 72). This rule, anecdotally known as the “parish rule”, encourages longstanding intergenerational club loyalty, as well as often fierce sporting rivalries between local communities. As a result of the institutional affiliations and a focus on a consolidation of national and local identities, the GAA has come to serve as what Lynette Hughes and David Hassan (2015) called “an ideological apparatus to reinforce further and reinstate a distinctively Irish nationalist way of life” (5). The playing of sports at all levels is the front-facing and most visible element of that community, however a GAA club’s activities pervade many aspects of the social life of an Irish community through fundraising activities (often in

association with the local Catholic church, hotels and pubs and local businesses) which provide sponsorship and other supports to the club, and the opening of the club facilities to the public for physical activities and other uses.

3.3 Identifying a “local aesthetic”

To begin to define an aesthetic of the GAA that would form the focus of my visual representation the most obvious starting point was a certain type of clothing that has become closely associated with the organisation and its activities on both local and national levels. In recent years, the GAA has successfully branded a clothing line through a long-standing collaboration with Irish clothing manufacturer O’Neills (Nugent 2016). Comprising of playwear including jerseys with club or county colours and crests, shorts, tee shirts and casual wear such as tracksuits, sweaters and hoodies, this line of clothing has become a common sight in Ireland both in and around GAA clubs and communities as well as in everyday life, where the wearing of GAA clothes has become a performative marker of Irish identity as articulated by the GAA. The GAA/O’Neills clothing line serves both a functional and symbolic function within the community, however, unlike the example of the school uniform that MacDougall focused on in his study of the Doon School, it only identifies an association to that community and not a position within a hierarchy. The organisational and managerial structures of a GAA club are unlike those of hierarchical systems such as schools and religious organisations as they are constitutionally based on volunteerism. Each club is managed by an Executive Committee consisting of the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Treasurer, Public Relations Officer Secretary, Irish Language Officer, Children’s Officer and other members (Kavanagh & Cusack 2021, 103). All of these positions as well as team managers, trainers and players are filled by volunteers. This volunteer-run and democratic

nature of a GAA club necessitates a large rate of participation from within its local area and this in turn creates a coherent and active local network of active club volunteers. As a result, the GAA has come to define itself as the single most visible and active community organisation in Ireland to the point where the very purpose of the GAA, rather than simply as a sports organisation, was stated by the former Director General Páric Duffy as “nothing if not a means of bringing individuals together to function better as a community” (Kavanagh & Cusack 2021, 103). The GAA is fundamentally a local organisation. Abiding by the parish rule, where a player may only play for the club of the immediate area in which he lives, means that loyalty to your local club is easily expanded to become loyalty to your local area. Playing for one’s local club means playing alongside neighbours, friends and often family. Ultimately, the act of playing for your team is also a means by which a person establishes social status and attains social acceptance in the community, and this locally identified socialisation within a GAA club along with the emphasis on the amateur player and the volunteer organiser is a process that encourages a culture of self-sacrifice and discipline (Hughes & Hassan 2015, 13). The 2019 RTÉ television documentary series, *The Game: The Story of Hurling* is one example of a documentary representation of the GAA where the importance of local loyalty and participation is repeatedly emphasised. In Episode 1, former president of the Camogie Association Joan O’Flynn explains that participation in GAA club activities from an early age is an experience that is socially “formative”, and that it is the place where most children develop a strong sense of being a part of a collective, and “not wanting to let the side down.” In another interview in *The Game*, former Co. Antrim hurler Terence McNaughton explained the difference between county teammates and club or local teammates as follows: “hurling with your county, you make friends with the guys, you’re invited to their weddings. I think the people you play with in your club, I think they’re the

people who will carry you to your grave, they'll always be there at the end. They're a part of you.”

Other examples of the local GAA team in popular culture include the twelve-part television miniseries *Normal People* (2020), which was set in a fictional small town in contemporary rural Ireland. The first episode of this series opens with the main character, Connell, who is a player on the local team, having a discussion with his friends about Gaelic football. Later, we see this character scoring a goal for St. Kildas, his local team. Afterwards, he is applauded and welcomed as a hero on to the bus. The premise for the series is the relationship between the popular Connell and Marianne, a girl in the same school who is considered an “oddball”. Connell’s character as a local GAA hero and his resulting social popularity is established early in the first episode of *Normal People* using various aesthetic and characteristic elements associated with a rural GAA club: an overlapping of educational/professional life with that of the club, personal loyalty to the team and the club, self-sacrifice, as seen through Connell’s willingness to put himself in danger of bodily injury for the team, the social rewards of success on the playing field and the O’Neills clothes – the local jersey colours, the club crest, the shorts and socks he wears.

My approach when working in participation with a GAA community would be to identify elements of what I call a “local aesthetic” that would serve as the focus of my filming activities. This aesthetic would be identified and utilised through observation of the interactions that members of the GAA club would have with each other, both as part of sporting activities and in other community-related activities, and by observation of how these people interact with the clothes, objects and facilities that signify the aesthetic of the local GAA club. These observations would be guided by conversations with club members about what the most suitable places or events to film would be, or who the most suitable person to talk to would be in order to access and somehow accurately represent the local aesthetic of

that community. My objective would be to represent the local aesthetic using video and sound, and then to present it back to members of the GAA club to elicit reactions. The representation of these reactions as part of a dialogic process may be the key to creating an alternative and reflexive viewpoint from which the GAA club may see itself, and an impartial representation of this organisation for the wider community.

In late 2018, I approached the chairperson of Clonakilty GAA Club in Co. Cork with a proposal to work with them on this Performative Feedback Filmmaking project. Clonakilty is a mid-sized town 54km west of Cork City in the southwest of Ireland. The GAA club complex was built in 2009 and lies on a nine-hectare campus in the townland of Ahamilla, 2km west of the town. The club has six playing pitches, two training fields and a walled court with artificial grass for training and smaller games. The club buildings contain changing rooms, saunas, a bar and function rooms, a kitchen, meeting rooms, a Pilates studio, a sports injury clinic, a covered stand with capacity for one thousand people and a small number of offices for local businesses. This large facility, I was told by the club chairman, was designed to cater for the entire community, and not just for the club members and players.

After a brief email exchange in which the chairperson, G_____ expressed an interest in the project, I was invited to attend an officers' committee meeting the following week where I would present my proposal to the group for approval. At the meeting, I presented my project proposal in as much detail as time would allow: I explained my research questions, my proposed methodology and the procedures that are required of me by the University's Social Research Ethics Committee. These included the preparation of a comprehensive information sheet explaining the purpose of my study, why members of Clonakilty GAA Club were invited to participate, and the consent procedures that I would follow with each person and group that I would be filming. I explained that I would not film groups or individuals who were under the age of eighteen because of the sensitivities of working with

minors; rather, I would focus on the senior sports teams and the procedural, social and volunteering activities of the adult members. I explained that all data and recordings would be securely stored according to university policies, and that no interviews or footage of individuals would be published or made public in any way without the prior consent of the interviewee or subject. Finally, I handed out an information sheet and consent form to each of the fifteen members at the meeting and asked if there were any questions. After a short silence, one woman who had been sitting at the edge of the group spoke up and, with a wry smile asked me, “Where are you from?” “Ballyduff, in North Kerry,” I replied, and a chuckle spread around the group. Though I had never been involved in the GAA community in my home village as a child or teen I was aware that my local hurling and football team had a reputation for being “rough” players. A certain amount of violence is tolerated in GAA field sports, especially between local rival teams, but the reputation of Ballyduff, almost 150km away from Clonakilty GAA was well known. The next person who spoke up told me that one of the officers was married to a person from Ballyduff and asked if I knew her. I did. Finally, I was told by the chairperson that they would discuss the idea and would let me know of their decision soon.

Even though the meeting was positive overall and the group seemed open to the idea of working with me on the project, I was initially disappointed by the response to my well-prepared and comprehensive presentation, but I soon realised that by asking me about where I came from, the committee members were demonstrating what was most important to them in making their decision about whether to work with me or not: in the context of a GAA club building, my artistic and academic credentials were not as important as my local identity. If I had been a researcher from another country this would not have been a factor, but because I am Irish, I must have a local affiliation, and this is what I would also be judged upon. The following week I received a phone call from G_____ to tell me that they would be happy to

work with me on the project. Soon after I learned that my mother had been visited by the wife of the committee member who was mentioned at the meeting. Separately, as I discovered over a year later, a well-known retired police sergeant from my home village with connections to Clonakilty was contacted for an informal character reference. At this early stage of my project, the local aesthetics of Clonakilty GAA Club were already becoming apparent in the simple interactions that I was having with the club, and in the actions of a national network of GAA members and family that were happening without my knowledge.

3.4 “A cold light”

The chairperson allocated the club’s Public Relations Officer as a contact person who would deal directly with me on my project. The arrangement was that I would contact M_____ to make plans to attend team training sessions, games or events, and they would contact the relevant person for me to liaise with. In addition, M_____ would contact me with suggestions of events that I should attend in order to make a broad representation of life in and around the busy club. My first arranged filming visit was to come to the first senior men’s football team training of the season on the evening of February the 5th, 2019. I was forwarded the mobile phone number of one of the trainers of the team, B_____, whom I contacted to make sure that it was fine for me to come and film the training session. After waiting anxiously all day for a reply, I realised that most communication about training, matches and most other aspects of club life begins after 6pm. The majority of the club members have daytime jobs and busy family lives; club life happens on evenings and weekends. When I arrived at 7pm the session had not yet started. Players were just arriving in their cars and making their way towards the changing rooms. I started chatting with a man who was carrying a net full of footballs outside the changing rooms, who told me his name

was A_____ and that he had been involved in the club as a player, volunteer and trainer at various stages since he was a child. After explaining to him what my project was about, he suggested that I make interviews with various people he named about famous games and players, and about the history of the club. I told A_____ that this was a good idea, and that I would certainly be making interviews later in my process, but that I was more interested at this point in the process in filming the day-to-day (or evening-to-evening) life of the club. This first encounter reminded me that when the word documentary is used to describe a filmmaking process, certain expectations are evoked which can ultimately risk limiting the experimental potential of the medium. Documentary, as Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1990) has written, is just a name that is given to one category of filmmaking that is part of an established corpus of cinematic traditions (8). This categorisation carries historical, cultural and socio-political contexts that cause the medium of nonfiction filmmaking to constantly “reflect back on itself”, eventually stripping itself of meaning (98). I realised at this early stage that, rather than allow myself the convenience of calling my work with Clonakilty GAA Club *documentary* in discussions with my participants, I needed to explain that this was a work of experimental filmmaking that might sometimes be called *documentary* or “nonfiction”, and perhaps someday might end up in the form of a conventional documentary. For the moment, I would explain that I was using the camera and sound recording equipment to do artistic research, and that the end result of this research would probably not resemble what most people might expect a documentary to be. This clarification was necessary; however, as I found out, in practice, perhaps unsurprisingly, this explanation was not always clearly understood.

