

# **Intimacy in Contemporary Digital Cinema**

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## Abstract

Critical discourses on contemporary digital cinema tend to be either overtly negative, framed within a rhetoric of loss or disenfranchisement, or unilaterally positive, celebrating the user agency and freedom digital technologies enable. Both these conceptual positions are unhelpful because they either focus on what contemporary digital cinema *fails* to do or what it *should* do, without examining more closely how it actually functions. What is needed is a third, neutral approach which takes both sides into consideration but is also aware of their limitations and weaknesses.

This thesis takes as its impetus Giles Deleuze's suggestion that, just like the cinemas of the movement-image and the time-image before it, contemporary digital cinema needs a basic will to art – a new aesthetic principle, a new function of the image, a new politics, a new representational potential distinct from those that have come before it. The aim of this thesis is therefore to establish this will to art and explore its ramifications for and manifestations in contemporary digital cinema.

Taking into consideration a variety of filmic texts from the 1980s to the present day which prominently feature diegetically recorded footage, as well as amateur film-making practices from the home movies of the 1960s to the video clips now uploaded to online media sharing platforms, the increasing relevance of home media in the reception of contemporary digital cinema, and most crucially the process of convergence inherent in digital media, this thesis argues that the will to art of contemporary digital cinema is intimacy.

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## Long Abstract

This thesis has several aims. In the conclusion of his *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Giles Deleuze suggests that, just like the cinemas of the movement-image and the time-image before it, contemporary digital cinema must have a basic will to art: a new aesthetic principle, a new function of the image, a new politics, a new representational potential distinct from those that have come before it. In many ways this statement forms the basis for my work. The primary aim of this project is therefore to establish what this new will to art for cinema could be and to explore its ramifications for and manifestations in contemporary digital cinema.

However, critical discourses on contemporary digital media tend to be either overtly negative, framed within a rhetoric of loss or disenfranchisement, or unilaterally positive, celebrating the user agency and freedom digital technologies enable. Both these conceptual positions are somewhat problematic because they either focus on what contemporary digital cinema *fails* to do or what it *should* do, without examining more closely how it *actually functions*. This prevalent conceptual divide presents a challenge but also offers a unique opportunity. It is clear that what is needed is a third, more nuanced approach which takes both sides into consideration but is also aware of their limitations and weaknesses – and

that this neutral position could bring an under-represented and original perspective to the current discourse on contemporary digital media. Maintaining this position is thus a key secondary concern of this thesis.

Although the term ‘digital cinema’ can be understood in a number of ways, a major assumption underlying this project is that *all* contemporary cinema is in fact digital cinema. Regardless of whether films are fully computer animated, filmed on digital video or on film stock, all films today are eventually edited and processed digitally. Moreover, an increasing number of cinemas have the facilities to screen films digitally and the vast majority of films are now just as likely to be watched on smaller digital screens as in the cinema. All contemporary cinema is thus digital in some aspect of its production or reception – so the claim that all contemporary cinema is digital cinema is not without merit. A secondary and related contention is that a number of digital technologies and digital media also constitute digital cinema. Watching trailers for upcoming releases online or a film on DVD in the living room are just as much cinematic experiences as going to a cinema is – and that they are inherently digital is self-evident. Together, these two claims thus allow this thesis to take a range of filmic texts from the 1980s to the present day, as well as amateur film-making practices from the home movies of the 1960s to the video clips now uploaded to online media sharing platforms, the increasing relevance of digital home media in the reception of contemporary digital cinema and the process of convergence inherent in digital media all into consideration when discussing the term digital cinema.

However, bearing in mind what is achievable within the scope of a doctorate, the primary focus of this thesis will be on contemporary films which dominantly feature some form of diegetic audiovisual recording as part of the filmic text. Focussing mainly on these films allows me to identify what the will to art of contemporary digital cinema is and how it manifests in contemporary digital cinema. Films which feature diegetic digital footage both reflect and reflect on how digital images and digital video have become part of our

contemporary reality and how we interact with them every day – they are thus simultaneously a symptom and an examination of contemporary digital film-making practices, both amateur and professional.

With this in mind, it makes sense to open with the technological development which stands between traditional analogue cinema and contemporary digital cinema, a format which all too often is overlooked by both critics and proponents of digital technology: video. To begin with, I therefore limit the scope of my investigation even further simply to the medium of video itself. The starting point for this thesis is the proposal that the artistic potential – the Deleuzian will to art – of video, in its historical moment from the 1980s to the early 1990s, is intimacy. I base my understanding of intimacy on a combination of Michael Herzfeld's concept of cultural intimacy and an adaptation of Erving Goffman's model of front and back stage spaces. For the purposes of this thesis, intimacy should be regarded as both a physical space, Goffman's private and more informal 'back stage' away from the public 'front stage', as well as a collective metaphysical space, standing between official self-presentation and private introspection.

This proposition – that the will to art of video is intimacy – serves as the basis for an extended analysis of two films from the late 1980s and early 1990s which strongly feature video, Michael Haneke's *Benny's Video* and Atom Egoyan's *Family Viewing*. What is immediately notable about them is that they both feature video only intermittently. That is to say, on the whole they both use film rather than diegetic video footage to convey the narrative. This juxtaposition of the two formats – film and video – has the effect of making their differences more discreet to the viewer. In both *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing*, video is consistently linked to intimacy and the potential of video to capture intimacy is emphasized when shown alongside the inability of film to do the same. In stark contrast to the claims made by techno-essentialist critics who assume video to be little more than a commodity or fetish, video is actually shown in both of these films to have positive

associations and thus a preliminary conclusion is that the unique will to art of video is indeed intimacy.

However, *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing* are both notably realist. This is problematic because spectacle, rather than realism, is arguably the most prominent and immediately recognisable aesthetic impulse of contemporary digital cinema. In film studies, spectacle has been generally regarded as antithetical to both narrative progression and realist aesthetics. This raises the question of how intimacy can be reconciled with spectacle. However, two more recent films – *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* – which both present the narrative exclusively from the subjective perspective of diegetic hand-held video cameras, demonstrate that authenticity and intimacy are possible within traditionally spectacular cinematic genres. It is this authenticity, coupled with an awareness of amateur film-making practices both in terms of the performances before the camera as well as how the video camera is handled, that enables the will to art of video to be reconciled even with a cinema of spectacle.

This would suggest that the prime function of the image in contemporary digital cinema is intimacy, at least whenever diegetic cameras are involved. However, merely using diegetic cameras and imitating the style of amateur film-making practices is not as straightforward as it may appear – both the diegetic performer's acknowledgement of the future space of reception and the actual uses of video have to be authentic for the representation to be intimate. So how can professional film-makers successfully emulate the intimacy of amateur film-making in what are usually thoroughly planned, scripted and rehearsed performances? I suggest that this can only be achieved by acknowledging the effect of context on performance in amateur film-making practices. The formal predecessors of contemporary modes of amateur film-making – home movies and home videos – demonstrate that the recording technology itself is not the catalyst for changes in performance; it is the performer's knowledge of the future space of reception that is critical.

*The Blair Witch Project*, *Cloverfield* and *sex, lies, and videotape* all demonstrate an awareness of the context of production of amateur film-making practices, while *Redacted* arguably fails in its appropriation. Ignoring the effect of context on performance, *Redacted* simply uses diegetically recorded amateur footage in order to make a political statement – and subsequently has nothing to offer in terms of intimacy.

Home media are another crucial element for understanding contemporary digital cinema. The most common way films are currently consumed is via home media, and foremost among these is the DVD. I suggest that because of the intimate context of its reception, the defining characteristic of the DVD is also intimacy. If the medium of video, amateur practices and the predominant way we consume contemporary digital cinema all enable intimacy, and that intimacy is even shown to be compatible with a cinema of spectacle, then it must follow that the guiding principle, the main function of the image, the artistic potential of contemporary digital cinema is most certainly intimacy.

It is increasingly difficult to separate the various elements of contemporary digital cinema and there is a key concept which describes this process in digital media: convergence. Convergence in contemporary digital cinema can be traced across two parallel developments, the convergence of the camera and the convergence of the screen. For example, *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* are much further along the arc of convergence that began with *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing*. Rather than just featuring video sparingly, these films exhibit fully converged cinematic and diegetic cameras – in other words, the diegetic camera is synonymous with the cinematic camera in these films. On the other hand, DVD bonus materials which extend the diegetic world while simultaneously associating themselves with extra-diegetic medial discourses reflect the convergence of various types of screens.

I suggest that through the process of convergence the will to art of video and digital cinema have become one and the same: intimacy. Haneke's *Caché* is notable because it

manages to contain almost all aspects discussed in this thesis within a single film: the intimacy of video, diegetically recorded footage, amateur film-making practices, the intimacy of their context of reception and the process of convergence itself. *Caché* is perhaps the most definitive demonstration that through convergence, the will to art of video and the will to art of contemporary digital have become one and the same. The conclusion of this thesis is therefore that the will to art of contemporary digital cinema is intimacy.

## Notes

This thesis was written at the Modern Languages Faculty at the University of Oxford. However, as the focus of investigation is contemporary digital cinema it is assumed that the reader is not necessarily a linguist and so therefore quotations are kept in English, where available through the use of published translations. All quotations marked \* in the footnotes are my own translations.

However, some key French and German phrases have been left in the original, primarily to acknowledge their originating cultural discourses. Similarly, in accordance with prevalent scholarly practices, all films are referred to by their original title.

The filmic sources used in this thesis, listed at the back, are too numerous to be considered obligatory viewing but it is recommended the reader be familiar at least with the following films, which are the primary focus of this study: *Family Viewing* (Atom Egoyan, 1987), *Benny's Video* (Michael Haneke, 1992), *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), *Redacted* (Brian de Palma, 2007) and *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005).

## Introduction

There is the temptation when writing about contemporary digital cinema and new media in general to emphasize the ‘newness’ above all else; to insist on rupture rather than on continuity. What has struck me in my research, both for this thesis and for other projects, is that there are two prevalent assumptions in critical discourses on contemporary digital cinema. The first is precisely this notion that there is a fundamental break between digital cinema and traditional ‘analogue’ cinema. The second is that this break is cause for either breathless enthusiasm for the aesthetic, political or representational possibilities of this new medium or instead for deep suspicions about the negative social effects and aesthetic poverty of digital media.

Every new technology seems to evoke these strongly opposing critical reactions. One extreme is a form of pessimism or even technophobia, derived from a humanist fear of technological disenfranchisement, while the other is optimism, manifesting itself in a form of naive technophilia. Exploring nineteenth century reactions to the steam engine and the light bulb, Peter Glaser has identified that neither position is a particularly new

phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> In his ‘Letter to Serge Daney: Optimism, Pessimism and Travel’ the philosopher Giles Deleuze identifies how *both* discourses are relevant to contemporary cinema. Deleuze suggests an interpretation of film history in which cinema suffered repeated ‘deaths’, only to be reborn each time in a new form. Thus he suggests the first period of cinema – based on his notion of the movement-image – is characterized by montage. Echoing Walter Benjamin, Deleuze implies that this cinema died – or rather was ‘killed’ – in the Second World War through the abuse of mass media by authoritarian powers, in both fascist and Allied propaganda. A new cinema was born from its ashes, based in his words “on new principles, a new function of the image, a new ‘politics’, a new artistic finality.”<sup>2</sup> A cinema founded not on movement but what he terms the time-image. But this new cinema was threatened in turn by a second ‘death’ in the latter decades of the last millennium, not at the hands of a political power but rather the power of social control exerted through the medium of television:

TV’s social functions (seen in game shows, news) stifle its potential aesthetic function. [...] It has found a way of producing a technical perfection that is the very image of its complete aesthetic and poetic emptiness.<sup>3</sup>

This more recent, second ‘death of cinema’ is the impulse for both critical positions on contemporary digital cinema. The aesthetic barrenness of digital perfection is clearly a justified reason for pessimism. However, Deleuze suggests that there may also be grounds for optimism; that there is an aesthetic potential in the renewed ‘death of cinema’ which may allow for a new form of anti-hegemonic opposition to those very forces of surveillance and control which threaten it:

the tense, convulsive form of cinema that leans, as it tries to turn round, on the very system that seeks to control or replace it. [...] Cinema ought to stop ‘being cinematic’, stop playacting, and set up specific relationships with

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<sup>1</sup> see Glaser 2010: 15

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze 1995: 69

<sup>3</sup> Deleuze 1995: 74

video, with electronic and digital images, in order to develop a new form of resistance and combat the televisual function of surveillance and control.<sup>4</sup>

In his essay, Deleuze illustrates that in moderation both conceptual positions are useful in thinking about the ramifications of yet another development in cinema. However, when taken to an extreme, both can be unhelpful and even analytically crippling.

So perhaps there is after all something new about contemporary digital cinema. Like cinema after the Second World War, it too needs to be based on new principles, a new function of the image, a new politics, a new artistic finality. Elsewhere Deleuze introduces the notion of a new “will to art,”<sup>5</sup> which I believe sums up all of these elements within a single phrase. But at the same time, I really want to stress that contemporary digital cinema should be regarded in the context of continuity rather than rupture. Crucially, it is still cinema we are talking about; hence why the title of this thesis focuses on ‘contemporary digital cinema’ rather than on ‘new media’ for example. So while this thesis will assume there is something new about contemporary digital cinema, I firmly disagree with the view that it completely breaks with traditional cinema and constitutes an entirely new medium.

In line with Walter Benjamin’s artwork essay, the question at the heart of this thesis is not whether the shift to digital has positive or negative consequences or even whether digital cinema can be art. Instead the question is simply what the new will to art of contemporary digital cinema is. I will argue that the will to art of this third period of cinema is based on intimacy. This intimacy is not just derived from the representational potential of video, its actual uses in amateur contexts and its deployment by professional film-makers, but also from the increased relevance of home media. It is increasingly difficult to separate all these various elements of contemporary digital cinema, which is why the concept of convergence lies at the heart of this thesis. By tracking technological developments and amateur and professional film-making practices over the last twenty-five years, I will show

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze 1995: 76

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze 2007: 255

that the will to art of video is in fact applicable to all contemporary digital cinema. However, before I go on, there are three terms – digital cinema, video and intimacy – which are central throughout this entire thesis and thus may need clarification.