Training was poorly attended on this first night. A group of about twelve players did physical exercises and football drills under visually pleasing floodlighting. I introduced myself to everyone who I pointed my camera at, either with a hello, or a nod and a smile.

Immediately, I became interested in the repetitive actions of the players as they supported each other in stretching exercises and ran in circles passing balls to each other. I allowed my camera to remain fixed on these actions and interactions between players and coaches for long periods. The sounds that my microphone recorded that evening were those of balls being passed and kicked, short calls and shouts between players, instructions being shouted by the coaches, mumbled conversation and laughing between friends, and the sounds of cars rumbling past filled with players from other teams coming and going to training.

My visits to training sessions continued over the next weeks, but communication had begun to break down with my contact M_____. I hadn't received phone calls or text messages from them and my emails either went unanswered or were replied to in brief and without detail. Consequently, I missed what would have otherwise been significant events and additions to my filmmaking work. Other events that were happening couldn't be filmed for various reasons. One event, an extras casting call for a War of Independence recreation at the club grounds in Ahamilla was missed because the producers of the film in questions didn't want the event to be filmed. Other events that involved underage players were off limits because of the ethical limitations of my research. In the meantime, I continued throughout the summer of 2019 to use my contact with the men's senior football team to film training and games, but I soon realised that my filmmaking activities were themselves becoming repetitive. By July 2019, all contact with M_____ had ceased, and I began to grow concerned about the direction of the project. In early August 2019 I received a phone call from the club chairperson, G_____, who told me that because I had missed various significant events that summer, they would no longer continue to support me with my project. During the subsequent conversation, I explained my position to G_____; that as I was not a member of the club community and was not privy to internal communications, I had no way of knowing what was happening at the club and when, apart from the regular training and

games. This was compounded by the fact that my communication with my club contact M_____ had broken down. G_____ agreed to take over the role of my internal contact with the club and during the conversation listed several events that I should attend. During a long phone conversation, as I explained my concerns and hopes for the work to G_____, he seemed to begin to understand the potential benefit of my project to the club, telling me that it might be a good thing to “see ourselves in a cold light.” My interpretation of this statement was that he was interested in how a representation of Clonakilty GAA club using this methodology might reveal a bigger picture about the club sits in the wider community, and how they are regarded in that community. In a later conversation G_____ explained to me that he wants the club (the community as well as the physical space) to be a safe and open space for the town of Clonakilty, and that a large part of his job was an effective public relations campaign to demonstrate that this was the case. This statement suggested to me that by allowing an outside agent to come and facilitate an art project that would eventually be displayed in public could be a reflexive opportunity for the club, ultimately enhancing their public outreach campaign. I began the following Saturday by attending a match that was hosted at Ahamilla between two external teams. That evening, I attended a fundraising bingo at Clonakilty Parish Hall where I was welcomed to film the bingo and the local fundraising lottery balls being drawn.

My contact with G_____ continued to be fruitful over the next months, and I was called to attend and film various events including acknowledgement events for sponsors and fundraisers and general proceedings on the club campus. G_____ phoned me one evening to tell me that the senior club members would be observing a guard of honour at the funeral of a recently deceased lifelong club member at the church in Clonakilty and that he thought it would be important for me to film this event. When I arrived, mostly elderly club members had lined both sides of Patrick Street, leading down to the church. Many of them were

wearing green and red sweaters (the colours of Clonakilty GAA) with the Clonakilty GAA crest, and all were wearing red, green and black armbands. I recognised a few people there, and in a short conversation with G_____ I learned that this happens for all lifelong members of the club. As the coffin of the deceased member was carried down the hill towards the church, the guard of honour followed on either side. I stood on the side of the street, pointing my camera at the passing entourage. From then on, my presence at Clonakilty GAA gatherings and events become more frequent and generally accepted. I attended the club regularly to film events, games and training and most of the organising members, coaches and players grew to recognise me. My communication with the chairperson G_____ became open and productive and I began to be asked to volunteer my skills as a videographer and photographer for various reasons. At one stage in late 2019 I was contacted to ask if I would be able to send a video clip to be used as evidence in an appeal against a referee's decision during a game. I was happy to be able to oblige.

At this early stage of the process my objective of filming a sense of the local as expressed through aesthetic elements seemed to be attainable, but it became important to further clarify definitions of this aesthetic and then to isolate elements on which to continue to focus. It became clear from my first meeting with the GAA club officers, and throughout the early filmmaking processes, that one of the main concerns that the club has is with maintaining a coherent and high-functioning community. Though this community is always open to new members and volunteers, a very important element of the interpersonal and structural relationships within the community was familiarity, and the process of obtaining this familiarity is informal, but complex. *Who you are* seemed to be just as important as *what you do* for the club. I noticed from all my interactions with club members, both on the playing and training fields and in peripheral occasions, that establishing local connections was an important part of the socialisation process. Even though I was attending ostensibly as

a researcher and not an aspiring community member, my presence at these various occasions was often greeted with the usual questions about where I came from and who I knew in the local area. In an increasingly globalised society, an attachment to place and the local area has remained an important factor of Irish social life. The attachment with place and belonging has been associated with a history of homogenous, isolated and relatively enclosed rural communities in Ireland, but despite the development of an increasingly educated and mobile population, this identification with the local area has persisted (Ingles 2009, 2). In his study on this continuing importance of the local in contemporary Ireland, Tom Ingles (2009) described the social processes that establish an individual's local identity:

In Ireland, one of the most common communication probes – after asking people their name – is to ask them where they are from. Place is seen as a major social indicator, of culture, class, nationality, urbanity and so forth. It is part of the multiplicity of signs that enable individuals to classify each other socially and culturally. It establishes similarities and differences and the strength of the bonds and boundaries that could unite or divide them. Among people born in Ireland, particularly outside Dublin, the initial classification is often in terms of county. Once this is established, strangers may be asked the parish or townland to which they belong. Finally, depending on the knowledge of the questioner, information may be sought about family relations, neighbours and friends. (3)

Almost all of the initial interactions with Clonakilty GAA Club members that I had during the first year of my fieldwork followed this pattern. Following this, I would usually enter into a description of my filmmaking practice research. One memorable example is when I went to film the after-training dinner routine in the kitchen of Clonakilty GAA club. For over ten years a local supermarket owner has sponsored an after-training meal for the men's senior

football team. Many of the team members travel straight from work or college to training, often driving for up to an hour, and so they are given a substantial meal in the clubhouse kitchen after their session, prepared and served by long-time volunteer C_____. That evening in late 2019 I left the training session early to go to the kitchen and have a discussion with C_____ about what I planned to film. As she prepared the food for the team, I had a conversation with C_____ about where I came from, where I now live and who I know in the area. It turned out that my next-door neighbour was C_____’s Irish and History teacher at secondary school, and that she knew of a couple of people from my home village. As I switched the camera on, C_____ began to proudly explain to me the deep connection that her and her family have with the local area and with Clonakilty GAA; all of her family members were “involved” with the club in some way. C_____ explained to me that, aside from her daily work with a different local supermarket (also a sponsor of the club), club activities dominated the day-to-day life of her family. As the team and trainers arrived to eat their beef stew meal C_____ greeted them individually by name, sometimes explaining, “Do you know Michael, he’s doing a bit of filming here for his project?” At that point, most of the team players and trainers were familiar with me, and despite my rolling camera they greeted me with “hello” or a nod in my direction. Rather than focusing only on clothing, objects and the corporeal factors evident in the sporting life of the GAA community, I found that the local aesthetic was revealed through these situations where the suitability of my presence was being assessed through processes of social labelling and identification. It became clear to me that, aside from my own participatory ambitions for this project, I was inadvertently involved in a process of admittance into participation in the daily life of the community, and that this process would have to be clearly evident in the resulting video work.

3.5 Performativity and auto-ethnography

As a research exercise for a 2014 solo exhibition, I organised and delivered a semi-fictional public history lecture named *Excursions and Visits to Places That Have No Reason to Exist* to a group of local history enthusiasts at St. John's Arts Centre in Listowel, Co. Kerry. The subject was a well-documented "faction fight" that had taken place at the nearby Ballyeagh Beach in 1834. The improvised civilian battle reportedly involved thousands from neighbouring rival communities in North Kerry, and many of the residents of this part of Ireland still identify themselves with the factions that clashed along familial and regional lines there in 1834. The lecture had been advertised and featured in local media, and attendance was at full capacity. In an interview I gave with a local radio station the morning of the lecture the presenter seemed determined to connect the content of the presentation with the fact that I had grown up within a few miles of the original faction fight site. My own local identity could not be removed from the context of this presentation. Using elements of historical record mixed with invented scenes and elaborated conjecture, I proposed to the audience that the historical narratives and records that have carried details of the event from 1834, upon which elements of local identities have been formed, could very likely be unreliable, even false. The feedback (both negative and positive) that I received during and after the lecture became central to my research for the exhibition of video and sculptural installation named *The Remembering Game* at Siamsa Tíre in Co. Kerry in 2014. What became clear during this process was that the exercise was essentially a crude type of performative ethnographic fieldwork which was designed to elicit a response to create some form of historical and attitudinal knowledge out of a tension between the expectations of the audience and the objectives of a critical artwork. In addition, the firmly held beliefs in specific historical narratives that were held by many in that audience revealed themselves to

be central to their own performance of a local or regional identity, as was my own playfully provocative interpretation of the historical record.