### **Animated Reality**

The first of these terms is *digital cinema*. What exactly constitutes digital cinema and when can a film be considered digital? The majority of discourses on digital cinema tend to focus overwhelmingly on the ontology of the digital image,<sup>6</sup> and it is certainly a useful place to start. The key ontological distinction between digital and analogue images is the shift from analogic, physical to abstract, numerical representation. A traditional filmic recording is created via a photochemical reaction caused by light falling through a lens and hitting raw film stock. The filmic recording is directly transferred to and transcribed in the film's negative; the image therefore has a concrete existence in reality. A digital recording on the other hand converts the light into binary code – ephemeral ones and zeros in abstract algorithms stored in a chip's memory – and therefore has no actual physical existence. As Markos Hadjioannou stresses:

both technologies use the light reflected off the world in their processes, but where analogue representations are direct and isomorphic transcriptions, digital representations are conversions of these patterns of light and shade into abstract numbers that are assigned formal relationships on the basis of a preformatted numerical grid.<sup>7</sup>

Digital cinema can therefore be taken to mean both films shot using traditional film stock *or* directly on digital video – the reality of contemporary cinema is that even analogue film needs to be digitized and transferred onto a computer in order to be edited. The conversion to digital is inescapable as digital non-linear editing has all but completely replaced traditional editing methods by virtue of its low cost and the fact that the original negative is left intact, whereas previously it would have been physically cut and spliced. As Lev

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<sup>6</sup> see Prince 1996: 28-30; Manovich 2002: 406; Morgan 2006: 443, 454; Hadjioannou 2008: 125

<sup>7</sup> Hadjioannou 2008: 125

Manovich points out, from that point onwards “the computer does not distinguish between an image obtained through the photographic lens, an image created in a paint program or an image synthesized in a 3D graphics package, since they are from the same material – pixels.”<sup>8</sup> Once the film has been transferred to a computer and digitally edited, two more procedures can take place: the first is known as image processing, in which the lighting and tint of a shot, as well as the removal of flaws, can be rearranged; the second is the production of computer generated images (known as CGI), where anything from the alien locations and clone troopers in *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* (George Lucas, 2005) to the composite landscapes and crowd scenes of *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000) are created using 3D digital animation techniques.

The semantic complication arising from all this is that because *all* forms of digital representation, whether moving or still images, sound recordings and even written text, have the same set of signs – ones and zeros – as their ontological basis, the manipulation of these representations becomes infinitely easier. While limited manipulation of photographs was always possible through the use of different focal lenses, exposure times and developing techniques, the fact that all digital images are virtual – essentially mathematical abstractions – means that there is in fact no referential difference between the image as it was recorded and a digitally altered version of that image. As D.N. Rodowick highlights: “equivalence in space is no longer the measure of representation. [...] In resemblance, meaning derives from the authority of the original, an authenticating model that orders and ranks all the copies that can be derived from it. [...] In digital culture, the distinction between original and copy has lost its relevance.”<sup>9</sup> In short, when faced with a digital image, verifiability becomes practically impossible for the viewer – thus, the question of truthfulness becomes meaningless. In digital cinema, the footage that is shot is therefore no longer the end point but simply raw material to be composited into a final image in a

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<sup>8</sup> Manovich 2002: 409

<sup>9</sup> Rodowick 2001: 211

computer. As raw material it is treated no differently than computer generated images.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, because the ontological basis of digital live-action films has shifted, the relationship between different stages of the film-making process also changes. Two filmic examples illustrate this transition in particular: while shooting a scene for *Zabriskie Point* (1970), Michelangelo Antonioni was trying to achieve a particularly saturated shade of green in a field of grass – so he had the grass painted.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, for the film *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), the Coen brothers had envisioned a dry, dusty, brown look. When filming moved from Texas to Mississippi, the lush, green and wet local landscape had to be selectively colour-corrected during post-production – in a process not possible with traditional analogue methods such as changing lab exposure times or silver-retention, some colours were kept while the greens of the foliage were desaturated.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, rather than discuss this transition neutrally, the majority of critics frame it in a context of loss – the loss of the indexical relation to reality. While it is useful to be aware of the theoretical ramifications of the ontology of digital cinema, this thesis will not focus on the ontology of the medium beyond this brief overview. Though somewhat glib, the claim that *all* contemporary cinema is digital cinema is in fact not entirely inaccurate. Regardless of whether films are fully computer animated, filmed on digital video or on film stock, they are all eventually edited and processed digitally. All contemporary cinema is thus produced digitally. Of course, in addition to production, any definition of cinema should encompass reception as well. Here too, the transition to digital is more than evident. An increasing number of cinemas have the facilities to screen films directly from a hard drive via a digital projector and not from film positives. Moreover, the majority of films are now watched on digital screens in the home rather than on the cinema screen.<sup>13</sup> Whether on DVD or via online streaming services, the reception of contemporary cinema is thus just as

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<sup>10</sup> Manovich 2002: 411

<sup>11</sup> Manovich 2002: 411

<sup>12</sup> Prince 2004: 28

<sup>13</sup> see Chapter 4

digital as its production. We can establish with certainty that the shift from traditional analogue cinema to digital cinema took place across the 1990s. Though it would be futile to put an exact date on when this transitional period ended, it is safe to say that at present all contemporary cinema should be regarded as digital.

### **Video as Period and Practice**

The second key term used throughout this thesis is *video*. On the surface the term may appear self-explanatory and is commonly used in scholarly discourses without any further definitions, but it has a wide variety of connotations. I therefore regard it necessary to define my usage of the term more closely. Colloquially, video primarily refers to a number of interchangeable storage formats for audiovisual recordings. Video can thus be a physical medium, which can be further subdivided into analogue (usually based on magnetic tapes such as VHS, Betamax or Betacam) and digital formats (such as DVDs or Blu-ray discs), or to non-physical media, existing purely as data on a computer (for example, in QuickTime or MPEG-4 formats). If anything, this conflation only adds to the confusion and so I propose to define the term not in strictly technological terms, but rather as both a *historical period* and a *practice*.

Video was first introduced as a television recording format in the 1950s to replace film stock, which was becoming increasingly expensive as the sheer volume of television broadcasting increased. It was not until the early 1970s that Phillips and Sony began developing a videocassette format for domestic use but the technology was prohibitively expensive and as such did not see broad consumer adoption until the very end of the decade. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the analogue 8mm, 16mm and Super 8 formats were therefore predominantly still used for home movies and by amateur film-makers. It was not until video became more affordable in the early 1980s that it really took off – crucially, both as a storage medium for recording broadcast television and as the preferred

format for amateur film-makers. Though it is difficult to give a definitive date, we can safely argue that the historical era of video begins in the early 1980s and ends in the mid-1990s. Again, exact dates would only be approximations, but the introduction of the DV codec for camcorders (initially used in tape video recording but since the proliferation of tapeless recording now used on optical discs, solid state flash memory cards and hard disk drives) in 1995 and the DVD as a physical storage medium in 1997 suggests that the mid-1990s were the point at which the era of video ended and was replaced by the era of digital video, which continues to the present day. Consequently, when I discuss video as a historical moment in this thesis, the era I am referring to is roughly the fifteen-year period from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s.

I have found that many scholars, in their eagerness to celebrate the shift from analogue to digital cinema, often ignore this historical period and video's significant role in it entirely – suggesting that film-making practices abruptly became digital at some point in the late 1990s.<sup>14</sup> Instead of locating the origin of contemporary digital cinema in the era of video, they suggest that these practices and their corresponding performances first manifest themselves in the new millennium. However, in chapter three I will argue that the diegetic use of and performance to digital cameras is directly descended from the amateur film-making practices of the home video era of the early 1980s to the mid-1990s. Crucially, the now ubiquitous poor-quality digital footage by non-professional camera operators is totally unlike the professional-looking aspirations and static framing of the home movie era of the 1960s and 1970s. This aesthetic break, immediately recognisable in the unprofessional handling of the camera, resulting in shaky camerawork, bad focus or unintentional overexposure, is precisely what defines video as film-making practice and has its origins in the spread of cheap camcorders from the 1980s onwards, allowing for the constant recording of the domestic – and sometimes public – sphere. As I shall demonstrate later, the

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<sup>14</sup> see Ganz and Khatib 2006: 26

fact that the video camera has the potential to be recording at any time also affects performances before that camera. For the purposes of this thesis, when I refer to video as practice, I therefore mean precisely this phenomenon which results in that unmistakable unprofessional aesthetic and behaviour before the camera – regardless of whether it is authentic or artificial.

### Staging Intimacy

The final, and perhaps most crucial, term for this study is *intimacy*. My argument in this thesis will be that the will to art of digital cinema is based on intimacy – but what exactly does intimacy mean? Again, it is a term used by others frequently and indiscriminately, often without clarification as to which of its nuanced meanings the author is alluding to. The general consensus is that intimacy is primarily a condition of interpersonal relations. For my purposes there are two key theorists – both from outside the field of media studies – whose models offer useful insights into the forms intimacy can take.

In his seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman suggests a dramaturgical breakdown of every-day human interactions. Goffman considers all social interactions to be performances; that is, formalised modes of behaviour in relation to others. Central to his idea is the notion that when an individual comes into contact with others, he or she will attempt to control or guide the impression they form of him or her through performance. Goffman describes these modes of performance as the art of ‘impression management’, through which performers attempt to present a favourable impression of themselves to others. Individuals are less motivated by the desire of achieving certain moral standards but rather, as Thomaz Wood notes, by the “moral question of creating an impression of meeting those standards. This is a significant dramatic achievement and consonant with the contemporary use of the

Greek word for actor: *hypocrite*.”<sup>15</sup> For Goffman there is a clear distinction between the ‘actor/performer’ – who performs a role – and the ‘persona/character’ – the figure that the actor is trying to suggest. While this may seem an obvious observation regarding an interaction between two individuals, or a single individual with a group, it can also often be the case that a group of individuals will collaborate in a collective performance. This ‘team performance’ may be motivated by a variety of reasons but generally has the same goal, namely projecting a positive collective impression to an external audience.

Moreover, according to Goffman, all these performances can be contextualised in a staging area or ‘region’. The ‘front region’ or front stage describes the area where an individual or collaborative performance is given to an audience. Here the performance is public and aims to make a socially acceptable and favourable impression. In contrast, the ‘back region’ or back stage is considered a private space away from the audience; “a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted [...] where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude.”<sup>16</sup> Goffman also suggests that the back stage is where a ‘team performance’ is prepared. In Goffman’s examples, the ‘team’ is taken to be a heteronormative family unit – but of course it could be applied more generally to all intimate relationships, including those between lovers, partners or friends.

Goffman’s model is useful for this study because it allows a reframing of human interactions in performative terms – allowing me to analyse both the performances given by professional actors in fiction films as well as the performances by real people in amateur film-making using the same approach. However, his theatrical analogy is not unproblematic. Goffman suggests that the back stage is where performers do not have to perform a persona: “here the performer can relax; he can drop his front.”<sup>17</sup> Goffman’s

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<sup>15</sup> Wood 2002: 14

<sup>16</sup> Goffman 1959: 112-113

<sup>17</sup> Goffman 1959: 112

binary opposition between front and back stages would suggest that, for Goffman, the back stage is where the self – the performer when they are not performing a character – is located. However, he does concede that, coming off the front stage into the back stage, the individuals in a group (the performers) do not necessarily stop performing – after all, that group of individuals still constitutes a type of audience. There is thus a tension in Goffman’s conceptual model: while the back stage is still a stage for performance, that performance is more relaxed. My reading is that being away from an *external* audience and the need to present a socially acceptable face means that is precisely these ‘relaxed’ social performances which constitute intimacy. My definition of intimacy thus expands on Goffman; he notes only that “backstage conduct is one which allows minor acts which might easily be taken as symbolic of intimacy.”<sup>18</sup> Goffman’s binary analogy may not be entirely consistent in its allocation of space and performance, but a slightly modified model does offer a clear definition of how intimacy relates to spaces in which social interactions take place. For the purposes of this thesis, using Goffman’s model of front and back stages as a theoretical basis, I therefore propose that the back stage is the only space where intimate interactions – which may nonetheless still be performances – can take place.

The anthropologist Michael Herzfeld also suggests something along these lines in his work on the construction of national identities, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. In it, he identifies what he calls ‘disemia’, in his words: “the formal or coded tension between official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection.”<sup>19</sup> Although he never explicitly mentions Goffman, I believe his notion of disemia strongly echoes Goffman’s binary opposition between the public and private self. Goffman’s performative model of individual self-presentation on the front and back stage is mirrored in Herzfeld’s concept of an official collective identity in opposition to one potentially unfavourable before an external audience, which is thus kept hidden. As an

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<sup>18</sup> Goffman 1959: 128

<sup>19</sup> Herzfeld 1997: 14

example, Herzfeld cites the prohibition of plate-smashing in front of tourists in Greek tavernas because the Greek military dictatorship (and later democratic governments) regarded the practice as demeaning in the eyes of foreigners. The irony being that it is a Greek custom, but the fear was that the performance would pander to tourists' expectations of Greece's exoticism and Otherness.

Herzfeld goes on to propose the concept of 'cultural intimacy' as standing between official self-presentation and private introspection. Cultural intimacy is thus "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality."<sup>20</sup> In terms of national identities, such an intimate collective identity is therefore a mixture of embarrassment and idealized virtues. As Herzfeld puts it: "Embarrassment, rueful self-recognition: these are the key markers of what cultural intimacy is all about. They are not solely personal feelings, but describe the collective representation of intimacy."<sup>21</sup> This again echoes Goffman, who also repeatedly identifies embarrassment as a key element of back stage interactions.<sup>22</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, there is no reason why Herzfeld's definition of collective intimacy could not also be distilled to the individual level.

Herzfeld's concept of cultural intimacy, in combination with an adaptation of Goffman's model of front and back stage spaces, offers a remarkably useful definition of intimacy for our purposes. Intimacy is the private back stage space in which individuals in a close group can collaborate and prepare for a front stage public performance, without the pressures of social norms that the public space dictates. While the individual may still perform a number of specific social roles – say, 'father' or 'sexual partner' – they are nonetheless largely freed from the obligation to perform an idealized version of their

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<sup>20</sup> Herzfeld 1997: 3

<sup>21</sup> Herzfeld 1997: 6

<sup>22</sup> see Goffman 1959: 120, 140

persona. An intimate space can therefore be both a physical space, the more informal back stage away from the front stage which necessitates impression management, as well as a collective metaphysical space, standing between official self-presentation and private introspection. Intimacy should not be seen in opposition to performance; there are different kinds of performances and some are simply more intimate than others. While both Goffman's and Herzfeld's views of intimacy may be considered fairly tactical, I do not believe they are necessarily negative. Owning and embracing that source of embarrassment within the back stage is a sign of control and agency on the part of the performer – and ultimately should be regarded positively.

A filmic recording of a back stage space can therefore be said to be a filmic representation of intimate performances – of intimacy. I suggest that since its introduction in the 1980s, the primary focus of video has always been precisely these back stage interactions, by virtue of the fact that the video camera is small, inexpensive to operate and the potential for recording is always given. As we shall see, even the earliest feature film narratives dealing with the cultural phenomenon of home videos focus mostly on the interaction with and effect on intimate spaces.