Building on Dwight Conquergood's (1985) writing on performative ethnography, D. Soyini Madison (2006) described how use of the "dialogic performative" in ethnographic fieldwork enables a level of cross-cultural interaction based on a transparent exchange of performances of ideologies (321). She uses Conquergood's metaphor of a "caravan" as a space of radical democracy, where meaningful cultural interchanges happen in a performative manner to propose that performance is a vital constituent principle of all social observation (Madison 2006, 323). One can assume that Jean Rouch was aware of the potential of dialogic performative ethnography in his development of "ethnofiction" methodologies in films such as *Les Maîtres fous* to *Jaguar*. As I began to work with Clonakilty GAA Club members and volunteers, I found that it was often advantageous and necessary to engage in performative interactions. Even though I was never a clear-cut "insider", the sometimes inadvertent and automatic need to be accepted, trusted and understood by members necessitated that I engage in social performances of my position within the typical social order found at the GAA club: Irish, rural and, to a large extent, working class. This performative interaction sometimes came at the expense of the suppression of my personal opinions and values. One notable example happened in early 2019, when during the first breaths of a conversation with a veteran member of the club I was asked the inevitable question: "Where are you from?" It turned out that this man had an acquaintance that was my neighbour and that both these men were heavily involved in breeding and training greyhounds for the sport of "coursing", the controversial traditional activity of racing two dogs in pursuit of a wild hare. Personally, I abhor this sport and the culture of animal cruelty that it supports. But on this occasion, I concealed my opinions and suppressed my values to avoid a confrontation that might compromise my filmmaking activities.

Bill Nichols (2001) acknowledged the role of performance in certain documentaries, mainly in reference to the behaviour of those in front of the camera, whom he called “social actors” (5). His “performative mode” of documentary was defined as a type of film that combines the “actual and the imagined”, where the filmmaker is using documentary material and actual footage almost as props in a deliberate performance but does not refer to the inadvertent or uncontrolled performance of the filmmaker within a social situation (2001, 131). Laura Rascaroli (2009) pointed out that, though social interactions within the context of everyday life are commonly performed in order to elicit certain reactions, the idea of performance is in some ways contradictory to the established perceived objectives of documentary film as an agent of truth (85). In the context of documentary filmmaking practice as dialogic performance the filmmaker becomes an active, and ultimately visible agent in the interaction. These normal performative social interactions become integral to the process, and ultimately, they shape the outcome of the creative work. I decided from early on to embrace this performativity, to acknowledge it as a central element in the interactions that I would be having with the members of Clonakilty GAA, and with members of the public at the exhibition stage.

3.6 The ladies’ game

On the November 19th, 2019, I sat down for the first time with the club chairperson G_____ to give an update on my progress and to show him a selection of the footage that I had made to date. G_____ was particularly interested in the “off-pitch” footage that I had shown him, including fundraising activities, the funeral and the serving of sponsored dinners in the club kitchen, and indicated to me that for “internal political reasons” I should not to include footage that I had made of a game where the senior men’s football team had lost,

knocking them out of the county championship that year. He then recommended a list of people who I should contact for interviews and made other suggestions about what he thought I should be filming. He told me that he, as the club chairperson, was very keen to emphasise the “community” aspect of Clonakilty GAA and that he would like me to show how the club contributes to the social and personal life of the area as well as to focus on the sporting elements of the club. I told him that this suggestion echoed my own objectives for the project that included representing the local aesthetic of the club. G_____ also told me that he had an ambition that the club become a more inclusive, progressive and diverse place, where any member of the community could “feel at home”. After a discussion on this matter, we agreed that it would be a good idea for me to film some of the activities of the ladies’ football team. Though not technically a part of the Gaelic Athletic Association, as already mentioned, the women’s games are very popular across many clubs in Ireland, and at Clonakilty I was told that they are given equal access to facilities and other resources as the men. This would be an opportunity for me to depart from the traditional and seemingly conservative male-dominated image of the GAA to show how a new and alternative form of Gaelic sports is becoming more popular and accepted in Ireland and amongst the local clubs, and to get a perspective from an element of that community that is a relatively new entity.

In early 2020 I approached Y_____, the manager of the ladies’ football team to see if they would be interested in having me film their activities for a one-year period or for as long as their playing season would take. In what seemed to be a more democratic procedure from the outset, Y_____ told me that she would “put it to the girls” at the next opportunity and would get back to me rather than take a managerial decision which would be imposed on the group. After a few days, Y_____ let me know that they would be happy to participate in my project, and soon after I began to attend their training sessions. From the outset, these sessions seemed to differ from the activities I had observed with the men’s senior football

team. Firstly, “the girls” (all of them were of adult age but are referred to and mostly refer to themselves as “the girls”) were often found training on the side fields which are leased from a local farmer, rather than the main, floodlit field. On one specific darkening winter evening in early 2020 I observed the men’s senior team were training under floodlights on the main field while the ladies’ team was training on the farmer’s field adjacent. When the men had finished, the ladies moved over to finish their training under the lights; however, the lights were switched off after ten minutes. Despite this, the ladies never expressed any complaints or dissent to me and, on the contrary, often described how they felt as equals to the other teams. In these early days filming with “the girls”, my observations were that their position at the club was different from the men’s – they were not offered a post-training meal and, in general, seemed to have less status than the male teams. This did change somewhat later in the season after a series of successful wins for the ladies.

From the beginning, my experience filming with the ladies’ team was very different from that with the men. They seemed to be less conscious of my presence there, were more friendly to me and, notably, my conversations with them and their trainers seldom focused on establishing my local credentials as it often did with the other more established teams. In general, I felt more comfortable being around the ladies and talking to them about my project.

In March 2020 the Irish Government introduced measures to restrict the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Large outdoor gatherings were banned, so for Gaelic football and hurling teams this meant that only essential personnel (players, trainers, management and match officials) were allowed to attend games and training. As spectators were not allowed to attend the games, my solution to the problem in front of me was to volunteer my services to live-stream games for the ladies’ football team – they accepted gladly. Over the next seven months I followed the ladies’ team through every game and many training sessions of a successful county championship campaign, live streaming the games on their Facebook page,

often with more than five hundred people watching. This experience brought me closer to the team and the trainers – my contribution was hugely appreciated, and I began to be accepted as a part of the team effort. An appreciative Y_____ passed my number around to other teams at Clonakilty GAA and elsewhere, and by May 2020 I was being regularly asked to live-stream games for various other teams at the club. I was able to shoot little footage for my project at this time, but the experience brought me close to the inner circle of the club – I was now “essential personnel”, a functioning volunteer, and my observations and the connections I made during this time became invaluable to me at later stages in the project. I was offered payment by various team managers for my services at times during this period, and though I always refused, sometimes I would later discover a banknote in my camera bag or jacket pocket. From that time on many of the people I met on the club grounds and at games recognised me and greeted me as one of their own, and for the first time I began to understand the benefits of acceptance as part of the community. This activity continued whenever possible throughout 2020 and into 2021.

3.7 Êtes-vous heureux?

My initial plan for obtaining feedback from my Clonakilty GAA participants was to install screens in the club buildings which would screen looping selections of footage for all passing members to see and consider before eliciting feedback on the screenings through informal conversations, email and phone communications and semi-structured interviews. From mid-March 2020, the club buildings were effectively closed due to Covid-19 regulations, and from December 2020 the building was used as the regional Covid-19 vaccination centre. My feedback process had to be modified, and inevitably I resorted to using digital communication. I began to create password-protected pages with selections of

videos on my personal website and send them to team organisers, officers and managers during this time with a request for them to circulate the videos to the team members. My objective of sharing my working process with as many members of the teams and club as possible was being achieved, but produced very little feedback, and almost no critical feedback.

Late in 2019 I had arranged a meeting in the club building with the then club secretary P____. This meeting was arranged as both a conversation and a filmed interview using studio-style lighting and a multi-camera and microphone setup that included both me as interviewer and P_____ as interviewee. Before the conversation started, I sat next to P_____ and we watched a selection of twenty minutes of footage that I had made in the previous months. The interview consisted of preprepared questions to provoke conversation about the meaning of the GAA club in P_____’s life and that of his family, and to elicit feedback on the footage we had watched together to understand if my approach in filmmaking fit with how he would like his club to be represented. Above all, I wanted to have an open conversation with P_____ about the importance of the club to the wider community and to him as an individual, and about how representations of the club such as were being made by my video cameras and microphones could potentially contribute to the life of the club.

In the funding proposal for the 1961 film that became *Chronique d’un été*, Edgar Morin explained the experimental value and unconventional nature of the film that he and Jean Rouch proposed to make:

This film is research. The context of this research is Paris. It is not a fictional film. This research concerns real life. This is not a documentary film. This research does not aim to describe; it is an experiment lived by its authors and its actors. This is not, strictly speaking, a sociological film. Sociological film researches society. It is

an ethnological film in the strong sense of the term: it studies mankind. (Morin 1985, 232)

Having established their simple but philosophically based research methodology, Morin explained the rest of their process and the questions that it was designed to elicit:

At the end of our research, we will gather our characters together; most of them will not yet have met each other; some will have become acquainted partially or by chance. We will show them what has been filmed so far (at a stage in the editing that has not yet been determined) and in doing so attempt the ultimate psychodrama, the ultimate explication. Did each of them learn something about himself or herself? Something about the others? Will we be closer to each other, or will there just be embarrassment, irony, scepticism? Were we able to talk about ourselves? Can we talk to others? Did our faces remain masks? (Morin 1985, 232).

During the production of *Chronique d'un été*, Morin and Rouch sent a group of young Parisians from various ethnic and social backgrounds out into the streets with a portable 16mm camera and sound recorder to ask passers-by the question, “Êtes-vous heureux/se?” (“Are you happy?”). The objective was to begin a series of experimental trials, where in the process of making these initial vox-pop-style interventions, the youths would begin to form an improvised filmmaking process, the result of which could not be immediately determined. Morin and Rouch followed members of the group as they went about their daily lives, often actively “performing” for or directly speaking to the camera, and additional participants became folded into the filmmaking process. The focus of the film’s production became intentionally tangential, almost to the point of being erratic, staying true to the

improvisational objectives of Morin and Rouch. After these initial stages, edited selections of rushes were screened back to the group of participants in a small auditorium at the Studio Publicis and the subsequent conversation, moderated by Morin and Rouch, became a debate on the politics of representation and the subjective nature of cinema. It emerged in this poignant conversation that the filmmaking process had affected the lives of some of the participants, and that they had altered their behaviour when the camera was present. In writing about the production of *Chronique d'un été*, Edgar Morin explained that the final edit of the film was heavily influenced by the concerns of the production company, Argos, and that all scenes including the Studio Publicis conversation were edited with considerations for the expectations and legibility of a viewing audience (Feld 2003, 250). Despite the obvious authorial impact of Morin, Rouch and the production company, the “feedback session” at the end of *Chronique d'un été* satisfies Morin’s assertion in his original proposal that this film would be “an experiment lived by its authors and its actors” (Morin 1985, 232).

In late 2019, and then again in late 2021 and early 2022, I held a number of similar filmed “interview” and screening feedback sessions with members of Clonakilty GAA club. These sessions would always follow the same pattern: I would arrive early at a space at the Clonakilty GAA Club or elsewhere in the town for the interview to set up lights, cameras and microphones, making sure that at least one camera was trained on the interviewee/s, and at least one more on the entire scene: the lights, the video screen and me as the interviewer. When the individual or group arrived, I would explain what the session would involve and then we would watch a selection of the video footage together, usually between twenty and thirty minutes. Each edit of this footage was tailored specifically to the interview/feedback session. Everything was filmed from shortly after the interviewee/s were told that I was starting the cameras, and I explained to them that I would show them my final cut of the filmed discussion before it would be made public in any way, and that they would have the

option of withdrawing the interview at that point. After the screening, I returned to my seat opposite the participants and began by asking them how they first became involved in the GAA club. After hearing a personal history, I moved on to more general questions about the community such as: “How is this GAA club important to the community?” and “Do you think the GAA is important to Ireland?” I asked all the participants about the footage that they had watched, and if they felt that it accurately represented their experiences. Finally, I asked all the participants if they thought that I had missed anything important in my filmed observations of their GAA club lives. Aside from these set questions, the sessions often took a more free-flowing conversational direction.

Many of these participant feedback sessions were made with individuals. I sat down with various officers, players and volunteers, always with different results but also always with some predictable answers to questions. Without exception, all the participants spoke highly of the club and of the central importance that it has on their lives and on the social and community life of the local area. All of them wanted to commend certain people by name who had contributed to the continued success of the club, both on the playing field and in other ways. Many wanted to talk about the history of the club, and about its humble beginnings, about how it has changed and adapted over the years, about the glorious moments for the football team. One memorable session was held with a group of ten members of the ladies’ football team and their manager Y_____ at a small auditorium of the local cinema in Clonakilty on a frosty Saturday morning. For this screening, I included a large amount of footage I had made during my year-long observations of their successful championship campaign alongside footage I had made of volunteers, fundraisers, social occasions and the training and games of other teams. The group was enthralled by the screening, and the subsequent conversation was lively and enlightening. They told me that they were so happy to see recordings of themselves made by someone who was not immersed as they were – that

they now had an impression of what it must be like for other people to observe them. We talked about the importance that the teams have in their lives and about how it didn't make them feel "more Irish", but that it did remind them of their local loyalties to Clonakilty GAA.

When reviewing and editing all these feedback sessions, I reminded myself of the questions that Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch asked themselves about what the participatory process of making *Chronique d'un été* might reveal: "Did each of them learn something about himself or herself? Something about the others? Will we be closer to each other, or will there just be embarrassment, irony, scepticism? Were we able to talk about ourselves? Can we talk to others? Did our faces remain masks?" (Morin 1985, 232). My next concern was to add an additional layer of feedback and discourse to the process in the final exhibition of the work that might reveal some of the answers to these questions.

As I was planning my methodology and beginning communication with Clonakilty GAA Club in late 2018, I contacted the curator and director of the *Uillinn*: West Cork Arts Centre in Skibbereen, Co. Cork, just over 30km from Clonakilty GAA club. I proposed to the curator to hold an exhibition of video installation and what I termed "community meetings" in early 2022. *Uillinn* is the largest public art gallery and museum in County Cork outside of the city and is a focus for experimental and contemporary arts practices in the Southwest of Ireland. Having had a working relationship with the centre for three years previous, I understood that a large emphasis is placed on community engagement with the arts through various workshops, classes and performances. From various conversations with the curator, I also understood that the centre and its funding bodies were keen to bring in new audiences. West Cork is known for having a generally culturally literate population and a large contingent of artists of various kinds living within 40km of the centre. Many of these people could be classed as what are known as "blow-ins": people whose families are not from, or who were not born in, the local area, and many of these people are British, Dutch, German

and other nationalities. Ann Davoren, the curator of *Uillinn*, told me that she was keen to bring more “locals” into the centre. My project proposal promised to address an area of Irish cultural and social life that was rarely the subject of critical artistic work: the GAA and, by doing, so held the promise of bringing a new audience to the centre.

3.8 Designing *The Parish* as a public, dialogic exhibition space

Uillinn was an ideal location to first exhibit my video installation made in participation with Clonakilty GAA for three reasons. First, it was close enough to Clonakilty GAA Club that members, players and officers could come and view the videos or participate in discussions easily and in their own time. The second reason was that the centre is free to enter and publicly funded. Clonakilty GAA Club is itself a publicly funded, public space (though perhaps reliant on a different model of public funding) and its management consistently reminded me that it was a resource for all the community to use and to benefit from. It was important to the participatory principles of my methodology that there would be the least number of obstacles placed between the public manifestation of my filming work with Clonakilty GAA Club and its members, while also opening up a space for viewing of and discussion about the work and the cultural community that it represents to the wider regional and arts community. Finally, *Uillinn* would gladly support my installation ambition and my planned talks, tours and events as part of their public engagement programme.

The exhibition design had three main objectives. The first was to create a safe, quiet and openly accessible environment where members of the public could physically engage with the video installation that I made in collaboration with Clonakilty GAA community. From various conversations that I had with members of the GAA community over the previous two years, I knew that *Uillinn*, West Cork Arts Centre was not a place that was

frequently attended by community members. My intention was to design a space that people could easily enter and engage with the videos without necessarily needing to engage with myself or gallery staff, if that was what they wanted. The status of Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre, as a prominent and visible public institution in this rural part of southern Ireland was centrally important. Uillinn has been at its current location in the centre of this mid-sized market town in West Cork since 2015. The building is the tallest and most prominent object in the town. When it was first proposed, the building project generated a great deal of local controversy due to its cost and potential impact on the landscape, but since 2015, it has become a magnet for artistic activity across the region (McDonald 2015). A fundamental mandate of the West Cork Arts Centre is free and open access to, and engagement with the arts for the public (West Cork Arts Centre). Publicly funded regional art centres such as Uillinn have two essential purposes; as an art museum that houses and exhibits works of art combined with a public education programme, and as a functional amenity which the community at large can avail of for all sorts of arts and creativity-focused activities. As essentially representing both things, Uillinn has the curatorial reputation to stand over the artworks that it chooses to exhibit as credible works of art, and a stated policy of engaging with the regional community in mediating these artworks.

My exhibition design for *The Parish* was directly influenced by this status of Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre in the community. Hence my plan was to create two main spaces of different but complimentary forms of engagement: a darkened, immersive video and sound installation where the visitor would physically and intellectually engage with the video works, and a second, dialogic space for meetings, discussions and talks, where the visitor might engage with the project on a more critical and discursive level.

When the visitor arrived at Gallery 2, they first encountered a semi-dark, carpeted “reception” or landing area with an installed video screen which separated the screening

room from a third space. The video screen played a forty-minute looping video of wide-shot scenes from around Clonakilty GAA Club, where I had positioned a camera on a tripod and allowed it to run for ten minutes at a time, showing constant human interactions with the buildings, fields and driveways. On the wall of this entrance space was installed white vinyl lettering with the title of the exhibition: *The Parish: Michael Holly with the Clonakilty GAA Community*. A screen in the corner introduced the visitor to the exhibition with a short text describing the project and acknowledging the participation of Clonakilty GAA. This space was designed to allow the visitor to acclimatise to the atmosphere of the exhibition; outside it may have been bright and busy, but this semi-darkened space served as a buffer between that world and the immersive or dialogic space within. A door to the right of this reception area brought the visitor into a darkened room with black walls and dark grey carpet for an immersive video and sound installation. The two-channel, forty-minute video installed in the screening room played on a continuous loop projecting a large variety of observational footage including games at Clonakilty GAA Club, fundraising events, training sessions and club members talking to each other and to the camera. The two projections interplayed the footage, showing scenes from the same place and location simultaneously at times. At other times, footage from very different situations were juxtaposed, such as when the funeral I filmed in early 2020 played beside images of a fundraising bingo at the community hall. At other times, one screen showed observational footage while the other showed reactions on the faces of club members, officers and players watching the same video during the interview feedback sessions. My first objective when designing this two-screen installation space was to disrupt any possibility of a narrative reading of the videos. As looping videos with corresponding speakers producing sound, the beginnings and endings were difficult to perceive, and the two-channel installation with simultaneous and alternating videos were edited to make sure that the experience was immersive and sensory as opposed to telling a

story of any kind (as established in my research on Chapter Two). A bench sat opposite the screening wall in the dark and comfortable room, which was designed to allow visitors to enter the exhibition without having to speak to any person. I hoped that this exhibition would attract a local contingent that might not otherwise find themselves in a contemporary art gallery and that they would feel comfortable enough to be able to sit and absorb the video installation in relative anonymity.