### **Establishing Boundaries**

The scope of this thesis allows me to focus only on a handful of films, although I stress in my final chapter that through convergence these emblematic filmic examples stand for all of contemporary digital cinema. These films do not share a common director or cinematic school or tradition, their countries of origin range across Europe and North America, the earliest are from the 1980s while others were only released in the last few years, some are auteur-driven independent films while others are Hollywood blockbusters, and together they cover a vast range of genres. What they do all have in common is that they are either filmed entirely within the diegesis of the film or feature diegetic footage as

an integral part of the narrative. This formal constraint allows me to narrow down the vast magnitude of contemporary digital cinema to a more manageable body of films, while still allowing for my conclusions to be applicable to the wider field. Among a wider canon of such films, those that I shall pay particularly close attention to are *Family Viewing* (Atom Egoyan, 1987), *Benny's Video* (Michael Haneke, 1992), *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), *Redacted* (Brian de Palma, 2007) and *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005). By including video practices derived from amateur film-making and home videos, they each address a film theoretical problem in narrative form. Moreover, I will suggest that what really unites these films is not so much an aesthetic or formal gimmick but rather that intimacy, as both the catalyst and product of diegetically recorded footage, is the crucial link between all of the elements of contemporary digital cinema exemplified by these films.

Using 'found footage' or footage supposedly recorded within the diegesis of the film has certainly been a popular choice for film-makers in many recent films. However, this idea is of course not new and has a number of notable precedents, such as *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), *David Holzman's Diary* (Jim McBride, 1967) and *Hi, Mom!* (Brian De Palma, 1970). While these films have much in common with the films I focus on, the crucial distinction between them is that they are all firmly pre-video and therefore pre-digital – and ultimately cannot reasonably be included in a discussion of contemporary digital cinema. While I will discuss the difference between home movies and home videos in greater depth in chapter three, suffice it to say at this point that they simply do not fit into the remit of this thesis – though they do constitute the heritage on which the films I focus on build.

The conceit of using diegetic cameras is by no means limited to cinema alone. To my knowledge, the first attempt at taking the aesthetic of 'found footage' to another medium can be found in the video game *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days* (IO Interactive, 2010). The

bobbing and swaying, pixelation and overexposure in *Kane & Lynch 2* suggest that the game's camera – normally completely virtual in video games – is very much within the diegesis of the game. Similar to *Cloverfield*, which is the focus of chapter two, *Kane & Lynch 2* uses timestamps at regular intervals; while in the film this indicates a jump in time, i.e. the beginning of a new scene, the video game uses this paratextual signifier to signal that the game is being saved – in other words, indicating that a particular section or scene is completed and a new one is just about to begin. Even outside of the narrative, *Kane & Lynch 2* seems to suggest that the entire game consists of found footage, for example the loading screens between levels are in the style of loading screens for online video clips and the pause menu is visually reminiscent of a menu on camcorders. Nonetheless, as stated earlier, this thesis intends to focus on contemporary digital cinema rather than on new media in general. There are certainly fruitful intersections between cinema and video games – for example in chapter five I briefly touch on the fact that because of technological convergence, they increasingly share the same screens – but the scope of this thesis simply does not allow me to go into any great depths.

It will become obvious to the reader that all of the films I discuss in this thesis – even those that are more experimental or 'indie' – are fundamentally examples of narrative cinema. That is not to say that there are not other forms of contemporary film-making which incorporate diegetic cameras and found footage. Contemporary documentary, experimental and avant-garde films frequently make use of amateur film-making practices and even actual amateur or home video footage itself. The works of Stan Brakhage, Péter Forgács, Jonas Mekas or Joseph Morder stand out in this regard in particular.<sup>23</sup> The discourses within and around these films are just as interested in the intersection between technological developments and how we interact with them as the narrative-based films I focus on; however, I believe they operate in an 'art' rather than a 'cinema' context. That is

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<sup>23</sup> see Nichols 2003: 2 and Blüher 2005: 177

to say, outside the festival circuit, screenings in galleries and film archives or academic conferences, these films are hardly ever screened in cinemas and rarely even get released on home media. The scope of this thesis does not allow me to do justice to both contexts, so I have chosen to focus exclusively on films which present a theoretical argument in their narrative form. In order for my claims to apply to all of contemporary digital cinema, it also helps considerably that all of the films discussed in this thesis enjoyed a wide release and that while some are more experimental auteurist vehicles, others are firmly in the mainstream – covering, in other words, the entire range of cinema.

Finally, a brief note on my theoretical approach. The theorists who are most influential on this thesis – in addition to Deleuze, Goffman and Herzfeld whom I have already mentioned – are Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault. My affinity with Deleuze, Baudrillard and Foucault is partly why I generally distance myself from the metanarratives of Marx and Freud – though I will refer to them when they become relevant to a particular aspect. My aim is to approach the analysis without theoretical preconceptions or ideologies – in fact, along the way I intend to illustrate that one-sided or uncompromising conceptual presuppositions about digital media can often lead to false conclusions. The question – to echo Benjamin again – is not whether the shift to digital has ‘killed’ cinema, whether digital cinema is a new medium entirely or whether this is a good or bad thing. Rather, it is simply what cinema has become after that shift.

## Synopsis

In the first chapter, I will limit the scope of my investigation from all of contemporary digital cinema simply to the medium of video itself. My starting point will be the proposal that the artistic potential – the Deleuzian will to art – of video, in its historical moment from the 1980s to the early 1990s, is intimacy. This proposition is the impetus for an extended analysis of two films from that era featuring video, Michael Haneke’s *Benny’s Video* and

Atom Egoyan's *Family Viewing*. Of all the films I examine in this thesis, they are the earliest chronologically, and what is most noticeable about them is that they both feature diegetically recorded video footage only intermittently. That is to say, they both still predominantly use film to convey the narrative. This juxtaposition of the two formats – film and video – has the effect of making them more discreet to the viewer. The potential of video to capture intimacy is therefore emphasized when shown alongside the inability of film to do the same. Contrary to the claims made by techno-essentialist critics who assume video to be little more than a commodity or fetish – a preconception they see confirmed in their readings of *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing* – video is actually shown in both films to have positive associations. Specifically, in both *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing*, video is inherently linked to intimacy. The conclusion of the first chapter will therefore be that the will to art of video – and video alone – is undeniably intimacy.

However, *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing* are both obviously realist. This is problematic because spectacle, rather than realism, is arguably the most prominent and immediately recognisable aesthetic impulse of contemporary digital cinema. Historically, spectacle in cinema has been regarded as antithetical to both narrative progression and realist aesthetics. In chapter two I will therefore ask how intimacy can be reconciled with this notion of spectacle. Using *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* as case studies, I will argue that by showing the narrative exclusively from the subjective perspective of a diegetic hand-held video camera, these films in fact offer an authenticity and realism long sought after in various spectacular cinematic genres. It is this authenticity, coupled with an awareness of amateur film-making practices both in terms of the performances before the camera as well as how the video camera is handled, that enables the will to art of video to be reconciled even with a cinema of spectacle. *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* are also much further along the arc of convergence that began with *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing*. Rather than just featuring video sparingly, these films already exhibit converged

cinematic and diegetic cameras – that is to say, the diegetic camera becomes the cinematic camera in these films.