The tall, bright area of Gallery 2 outside of the separating wall at *Uillinn* has two vertical 5x3 metre windows and was designed to be the area of this exhibition where discussions might take place with members of Clonakilty GAA Club, other clubs and members of the public as they came to visit the installation. In the middle of this “dialogic space” I installed a 2.5-metre-wide circular plywood table surrounded by chairs. One video screen and a set of headphones sat on the table and screened excerpts from the various interview feedback sessions that I had edited. For the next six weeks, this dialogic space became my artist’s residency studio. My intention was to use this space to continue my work, including the initial drafting of Chapter Three of this dissertation, and to meet and speak to visitors to the exhibition as they came through, presumably after engaging with the audio and video installation in the adjoining room. The discussions, talks, meetings and conversations that were held in this dialogic space have all been considered as a further step of feedback for this project, essentially making the exhibition a continually active environment. Each morning I would arrive at the gallery at opening time, sit at the circular table and work, and as visitors came through to the dialogic space I would greet them and usually engage in conversation. On the white wall of this space I installed 2x4 metre black vinyl lettering with the following text from a letter that the founder of the GAA, Michael Cusack published in Irish newspapers in 1884:

We tell the Irish people to take the management of their games into their own hands, encouraging and promoting in every way, every form of athletics which is purely Irish and to remove with one sweep everything foreign and iniquitous in the present system. The vast majority of athletes in Ireland are Nationalists. These gentlemen should take the matter in hand at once and draft laws for the guidance of the promoters of meetings in Ireland next year. The people pay for the expense of meetings and the representatives of the people should have the controlling power. It is only by such an arrangement that Irish athletics can be revived and that the incomparable strength and physique of our race will be preserved.

(Coogan 2018, 210)

This letter was written shortly before the official founding of the GAA in the midst of what is known as the Gaelic Revival, a late-nineteenth-century revival in interest in Irish Gaelic culture, language and sports, and sets out some of the founding principles and values of the GAA, including the will to invigorate the popularity of “Irish” sports and pastimes, an Irish nationalist political identity, democratic self-organisation and masculine physical fitness. This text provided a starting point to talk about the position of the local GAA community in the wider context of contemporary rural Ireland, but it also provided a crucial “antagonistic” element. As established in Chapter One: Seeing Documentary as Participatory Art, a certain level of productive antagonism is a desirable addition to a work of participatory art – it activates discussion, avoiding the trap of the dialogic artwork becoming a “temporary utopian community”, or a simple harmonious reconciliation between agents (Bishop 2004, 54). The wall text was controversial, antagonistic, because in various cases its assertions were contradictory with the image that contemporary GAA clubs (and certainly Clonakilty GAA Club) want to portray of themselves. The club chairman, G_____ was vocal on this matter, as

were other members of the club, the ladies' team and members of the public. During my interview feedback sessions with members of Clonakilty GAA Club and Clonakilty LGFA Club one question I always asked was, "Is Irishness an important part of playing Gaelic sports and being involved in the GAA community?" Though I received a variety of responses, the most common answer was that it is not as important as being part of the local team or as important as being a part of the local GAA community. The text on the wall in Gallery 2 at *Uillinn* appeared to represent a set of values that, though still referred to in part in the constitution of the GAA national organisation, was not relevant to the local club, and in particular to the female players (Gaelic Athletic Association 2019, 4). The text also represented an image of presumption about the GAA that non-GAA people in Ireland (including myself) often hold: that it is still an insular, political and male-dominated organisation. Much of my experience in interview feedback sessions and in conversations with Clonakilty GAA Club members confirmed for me that these values are no longer relevant.

The exhibition at *Uillinn* was open to the public between April 2nd and May 12th 2022. I organised a number of scheduled events to coincide with the exhibition. On the evening of March 31st, the evening before the official opening, I invited a group of officers of Clonakilty GAA and their families to the gallery for a pre-screening tour and discussion at the exhibition. The event was attended by the then current president of the club, and two past presidents and their spouses, the chairman of the club G_____ and his wife, and several other volunteers and officers, many of whom had appeared in the observational videos and the interview feedback sessions. After the group watched the footage and interacted with the various exhibition material for almost an hour, we discussed the filming process, what has been a success and areas that may have been missed or intentionally avoided that would have added to the work. During our discussion the chairman G_____ congratulated me on the work

and expressed his interest in seeing a more conventional documentary made with the material, a promise I had made to G_____ and other members of the club from early in the process. I spoke about my work and process at the exhibition opening on the afternoon of April 1st, and again at a public gallery talk on April 16th. On April 30th local GAA journalist and author Ger McCarthy gave a talk about his recent book: *Cork LGFA: Game of my Life* (McCarthy 2022). This event was attended by a group of players from the Clonakilty Ladies Football team, the manager Y_____ and some members of the public. On May 7th, Irish photographer Paul Carroll gave a talk on his book of photography *Gaelic Fields* which showed landscape-style images of local GAA clubs all over Ireland over seven years (Carroll, 2016). For the duration of the exhibition, I spent as much time as possible sitting at the circular table during opening hours engaging with visitors as they entered, if they decided that they wanted to engage. Groups from the local primary schools visited on gallery tours and I asked questions of them about their GAA team, if they had one, or why they didn't play Gaelic sports, if they didn't.

At all the arranged events and during all of the informal interactions that I had with school groups and gallery visitors, conversations about the GAA community revealed a large variety of opinions and attitudes. On the morning of April 6th, I was sitting at the round table at the exhibition when a group of four tourists from Germany came to the exhibition, and after engaging with the video installation for some time I began a conversation with them, explaining what the Gaelic Athletic Association was, how it was formed and how it contributes to Irish social life today. They told me that, in Germany, the consumption of television, internet and gaming is negatively affecting participation in sports among youths, and they asked if this was the case in Ireland. Without any empirical evidence but with anecdotal knowledge provided to me by my experience with Clonakilty GAA Club I had to say no, that I was sure that the opposite was the case. On a national level and locally, the

GAA places a large emphasis on underage participation in Gaelic games. In 2018, the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study commissioned by Sport Ireland revealed that, nationally, 80% of primary age children participate in community sporting activities at least once a week and that Gaelic Football, Camogie and Hurling were by far the most popular of these sports (Sport Ireland 2018). Almost all GAA clubs in Ireland encourage children and youths to participate from a young age, and many run hugely popular summer camps known as Cúl Camps. A visitor to the exhibition on April 11th told me that, though he has grown up locally and has had plenty of opportunities to play GAA sports, he was put off because he thought it was "too serious". He explained to me that, as a youth, he was interested in physical fitness and sports but that the physical demands as well as demands on time and a high level of competitive pressure discouraged him from continuing his involvement from an adolescent age. There is evidence to suggest that this individual's anecdotal account of his experience with the GAA is not uncommon. In their 2015 study for the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Lynette Hughes and David Hassan argued that many GAA players both on intercounty and local level are effectively entrapped within a system that demands enormous physical and time commitments within a culture of "obligation" to the local team or club, despite the fact that all players by rule are volunteers and amateurs (Hughes & Hassan 2015, 16). They also cite a culture of prestige and fame, propagated by the GAA hierarchy that can be bestowed on a player either on a national or local level as a main contributing factor in player "burnout", which can lead to various personal and social problems (Hughes & Hassan 2015, 16). Other conversations I had with visitors to *The Parish at Uillinn* reflected similar reluctances that some people have when becoming involved with GAA teams. This issue of toxic obligation to the local club was raised at a conversation with sports journalist Ger McCarthy and members of the Clonakilty Ladies Football team in the Dialogic Space of the exhibition on the 30th of April. The

conclusion of this discussion was that this toxic obligation was more prevalent in the male sports, where local pressure from the wider GAA membership and from peers had been seen to have negative impacts on individuals' lives. They talked about how in their experience the culture in the female sport was "more honest", and that problems or issues were more openly discussed.

Estimates derived from an electronic counter on the door of *Uillinn* indicate that 2,368 individuals visited *The Parish*. A silent, forty-minute edit of the two-channel video was installed at the foyer of the Boole Library at University College Cork for two weeks in April 2022, which would have been seen by thousands of passing students, staff and faculty. The exhibition was installed at the South Tipperary Arts Centre in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary between the 20th of May and the 25th of June 2022. This exhibition programme included artist talks, tours with school and local GAA groups, and had an estimated attendance of over 900 people.

Conclusion: The Results of Developing and Testing Performative Feedback Filmmaking in the Field

This project was conceived of and developed under the label of practice-based research. As there is no single established method of practice-based research in the creative arts, I found it necessary early in the process to develop a working structure for how academic research and creative practice would overlap and inform one another. This Conclusion will describe how the findings of the two main strands of academic research as described in “Chapter One: Seeing Documentary as Participatory Art” and “Chapter Two: The Particularity of Experience and Spectatorship in the Installation Space” have each in turn informed the development of both the participatory filmmaking and exhibition strategies used in my experimental fieldwork as described in “Chapter Three: Performative Feedback Filmmaking”, but also that these chapters stand on their own as studies that address important and relevant questions in the overlapping fields of documentary studies and contemporary art studies.

Throughout the process, I have presented distinct elements of my research at a number of academic conferences and seminars, including a paper on documentary representations of the GAA at the Irish Screen Studies Conference in 2019, a paper on the “poor image” in documentary film at the Film-Philosophy conference at the University of Brighton, UK, in 2019, a paper based on Chapter One of my dissertation at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference online in 2021, a paper based on Chapter Two of my dissertation at the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies online in 2021 and a paper based on Chapter Three of my dissertation at the Visible Evidence conference at the University of Gdansk in 2022 (Holly 2019; 2019; 2021; 2022). As of January 2023, an adapted version of Chapter One is under consideration for publication in the *Moving Image*

Review and Art Journal (MIRAJ) and an adaptation of Chapter Two has been published in the *Studies in Documentary Film* journal (Holly, 2022). Therefore, the model for creative practice-based research that I have used on this project was put through the test of peer-review throughout, and designed to generate multiple research outputs, while also combining this academic research with experimental filmmaking practice in order to ensure a comprehensive and expansive study. Rather than writing this dissertation only as a summary reflective analysis of my artistic fieldwork, the first two chapters as described above evaluate and re-evaluate contemporary and canonical film works and artworks in order to discover and experimentally inform new methods of making documentaries based on ethically progressive, participatory principles.

Key research findings

In Chapter One, I analysed the methodology used in the early ethnographic film work of Jean Rouch, in particular his 1954 film *Les Maîtres fous*, in order to discover traces of what could be described as participatory practices. I discovered that, in acknowledging the inherent contradictions of the objective imperative of observational filmmaking, Jean Rouch's work can be closely aligned with contemporary artists from the early 1990s who practiced under the broad banner of participatory art. As a result, I applied Claire Bishop's (2004) concept of "relational antagonism", which was derived from the political theories of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, to the work that Jean Rouch did with the Hauka people on *Les Maîtres fous*. Bishop (2004) argued that for a work of participatory art within a community or group of people to be effective; that is to instil within it the possibility for social or political change, stimulation of dialogue and/or productive self-analysis, the artist, filmmaker or facilitator must introduce or encourage an *antagonism* within the project (54).

This antagonism feeds off of the often firmly-held ideological beliefs of the individual agents or agencies involved – it is a productive and controlled use of the energy created when opposing ideologies are brought together. Rather than conflict, which is an obstacle to productive dialogue, as might be induced when opposing ideological beliefs face one another in direct opposition, Bishop’s (2004) concept for relational antagonism instead has the capacity to stimulate productive, creative interactions, be that between the artist/filmmaker and the subjects of the project or within opposing group of people or communities (54). Bishop (2004) argued that there is also a danger of political or effectual impotency in these participatory projects; that by making the mistake of instead creating a simple “harmonious reconciliation” or “temporary utopian community”, such an antagonism cannot exist (54). In Chapter One I clearly demonstrated that this can be applied to Jean Rouch’s work on *Les Maîtres fous*, and that it also points out the important distinction between a work of art or film that is created by a single, authorial, monolithic authority from that which is created under participatory and inclusive principles. Participatory art, by definition, avoids handing over the power of the creation of meaning to one person (the producer-director). It should be inherently democratic, is planned and conceived using dialogue and discussion, and so the message becomes a polyphony from which the audience can derive meanings of their own. One important result of this research is my conclusion that, by virtue of the ethical considerations that must and should be taken into account when working with an individual, community or group of people on a documentary project, *all* documentaries involving human subjects (perhaps even all sentient subjects) should be seen as a form of participatory art – that all documentary makers must be expected to relinquish their power over meaning over to those who it has the capacity to affect the most.

The question of the ethics of the production of cultural representation is central to my argument in Chapter One. Chapter Two explores how public art installation can create

different meaning for documentary work to the cinema or home-screening contexts. In doing so, it acknowledges that a discussion on the ethics of cultural representation using documentary would be incomplete without an analysis of the equally powerful meanings created by the particular conditions in which it is presented to an audience. The comparative analysis of the spectatorial experience of V er ena Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor’s video and film installation *Commensal* at documenta 14 and their feature-length documentary *Caniba* revealed they become entirely different works in terms of the meanings that are created depending on their presentations. As core members of the Sensory Ethnography Lab, Paravel and Castaing-Taylor have spent over a decade experimenting with sensory ethnography, a kind of documentary that privileges how film can record and communicate in a way that does not rely only on intellectualisation or narrative. An analysis of these two works has confirmed that *Commensal* achieves these objectives by virtue of the conditions of the installation space: the looped, non-narrative presentation, the choice of site and aesthetic of installation, and the inherent agency of the audience. In producing *Caniba* as a feature-length documentary for cinema screens and home streaming, these filmmakers resorted to many of the tropes of conventional documentaries that are at odds to their “sensory” and experiential objectives. I argue that commercialised networks of screening and distribution ultimately necessitate formulaic presentation of nonfiction films, and that *Caniba* compromised its experimental ambitions in this way.

Hito Steyrel (2008) has written that, because of conditions caused in part by the privatisation of European state media, experimental documentary practices are becoming increasingly “homeless” (145). Chapter Two argues that, despite these increasingly formulaic and narrow industry attitudes to documentary production and distribution, the public art installation space remains essentially open to nurturing and exhibiting experimental documentary work. My comparative analysis of *Commensal* and *Caniba* in terms of two very

different audience experiences reveals that documentary makers can ultimately find more freedom for experimental processes in the installation space; that these spaces can be considered as laboratories for the development of new ways of making and showing documentaries. Chapter Two also argues that, because of this freedom from the strict requirements of conventional feature-length, theatrically purposed films, including narrative formality, conventions of length and the imperative to turn a profit, self-proclaimed experimental documentary makers such as Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel can find their experimental ambitions for more attainable using the installation space. This freedom of expression and ambition affects the human subjects of experimental documentaries also; their inherently complex representations are now no longer forced into easy narrative structures and character arcs – into becoming just another story to be consumed and discarded.

The application of research to practice

The research for Chapter One was carried out before and during the early stages of my filmmaking activities with Clonakilty GAA Club, and therefore my experimental approach, based on the principles derived from this research from the beginning of my interactions with the club members, players, volunteers and officers, was always to be open to contingency and to operate based on discussion and agreement. At all junctures and whenever a decision was to be made about the direction of the project I consulted the appropriate person, usually a person who was in charge of whatever group I was working with at the time. This person then would consult with the group. As described in Chapter Three, this activity continued with various groups and individuals throughout 2019, early 2020, sporadically throughout the 2020 to 2021 pandemic lockdowns and in early 2022, with

varying results. The most promising results of this filmmaking activity was with the Clonakilty Ladies Football team. In a marked contrast to the male teams, it appeared from the beginning that the female team worked on more democratic principles themselves. Y_____, the team manager, always consulted the team members using mobile phone messaging when a decision on my filming activities was to be made, and this determined much of my activities with the team. My own volunteering activities with the female team was far more frequent, and did not always result in any footage for the documentary project. Feedback on my work with this team was always easily forthcoming. At an arranged screening and feedback session at a local cinema in January 2022 and at a pre-screening of the exhibition in April 2022, members of the Ladies' team explained to me the benefits of the interactions that I had with them. In response to my question about the disruptive effect of my presence with a camera at training sessions and matches, the team members told me that after a couple of weeks they hardly noticed my presence; that it was only when I was making a direct contribution to the team effort through live streaming games or documenting activities for posterity on request that my presence was more noticeable. The team had used footage that I had shot for various reasons for strategic analysis and they appreciated having such a detailed document of an important (and unusual) year for that particular team. My conclusion from this feedback is that the elaborate approval, participation and feedback mechanisms that were put in place during the planning phase of this project had an important part to play in my social and professional integration within the community and resulted in an enhanced creative output that not only reflected my own creative ambitions for the project, but also some of the practical needs and requirements of the team, the club and associated managers and volunteers. In the case of my interaction with the female team, I conclude that the resulting video was indeed a collaboration, that control over the creation of meaning in these videos up to the point of presentation can be credited somewhere between me and them.

When working with other groups and individuals within the community, the results varied. As discussed in Chapter Three, the men's senior footballers are seen as the flagship team of Clonakilty GAA club. My interactions with the players of this team were far more limited, instead I dealt mainly with the managers, trainers and the executive committee. It was revealed to me in screening sessions with G_____ and other officers of the club that the management of the image of this team is considered centrally important. I was asked to not to use certain footage that showed the team in a weakened state or not performing at their best, and according to the guiding principles of my methodology I agreed. Though repeated efforts were made, the arranged screening and feedback sessions didn't include any of the players of the men's team, and as a result the conversations during these sessions were more focused on the evolution and progression of the club itself and its position in the community.

Another important element of the feedback filmmaking methodology that I tested in the field with Clonakilty GAA was to introduce an antagonistic element into the process. This element found its way at first into the questions that I posed to individuals and groups during screening/feedback sessions. These questions were designed to challenge assumptions about how Irish national identity is embodied and performed in GAA activities, but it was in conversations, screenings and talks during the exhibition phase of my project was where this antagonistic element was to become most effective and to produce most results.

The research for Chapter Two was carried out during the filming and planning stages of the exhibition and directly informed the filmmaking style that I employed as well as the editing of video footage and design of the installation. As described in Chapter Three, this installation became both a place for screening edits of observational, feedback and interview footage and importantly a dialogic space where discussions and conversations were provoked during events and by the video and installation materials. As also detailed in Chapter Three, many productive conversations were had during the forty-one days of the exhibition, but the

space had just begun to become truly productive by the end of this period. A conclusion from this experience is that an open, public space for dialogue developed during a prolonged collaborative process could become a valuable cross-community forum over a longer period, perhaps years. I am convinced that my Performative Feedback Filmmaking experiment has established that there is value in examining the possibility of semi-permanent co-produced, community space based on the principles of prolonged performative creative engagement, antagonistic dialogue and public access, and that documentary media can have a central role in such an endeavour. Public arts and research funding would have to be central to such a project, for as I have described, the imperatives of commercial filmmaking networks of production and distribution would simply not facilitate cross-disciplinary creative experimentation in this way. My PhD research project was funded by the Government of Ireland Postgraduate Research Scholarship and each of the two exhibitions was funded by the Arts Council of Ireland and local county council arts offices.

Aligning Performative Feedback Filmmaking methodology with research questions

Performative Feedback Filmmaking was developed as an experimental, creative documentary-making methodology within a community, and is comprised of various existing filmmaking and art-making practices and theories. The process was divided into two main phases for practical reasons: production and dialogic exhibition, each of which has been developed through research evidenced in this dissertation. The production phase of this methodology is in turn based on three core principles: 1) open, creative, performative and participatory community interaction, 2) the identification of and a focus on a particular community aesthetic, and 3) sensory ethnography filmmaking. The dialogic exhibition phase

of this methodology is based on the principles of: 1) non-narrative public video installation and 2) the facilitation of a public space for antagonistic dialogue.