The findings of the first two chapters may suggest that whenever diegetic cameras are involved, intimacy automatically becomes the prime function of the image in contemporary digital cinema. However, it is not always as simple as that. Merely using diegetic cameras and imitating the style of amateur film-making practices is not enough – both the diegetic performer's acknowledgement of the future space of reception and the actual uses of video have to be true-to-life for the representation to be intimate. The question therefore becomes how contemporary digital cinema can successfully emulate the rhetoric of intimacy of amateur film-making. In chapter three I will argue that this can only be achieved by acknowledging the nuances of performance in amateur footage. Moving to a broader context-based approach already introduced in chapter two, I will therefore focus on amateur film-making practices themselves. The formal predecessors of contemporary modes of amateur film-making – the home movies and home videos that came long before the clips now uploaded to YouTube – in fact demonstrate that intentional performances to the camera were established as the norm early on in amateur filmic practices. The crucial difference between home movies and home videos is not based on shifts in technology but rather on the context of the performance given. This suggests that the recording technology itself is not the catalyst for changes in performance; it is the performer's knowledge of the future space of reception that is critical. The makers of *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* appear to be aware of this proviso, as does Steven Soderbergh in his *sex, lies, and videotape*, but in *Redacted* Brian de Palma misappropriates diegetically recorded amateur footage while trying to make a political statement. Even though *Redacted* is an excellent example of convergence, merging video diaries, filmic documentaries, television broadcasts and online video clips into one filmic text, it fails both as a political statement

and an accurate representation of intimacy because it ignores the actual context of production of amateur film-making practices.

Extending the broader context-based approach of chapter three, it becomes clear that home media also play a major role in contemporary digital cinema. The most common way we currently consume films is via home media, and foremost among these is the DVD. In chapter four I will argue that through the intimate context of its reception, intimacy is also the defining characteristic of the DVD – even when its primary text does not embody the intimacy-image itself. DVD bonus materials which extend the diegetic world while simultaneously associating themselves with extra-diegetic medial discourses reflect the convergent nature of contemporary digital cinema particularly well. Similarly, the rhetoric of making-of documentaries – a staple of DVD bonus materials – actively recalls the intimacy of home videos, thus further demonstrating the inherent interconnectedness of the various elements of contemporary digital media.

The proposition made at the outset of this thesis will therefore come full circle in the fifth chapter. If the medium of video, amateur practices and the predominant way we consume contemporary digital cinema all enable intimacy, and that intimacy is even shown to be compatible with a cinema of spectacle, then it must follow that the guiding principle, the main function of the image, the artistic potential of contemporary digital cinema is most certainly intimacy. Through the process of convergence the will to art of video and digital cinema have become one and the same: intimacy. This process is reflected in the arc of my thesis, which begins with an analysis of one of Haneke's films and will conclude with another one in the final chapter. As a prime example of contemporary digital cinema, Haneke's *Caché* stands out because it manages to contain almost all aspects discussed in this thesis within a single film: the intimacy of video, diegetically recorded footage, amateur film-making practices, the intimacy of their context of reception and the process of convergence itself. *Caché* will thus form both the culmination of my argument and is the

sum of all that has preceded it. It will serve to demonstrate that through convergence, the will to art of video and the will to art of contemporary digital are one and the same – in other words, that the will to art of contemporary digital cinema is intimacy.

## Chapter 1

### *Intimate Potential*

Deleuze remarks in the conclusion of *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* that the “electronic image, that is, the tele and video image, the numerical image coming into being, had either to transform cinema or to replace it, to mark its death.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, at the historical moment when television threatened to ‘kill’ cinema, a new cinema was needed – one based on new principles, a new function of the image, a new politics, a new artistic finality. The massive shift in film technology from analogue to digital over the last twenty-five years is self-evident and has been widely explored, but what perhaps remains absent is a basic conceptual discourse about the potential of this new digital cinema. A large part of the problem is that it somewhat belies its fundamental complexity to a casual observer. As a result, much of the discourse concerning the digital is often over-simplified and reduced to two primitive opposing extremes; either technophilic or techno-essentialist.

The former position views advances in digital media positively and is usually heavily influenced by an approach to media analysis developed from Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan’s famous dictum, ‘the medium is the message’ prioritized the analysis of the

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<sup>24</sup> Deleuze 2007: 254

technology of any media work over an interpretation of its content. As McLuhan wrote in *Understanding Media*: “the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.”<sup>25</sup> Many contemporary critics writing on digital technology in cinema, such as Lev Manovich, D.N. Rodowick or even the popular science writer Steven Johnson, argue that the advances brought by digital technologies necessarily entail an improvement of quality (visually) and an increase in complexity (narratively) because they give the film-maker better tools to work with.<sup>26</sup> This essentially culminates in a somewhat problematic situation in which a teleological interpretation of film technology is linked to a rather tenuous notion of ‘improved quality’ in the film-maker’s final product.

The latter, negative position on digital media derives from Adorno and Horkheimer. One major advocate of this techno-essentialist reading, the German media theorist Friedrich Kittler, proposes that the hardware of digital technology structures the content it processes and not vice versa – in this case the computer hardware is the medium and the software its message. His basic premise is that while computer-based technologies promise heightened flexibility for the artist and better control over the work, in fact they introduce and conceal processes of subjugation in the interplay between hardware and software. In this way, the pre-programmed machine is seen to take control of the user, and not the other way around.<sup>27</sup> In many ways Kittler sees the digital age as the end of traditional media – because the digital can encompass all previous forms of media (text, image, sound) in one universal code, the binary code. Such a post-humanist world, in which technology manipulates the user and not vice versa, is of course wholly contrary to a technophilic utopian ideal.

The challenge for this thesis is therefore to examine contemporary digital cinema in a historical context without slipping into the oversimplification of either of these two

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<sup>25</sup> McLuhan 1964: 8

<sup>26</sup> see Johnson 2006

<sup>27</sup> see Gane 2005: 37

reductive conceptual positions. To do so, it makes sense to begin with the technological development which stands between traditional analogue cinema and contemporary digital cinema, a medium which all too often is overlooked by both critics and proponents of digital technology: video. At the point when video – both in the form of VCRs and camcorders – became available and affordable to the mass market in the mid to late 1980s, film-makers began to reflect on the impact of this new audiovisual technology on human interactions. Suddenly, spectators were not only able to experience films differently – where previously they had to rely on cinema or television, anyone could now record or buy videocassettes – but due to the popularity of camcorders, their own lives could now be recorded filmically. Two directors whose work from that period specifically deals with the technological artefact of video, and its users' relationship with it, are Atom Egoyan and Michael Haneke. Many critics' analysis of their work from the period is deeply rooted in the techno-essentialist position; for example, Karen Ritzenhoff comes to the conclusion that Haneke's films demonstrate that: "the move from analogue to digital technology [...] impoverishes interpersonal communication."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Mario Schönhart argues that the films present a "media-ravaged, artificially reduced and [...] (especially emotionally) reducing illusory world."<sup>29</sup> This techno-essentialist position clearly holds the latter alternative in Deleuze's prediction to be true: namely, that the electronic image has brought about the death of cinema.

However, what remains problematic with this techno-essentialist view is that it does not consider this death in the context of a longer continuity of cinema, as one of many ongoing transformations. These critics simply see video as a morally bankrupt 'voyeuristic fetish' or else a 'capitalist commodity', part of a contemporary globalized 'junk culture'. Deleuze is much more neutral; he states: "the new automatism is worthless in itself *if* it is

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<sup>28</sup> Ritzenhoff 2008: 145

<sup>29</sup> Schönhart 2005: 148\*

not put to the service of a powerful, obscure, condensed will to art.”<sup>30</sup> The question is therefore whether there is such a will to art video can be ‘put to the service of’ – or even if perhaps one is already inherent in and unique to the technological possibilities of the medium? A good starting point would be to simply ask: what can video do? Firstly, it can be used to make audiovisual recordings inexpensively; crucially, the tapes can be erased and used again. Secondly, these can be viewed immediately and repeatedly, as there is no development process like there is with film stock. Finally, the size and mobility of the camera allows for recording anywhere at a moment’s notice – the video camera can potentially always be recording. Based on these three properties, video can have multiple distinct and paradoxical uses. Thus, for example, video can be used to record public, front stage *and* private, back stage spaces – CCTV surveillance and home videos. These intimate home videos, in turn, can either be recordings of family life – everyday events or special family occasions – *or* recordings of sexual activity. As illustrated in Egoyan and Haneke’s films, the unique properties of video mean that these conflicting aspects of recording can even coexist on the same tape.

Atom Egoyan’s *Family Viewing* and Michael Haneke’s *Benny’s Video* serve as concrete examples of a particular point in the development of video. Both focus less on the public than on the private uses of video and both explicitly deal with characters’ relation to intimate video recordings. These films demonstrate the unique ability of video to record a variety of intimate spaces inaccessible to analogue film, which suggests the will to art of video lies perhaps in this potential to represent the intimate. Deleuze asserts that for cinema “an original will to art has already been defined [...] in the change affecting the intelligible content of cinema itself: the substitution of the time-image for the movement-image. [...] electronic images will have to be based on still another will to art.”<sup>31</sup> In this context, Mark Hansen points out that the “perpetual reorganization of the image or, more technically, the

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<sup>30</sup> Deleuze 2007: 255 [emphasis added]

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze 2007: 255

constant refreshing of scanned video and digitized images,”<sup>32</sup> which many other critics take as the basis for the conceptual analysis of contemporary digital cinema, is not as novel as assumed but that actually, “these effects cumulatively represent the achievements of the more radical products of time-image cinema.”<sup>33</sup> I shall instead examine whether for the medium of video, from its earliest beginnings in the mid-1980s, the will to art is a potential to represent intimacy, based on its technological possibilities and distinct from anything that has gone before in the history of cinema. My proposition is therefore that, just as the development from the movement-image to the time-image is situated at the heart of the shift from early cinema to modernism, the development to what we could call the ‘intimacy-image’ lies at the core of the shift from cinematic modernism to contemporary digital cinema.

### Diegetic Cameras

While the use of diegetic video footage has since become a staple for mainstream, mass market cinema – such as in the Hollywood blockbuster *Cloverfield*, which will be the focus of the following chapter – it remained very much a rare topic in the 1980s. Only a handful of auteur and independent film-makers not just recognised the potential of the technology, but also actively decided to make it a focal point for their narratives. Consequently, *Family Viewing* and *Benny’s Video* have much in common. *Benny’s Video* is the second instalment in Michael Haneke’s so called ‘glaciation trilogy’.<sup>34</sup> The common thread running between these three films according to a comment made by Haneke himself – one that he has apparently since regretted<sup>35</sup> – is the “glaciation of emotions,”<sup>36</sup> the alienation of the individual in the post-modern age. All three films revolve around violent

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<sup>32</sup> Hansen 2002: 52

<sup>33</sup> Hansen 2002: 52

<sup>34</sup> Frey 2002: 1

<sup>35</sup> see Sharrett 2006: 11

<sup>36</sup> see Kilb 2005: 67\*

death or murder: the collective suicide of the bourgeois family in *Der Siebente Kontinent* (1989), Benny's murder of the girl in *Benny's Video* and the student's killing spree in a bank in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (1994).

*Benny's Video* opens with amateur video footage of a pig being slaughtered on a farm. Benny (Arno Frisch), the son of wealthy, middle-class Viennese parents, repeatedly and obsessively rewinds and reviews this sequence, which he filmed himself. It soon becomes obvious that Benny is obsessed by video culture. While at home, he channel surfs between news reports of neo-Nazi murders of asylum seekers in eastern Germany, war movies, commercials and news footage from the war in Croatia. Indeed, at least one of the numerous television screens in the flat – two in Benny's room alone – always seems to be on and set to the same volume as the conversation of those present, making it sometimes difficult for the viewer to focus on the characters' dialogue. He also uses his camcorder to tape various events, such as the pyramid scheme party his sister organises or even just the view out of his bedroom window. Benny also rents violent action and gory horror films from the local video store and watches them while doing his homework or in bed. While at the video store, he meets a scruffy girl (Ingrid Stassner) roughly his own age, from the outskirts, takes her home and murders her with the same tool used to slaughter the pig – unintentionally recording the entire incident with his camcorder. The second portion of the film becomes an intense domestic melodrama; when Benny's parents return home from their weekend away, they are less horrified by the murder than by the consequences it could have for them and their social standing. They orchestrate a cover-up whereby Benny and his mother Anna (Angela Winkler) go to Egypt while Benny's father, Georg (Ulrich Mühe), disposes of the corpse. Benny takes his camcorder to Egypt and films scenes from the holiday – using the same camcorder that captured the murder to film his mother paragliding. When they return, Benny foils his father's plan and confesses everything to the police, implicating his parents in the cover-up with the illicit video recording.

Before *Family Viewing*, Egoyan had already experimented with video as a formal element in his feature film debut *Next of Kin* (1984), but it was a fairly linear comedy of manners with only incidental use of the new medium. Like in *Benny's Video*, the protagonist Van (Aidan Tierney) in *Family Viewing* is also a teenager who lives with his family in a modern flat in an unspecified Canadian city. When Van's Armenian mother left the family years ago, Van's Canadian father Stan (David Hemblen) moved her elderly mother Armen (Selma Keklikian) to a care home. Van seems to have developed a hesitant, semi-incestuous sexual relationship with his father's new partner Sandra (Gabrielle Rose). While visiting Armen at the home, Van meets Aline (Arsinée Khanjian), whose mother shares the room with Armen. Aline is a phone sex worker whom Stan calls while having sex with Sandra – sex sessions which he tapes with a camcorder. Van discovers that Stan has been taping over old home videos of Van's childhood, when his mother was still with them, so he hatches a plan to secretly move Armen from the home. While Aline is working out of town as an escort, her mother dies at the care home. Van secretly switches her identity with Armen in order to smuggle Armen out of the home without Stan's knowledge. He videotapes the funeral and convinces Aline to let him and Armen move in with her. When Stan gets suspicious about their disappearance, Van arranges Armen to be picked up by the authorities as a vagrant from the hotel he now works in. By the time Stan has found the hotel, Van and Aline have located the homeless shelter where Armen is, only to find Van's mother (Rose Sarkisyan) there too.

There are clearly many similarities between *Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video*. Both films feature troubled, male teenage protagonists, with uneasy relationships with their fathers. These father figures are marked by their fundamental failure to communicate with their sons and their desire to uphold the patriarchal status quo and their own reputations. Prior to the murder, the main form of communication between Benny and his parents seem to be a series of notes. After Benny's murder, Georg seems more annoyed than shocked; as

though his primary concern is his own reputation – his social standing and way of life based on his comfortable income – rather than any moral or ethical implications. Perhaps most tellingly, he chides Benny “You must not lie, you can’t afford it anymore;” here again, his priority is not some moral absolute (“you must not lie”), instead the use of the term ‘afford’ strongly implies that Benny has used up a materialist allowance or quota of transgressions too quickly with the murder.