My first research question when beginning this project was: What possibilities for self-reflexivity and empowerment do participatory, creative, documentary practices open up for a community? This research project has concluded that creative, participatory documentary, when combined with presentation in a space of broad community dialogue, has the potential to act as an effective impartial cross-community mediation tool. As explored in Chapter Three, Clonakilty GAA is a thriving community in its own right and also as part of a wider, national GAA community. The exhibition of the co-produced documentary representation of Clonakilty GAA at Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre became an act of transparent self-representation and demystification for the wider community in a way that would not be possible using conventional methods of public image-making through self-representation. Though collaborative, the videos that were made would never have been made by Clonakilty GAA themselves or by me as a filmmaker alone, but through principles of observational filmmaking, a focus on the local aesthetic and performative feedback sessions an entirely unique creative representation was generated. The results of this became clear in the context of the public space at Uillinn, which was activated during a series of dialogues infused with an element of productive antagonism. The ideological values of the GAA community were evoked, problematised and discussed in this context; concessions were made and understandings were exchanged.

My second research question was: How are the politics of cultural representation in nonfiction filmmaking altered through practices of prolonged engagement, participation, performance and feedback? In Chapter Three, I describe how my filmmaking methodology was designed based on these four practices from the outset. My interactions with the various members of Clonakilty GAA Club lasted for a little over three years. Without this long

engagement I would not have been able to develop a sufficient trusting relationship with Clonakilty GAA to acquire the breadth of footage and interviews, all of which were planned on constantly evolving participatory practices and feedback with the group. This long engagement also allowed the participatory element of the project to develop at a more natural pace, one that was dictated as much by my collaborators at Clonakilty GAA Club as by time constraints, schedules and availability.

My project outcomes demonstrate that the politics of representation can be radically altered by the design of the filmmaking and exhibition processes in equal measures. Using the analogy of documentary production as an *ecological system* as opposed to a process of *extraction* is a useful way to identify the difference between this experimental methodology and that of a conventional, auteur/director-led, narrative-driven documentary. I argue that the traditional or standard form of documentary-making could be seen as ethically analogous to the act of resource extraction and consumption. The model for the production of a film such as the Maysles Brothers 1969 *Salesman*, as discussed in Chapter One, could be compared to mining or mineral extraction: the objective for the film is set before production begins and therefore the task of the filmmakers is to go out and collect all of the raw materials necessary for this product for later assemblage into a saleable product without serious consideration for the effect that this activity has on the people involved. This “mining” is often driven by the objectives of one entity or a single person, auteur producer and/or director. A balanced ecological system, on the other hand, works because of interdependent relationships between the living organisms within it. Each of the organisms plays a part; all of them have their own needs and objectives, but without the support of the system in which they operate they are starved; if isolated from their own context they lose all analytical meaning. An ecosystem cannot be understood without observing all of the organisms living within it; it gives each of them their own meaning and function. A successful participatory documentary practice based

on the principles of prolonged engagement, performance and feedback can be seen to have similar attributes. Each of the components (the “organisms”) of my project with Clonakilty GAA club were necessary for its development and activation: me, as the cameraperson, project lead, facilitator and volunteer, the various players, team coaches, managers and officers, the wider GAA community, the university, the art museum and curator, and the public. As long as each of these components were encouraged to strive for their own aims as well as to contribute to the system (the project) as a whole, the project developed in an organic fashion. In another ecological conceptual parallel, I discovered that this type of organic development could only be possible if allowed to form at its own pace and with enough time. In Cizek and Urricho’s (2022) explorative book on co-creativity, *Collective Wisdom*, an organic, unrushed co-creative process is somewhat dramatically referred to as “deep time”; a process that reflects the timeframes that forests, rocks and cultures take to develop (44). Feedback provides a communication channel between components of the project much as it does between organisms in an ecological system. Initial feedback based on screenings to GAA club members and consultation with officers began the process in the case of my project, and feedback continued at the exhibition stage between various parties, including club members, members of the public and other agents. Finally, an ecological system can also be seen an analogy for a community, and therefore has its dominant ideologies, which are performed as part of an exchange and reinforcement of mutual values. This performance, as established in Chapter Three, is integral to a healthy functioning society, and therefore crucial to productive interactions within it. The politics of cultural representation are clearly altered by practices based on these “ecological” principles. What may otherwise have become a monolithic authorial voice takes the form of a more complex, diverse set of non-linear messages.

Summary of original contributions to knowledge

The presentation and chapter structure of this dissertation was originally conceived to reflect the structure of my practical working process. I decided that, to reflect my own research interests and to address an apparent lack of scholarship on the exhibition, presentation and experience of documentary film, equal attention was to be given to film production as to presentation. Therefore, Chapter One deals directly with the process of making a participatory and dialogic film within community settings and Chapter Two explores the dynamics of the conditions for the presentation of documentary film. Chapter Three was designed to bring these two elements of research together equally to inform a reflection of my fieldwork with Clonakilty GAA Community.

An important discovery of Chapter One was the conceptual link between the participatory filmmaking methodologies used in the early work of filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch, specifically his 1955 film *Les Maîtres fous*, but also his 1961 experimental collaboration with philosopher Edgar Morin, *Chronique d'un été*, and the participatory, socially engaged practices of contemporary artists from the early 1990s such as Jeremy Deller, Phil Collins and contemporary documentary filmmakers such as Lucy Parker and Steven Eastwood. Using the political theories of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau on the positive uses of certain types of conflict in democratic systems, this chapter concluded that the ethical framework for documentary filmmaking that Jean Rouch developed in the 1950s and 1960s determined a participatory practice that was fully open to contingencies and polyphonic outcomes, and so is closely aligned with the priorities of socially engaged, process-based and participatory contemporary art and filmmaking practices. These filmmaking and art practices take a participatory, contingent approach as a central, guiding

concept and reflexively acknowledge the subjective nature of the documentary record in order to ensure that the work speaks from several points of view rather than just one. Productive antagonisms, as proposed by Mouffe and Laclau, as adapted and coined by Claire Bishop as *Relational Antagonism* works in a way as to stimulate dialogue that further deprivileges singular or monolithic points of view (Bishop 2004, 69). The result may be that the process of making a documentary film or artwork then becomes a space for social change, conflict resolution, mediation or catharsis. This link is Chapter One's first original contribution to knowledge, and one that deserves more scholarly attention in the future. This chapter, finally, makes a proposal for a code of ethical practice, based on the discovery that all documentary films that involve human subjects should be conceptually participatory in nature.

After establishing a code for ethical, participatory, dialogic documentary practice as part of my research for Chapter One, Chapter Two continued by exploring the use of the filmmaking methodology of sensory ethnography, a contemporary descendent of ethnographic filmmaking as was practiced by Jean Rouch. As discussed, sensory ethnography is a minimalistic approach to filmmaking that prioritises observational documentation of sound and image over the descriptive, narrative or discursive as a primary means of communication. My analysis of the methodology of sensory ethnography was an important signpost in the development of my Performative Feedback Filmmaking methodology that was to be tested in the field. This practice builds on the observational practices of Jean Rouch and other pioneering ethnographic filmmakers such as Robert Gardner and David McDougall to use technology to craft a sensorial impression of a person, people, place or situation, acknowledging the limitations of textual codification in representing these things (MacDonald 2015, 374). Chapter Two quotes Lucien Castaing-Taylor, one of the loudest proponents of sensory ethnography and director of the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard

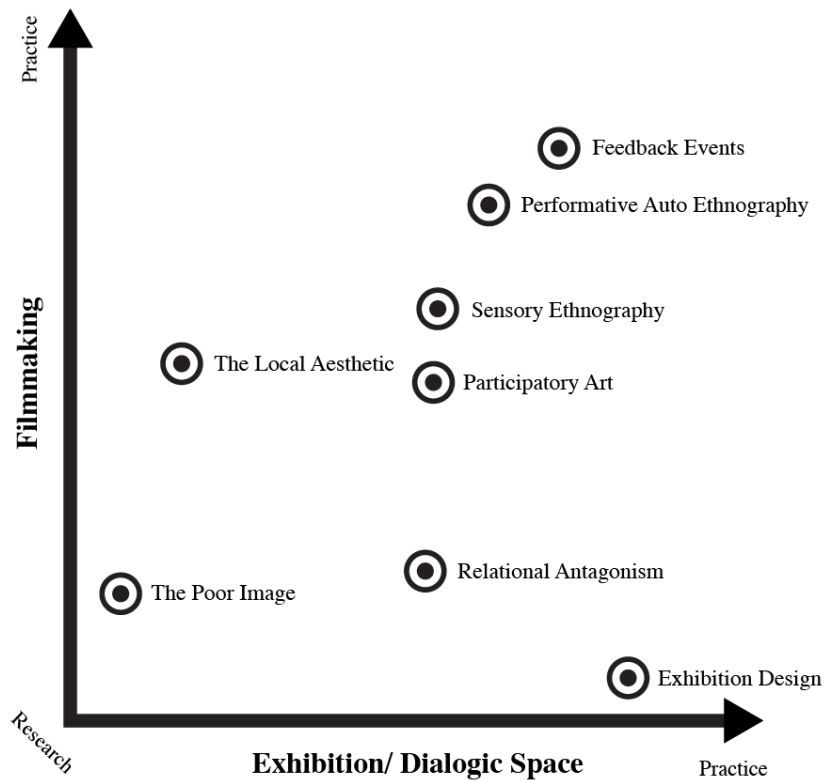
University, as he describes how as humans, we are essentially sensory, somatic beings – that we *feel* the world around us rather than read it (Peleg et al.). This deprioritising of language as a central element of documentary media is central to the sensory ethnography methodology. However, apart from a 2015 interview by Scott MacDonald with Castaing-Taylor on his installation works and a few other mentions, there is as yet little written about the audience experience of a work of sensory ethnographic filmmaking (MacDonald 2015, 393). Chapter Two comparatively analyses the experience of *Commensal*, a film and video installation by Lucian Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel at the documenta 14 exhibition in 2017, the experience of watching the feature-length version of the same content material, *Caniba* (2017) in a cinema or home screen setting. My argument uses this comparison to focus on the experience of a public gallery installation of nonfiction or documentary material, and how this context for presentation generates a very different reading of the same material for an audience. This chapter also considers how the installation space accentuates the subjective nature of nonfiction material, how there is an active contamination of the boundary between perceived objective documentation and subjective media in the installation space. This chapter's original contribution to knowledge lies in the conclusion that the gallery installation space is the ideal way for an audience to experience a work of sensory ethnography film or video, and it proposes that public installation can become a very effective laboratory for developing and testing experimental nonfiction media.

As discussed earlier in this conclusion, my intention was for the first two chapters of this dissertation to stand alone in their scholarly contributions, while also contributing a conceptual framework for my filmmaking practice within a community setting. Chapter One provided me with a set of methods of participatory filmmaking practice and an ethical code to use within a community setting. My research and conclusion on the use of productive antagonisms as part of participatory filmmaking practice extended to become a central

element of my exhibition strategy. The exhibition *The Parish* in the spring of 2022 at Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre, became both a site of video installation and a space for discourse, argument and knowledge exchange, effectively extending the process beyond the initial filmmaking and reactivating it in the space of the public gallery. My original contribution to knowledge, which was intended from the beginning of these studies, was a new methodology of participatory, performative, nonfiction filmmaking and exhibition that goes beyond the function of a monolithic, commodifiable artwork, and instead presents itself as a creative output with a contingent social function.

The development of this methodology began by identifying a set of artistic and research practices that could be combined to form a new, socially active documentary practice. All the disciplines and practices that I researched and/or put into practice are concerned with ethical, inclusive, participatory and non-commercial outputs, including participatory art, sensory ethnography, performative auto-ethnography, relational antagonism and the poor image. Each component has a separate function in the methodological development; some, such as the poor image were more important in building a conceptual framework and code of practice for the project, while others, such as Sensory Ethnography and Participatory Art, were central to research and practice, both in terms of filmmaking practice and exhibition design. The following graph illustrates where the various elements function on a scale between research and production in the development of the methodology, and how these elements overlap between the filmmaking and exhibition stages of the project.

Development of Performative Feedback Filmmaking Methodology



The graph illustrates how research and practice functioned as a continuum, both in terms of filmmaking and exhibition design, which, as already mentioned, are given equal status in the methodology. The following paragraph is a summary of the methodology as it has been established and tested through a period of practice-research.

Observational filmmaking using principles derived from sensory ethnography and the concept of The Poor Image begins the process. The initial direction and focus on this filmmaking are guided and agreed on by conversations and meetings with community members. In my fieldwork with Clonakilty GAA club this initial stage became pivotal in determining the direction of the project – I arrived with an open mind about what I would be filming and allowed the concerns of the club to dictate the process. When a substantial amount of footage and sound are collected, the first of the feedback sessions can take place. As the project facilitator, I compiled an edited selection of footage that was best

representative of the material that had been collected to date. At times extra footage was requested for viewing. The conversations that were had at these initial feedback meetings then determined the next stages of filming, and a focus on what I termed the Local Aesthetic was identified during these conversations and communications as a means to represent the community in video and sound. After an initial series of feedback meetings, the next stage was the arrangement of feedback/interview events, where footage would be screened for groups and individuals, after which a filmed semi-structured interview and conversation would take place. Once the final feedback/interview event has taken place the public exhibition is arranged and designed to have two main components: a space for video installation and a space for discussion, events and dialogue. During the exhibition period further events take place where the wider community and different publics are invited to view and comment on the video material. In the case of *The Parish* at Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre in 2022, these conversations, events and discussions over four weeks focused on the cultural and social position of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Irish society. In line with Clair Bishop's concept of Relational Antagonism, it is crucial in this period to stimulate debate that directly addresses concerns or issues that may not otherwise be discussed in the community (Bishop 2004, 54). One solution I devised to introduce a degree of antagonistic debate to the events and discussions at *The Parish* was a large wall text quoting a founding father of the Gaelic Athletic Association from an 1884 letter, which in a contemporary political context can be read as patriarchal, idealistic, excessively nationalistic and anti-British (Coogan 2018, 210). These events have the potential to be inclusive, informative and cathartic for a community and, as I have mentioned, they could benefit from a long-term investment in the installation, where conversations and discussions may develop into more formal interest groups or organisations over time.

Further research

I began my research for this project with an identification of the overlap between visual anthropological research methods, specifically ethnographic filmmaking, and the contemporary art practices of participatory art and video installation. My resulting methodology grew somewhere in the middle of this Venn diagram, and has discovered in this space the potential for a toolkit for inter-ideological and cross-community mediation through media and art practice. Having tested this methodology through all of its stages with the support and non-judgemental participation of Clonakilty GAA Club, I am convinced that it has the capacity for broader social and artistic applications, and for helping to address some of the most defining societal challenges at a community and local level. In line with neighbouring European policies, the Government of Ireland's 2021 Climate Action Plan has identified key areas of harmful emissions reductions and biodiversity improvement by 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2021). Many of these objectives, including the reduction of agricultural emissions by 30% and the increase of forested areas, are directly impacting traditional agricultural communities. Debates in the media are indicating that opinions are becoming increasingly polarised.⁵ Irish rural industries such as dairy farming, beef farming, peat extraction and plantation forestry are under pressure to mitigate against the effect of their harmful emissions output, to improve animal welfare and to shift focus to more sustainable energy production. These pressures are often seen as aggressive towards traditional rural values and ways of life in Ireland, and ideologically based factions are forming on both sides of this divide.

⁵ There are many examples of articles across the Irish print, online and broadcast media that demonstrate this political polarity, with publications such as *The Village Magazine* taking a pro-environment and pro-biodiversity position, while *The Farmers Journal* and some regional newspapers take a broadly pro-agriculture and pro-industry position. While these debates are often nuanced, this polarisation of opinion has increased in recent years under a government coalition of centre-right parties Fianna Fáil, Fianna Gael and The Green Party.

My project has demonstrated that representation through participatory documentary-making and exhibition within a community has the potential to create neutral public spaces of reflexive, but politically antagonistic dialogue. It has revealed that ideological positions can be challenged and softened in these spaces, and that they can be both artistically experimental and cross-community mediative. Further research may take place in the field of local conflicts over land use and threats to traditional agricultural practices caused by climate policies. This research would involve incorporating other creative processes and experts from other artistic and academic disciplines into the methodology. As demonstrated in my dissertation, the performance of local ideologies and identities through demonstrations of the local aesthetic played an important part in the long-term community integration that was necessary in order to facilitate the creative work, its mediation and activation within the dialogic space of the public art institution. Jean Rouch in films such as *Moi, un noir* and *Jaguar*, among others, made advanced use of performance of local and national identities central to his methods of cultural investigation. Performative tactics have also been used in the nonfiction and “parafictional” works of filmmakers and artists such as Abbas Kiarostami, Phil Collins, Walid Raad, Kiri Dalena and others.⁶ My next stage of research will incorporate the successes and findings of the Performative Feedback Filmmaking methodology with more advanced participatory performative and parafictional measures within conflicted and endangered rural communities. A further development of this methodology in the context of issues related to climate and ecological crises would also be in the development of a handbook for participatory and productive ethnographic filmmaking for an overlapping of anthropology and cinema beyond-the-human. Over the last decade, documentary films such as Andrea Arnold’s *Cow* (2021), Jessica Sarah Rinland’s *Blackpond* (2018) and artworks

⁶ Examples include, but are not limited to: Abbas Kiarostami’s *Close-up* (1990), Phil Collins’ *Bring Down The Walls* (2020), Walid Raad’s *The Atlas Group* project (1989 – 2004), and Kiri Dalena’s *Pila (Lines)* (2022).

such as Marcus Coates 2007 video installation of human-performed birdsong, *Dawn Chorus* have demonstrated digital media's capacity for having sensitivity to the perspective of the non-human and the other-than-human. This development of Performative Feedback Filmmaking would acknowledge the non-human as members of communities whose concerns can be mediated and included as part of a larger democratic artistic process.

A note on the project website

The outcome of the creative practice of this project was a temporary exhibition of video, installation and social engagement at Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre in Skibbereen, Co. Cork in April and May of 2022, and again as a smaller installation at the South Tipperary Arts Centre in May and June, 2022. While these exhibitions, in particular the first exhibition at Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre, served as laboratories for the public testing of the Performative Feedback Filmmaking methodology, their inherently ephemeral nature made the documentation and presentation of their results a challenge for the purposes of this dissertation. As described in Chapter Three, during various levels of pandemic restrictions between 2020 and 2022 the use of video hosting and sharing platforms such as Vimeo and YouTube became central to the continued operation of the feedback mechanisms of my methodology. While this methodology relies heavily on physical interactions and in-person discussions, these digital media distribution sites became integral to communication with participants with busy lives, separated by government restrictions and distance. Digital interfaces and communication became vital to the functionality of my project, and so the possibility of digitally representing the exhibition aspect of this project became an option.

I acknowledge that browsing a website is an inadequate substitution for being at an exhibition. A large part of this project was an experiment in creating an experience of being

at an exhibition space with a video installation, and then having the opportunity to engage in discussions with community members and the general public. Chapter Two of this dissertation argues this point in relation to the tangible difference in the experience of a gallery installation to that of watching on a personal screen. With this in mind, I decided that, rather than attempt to recreate the exhibition online, a website to represent and document the creative outcome of this practice-based project should instead illustrate and map the connections between the concepts and research that underpin the methodology and the outputs of the creative work, including video, discussion and installation. The landing page of the resulting website was designed to appear as a type of Venn diagram in flux, or a perhaps a constellation of potentially intersecting ideas and images of their outcomes. This page has eight elements with *Performative Feedback Filmmaking* as the central circle, which gives a basic description of the project with acknowledgements, and seven other elements, with connecting lines that illustrate how each have informed the other and how they have all influenced each other. This website is not designed to stand alone as a description of my project's research questions, methodology development, testing and outcome, rather it is a documentation of a process to be used along with this dissertation. It is a digital aid that attempts to make up for the inadequacy of text in describing what is ultimately a complicated visual, auditory and experiential project.

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