Stan’s priorities are similar. Just like in the Viennese household, the television screens in *Family Viewing* always seems to be on in the background, but where Benny’s family predominantly watches the news, the various TVs in *Family Viewing* are generally showing nature documentaries. This overbearing presence of television practically leads to a total breakdown in communication within the family unit. In one of the few scenes where Stan, Van and Sandra gather together, in this case to watch a film, Stan’s gaze never leaves the screen and the dialogue between him and Sandra (speaking about Van as though he is not present) becomes a piece of absurdist theatre. The only real father-son conversation Stan and Van have is just as flawed: when Van tentatively brings up his emotional turmoil and plans for the future, Stan – who loses the thread to the conversations a number of times as he watches TV – instructs him that he has better things to do like “getting settled,” overruling Van’s wishes to look after Armen full-time. This conversation only hints at an underlying motivation to Stan’s actions throughout the film. Just as Georg rationally and brutally sets about disposing all evidence of the murder to avoid public scrutiny and maintain his social position, Stan effectively tries to purge all Armenian influences on Van – something hinted at as already having started during Van’s childhood in one of the home videos where Stan asks Van (who at this point speaks English with a strong Armenian accent) if he can sing him a song in English. Stan’s new partner, replacing Van’s Armenian mother whom Stan mentally and sexually abused until she left, is unmistakably Anglo-Canadian; Armen is pushed off into a care home; the old family house is sold and replaced

by a featureless flat and perhaps most importantly: the only remaining evidence of Van's Armenian heritage – the collection of home videos – is systematically wiped out and recorded over by Stan.

For Stan, this act is as much sexual as it is cultural. In both films, the technology of video appears to have a major impact on the characters' sexual desires and relations. When Benny encounters the girl, Haneke portrays the build-up of their relationship relatively conventionally: boy meets girl, and so on. However, what could have been Benny's first sexual experience becomes something else entirely: boy meets girl, boy kills girl.<sup>37</sup> Afterwards, while cleaning up the blood, Benny strips naked and smears himself with the blood, observing himself in a mirror. This autoerotic spectacle is doubled through the video technology: not only is Benny looking at himself in a mirror, he can also review the tape of the murder and his subsequent actions repeatedly and ritualistically – just like he did with the video of the pig being slaughtered.

In *Family Viewing*, it is not the teenager Van who has a sexual penchant for video but rather Stan, who seems to be unable to become aroused and have intercourse with Sandra without the electronic paraphernalia of video and the telephone. His ritual has multiple layers too: not only is he recording himself and Sandra during their sexual encounters, he is simultaneously erasing the footage of his ex-wife and Van's childhood. Van's sexual desires seem to be slightly disjointed too; while he clearly has some kind of sexual relationship with Sandra he shows no interest in Aline, who is much closer to him in age and, like him, also from a mixed cultural background. Instead he appears to be investing her with symbolic sister-like qualities. Even so, the viewer is never quite sure if Van's relationship with Sandra is perhaps only his fantasy. The surreal scene in which Sandra comes home to find Van watching a sit-com and the television's canned laughter becomes a reaction to their dialogue is a prime example of this ambiguity: just as the two are about to

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<sup>37</sup> see Frey 2003

kiss, the scene is paused – as though remotely – and quickly rewound, thereby leaving it completely open whether the events actually took place or not. This very same device is also used by Haneke in his later film *Funny Games* (1997). *Funny Games* is about a middle-class German family held hostage and tortured in their Austrian lakeside summer house by two young men who arrive at their door unexpectedly. Like *Benny's Video*, it also stars Ulrich Mühe and Arno Frisch and in some ways can be seen as its spiritual successor.

On the surface, both *Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video* also seem ostensibly realist – while dealing with different themes, both narratives are essentially family melodramas. Nonetheless, there are aspects in both which do not gel with this aesthetic evaluation. Whether in the absurdist dialogue, the formal juxtaposition of film and video, the extremely symbolic nature documentaries commenting on the proceedings in *Family Viewing*; or in Arno Frisch's detached performance as Benny and Haneke's alienating emphasis on the 'flatness' of video footage leaking into the film in *Benny's Video*; both films feature elements traditionally considered non-realist.

Perhaps most interesting are Haneke's and Egoyan's contradictory attitudes to the medium of video. Haneke is very clearly techno-essentialist. As one commentator has pointed out,<sup>38</sup> Haneke presents Benny as a child of post-modernity. His darkened room echoes his need to control his world – control which is so easily granted to him in the realm of video where he is free to pause and rewind his virtual reality. Simultaneously, Benny is starved of experience in the 'real world', or actual reality; a circumstance which Haneke seems explicitly to suggest is his own choice. He craves video and it is his fixation combined with an emotional stuntedness caused by his distant parents which directly leads to the murder of the girl – an act which Benny only retroactively realizes cannot be rewound and undone. Haneke thus effectively echoes Kittler's sentiment by suggesting that

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<sup>38</sup> Wessely 2005: 95\*

contemporary new media not only structure the content they process, but also affect and essentially manipulate the people who use them.

Video technology brings about a change in the moral constitution of the individual and, by implication, in the moral fabric of society. [...] In Haneke, the threat comes from people who use video *because* they use it, not because of *how* they use it.<sup>39</sup>

Superficially there seems to be no redeeming use of, or positive feature to, the medium of video in *Benny's Video*.

Egoyan on the other hand manages to avoid the binary opposition of techno-essentialism and technophilia. While he does suggest that audiovisual technologies have comprehensively pervaded the domestic sphere, he does not condemn the technology of video itself. Indeed, his primary criticism seems to be more of TV culture – both Armen and Stan are unable to interact with anyone else while the TV is on. Instead, *Family Viewing* relies on video technology as a prop or extension of the characters' desires and subjectivity. Unlike Haneke, Egoyan seems to suggest that there are both appropriate and detrimental uses of video: clearly, using video to record moments of family life or reclaim lost memories is fine but Stan's sexual need for paraphernalia and his desire to obliterate intimate recordings should be regarded as unhealthy. TV consumption is portrayed negatively because it is essentially a passive activity, while video recording can at least be described as an active process. As Wilson remarks: "Egoyan does not overtly lament the influence of technology in the intimate circle of the family: he shows such image-making as an extraordinary resource for the film-maker."<sup>40</sup>

While both *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing* come fairly early on in their respective directors' careers, it is perhaps important to note that they form different points of interest in video technology for each director. Egoyan first experimented with video in *Next of Kin* and *Family Viewing* partly stemmed from his dissatisfaction with the earlier

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<sup>39</sup> Hediger 2010: 104

<sup>40</sup> Wilson 2009: 26

film.<sup>41</sup> As he does not really thematize video in any of his subsequent films, it can be argued that *Family Viewing* represents the culmination of his interest in formal experimentation with the medium. For Haneke on the other hand, *Benny's Video* is only the first of his recurring filmic examinations, occurring again in *Funny Games* and *Caché*, of the nature of video in relation to the formal aesthetics of film and its effect on social relations and morality. While both *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing* extensively use video cameras, video tapes and television screens as props, *Family Viewing* arguably goes much further. For Haneke, video is only ever an artefact, simultaneously the symptom and cause of Benny's problems. Visually, there is a clear distinction in *Benny's Video* between film and video – the spectator always knows exactly when something is recorded diegetically with a video camera. Egoyan however extends the liminal nature of video to the entire film. Many of the scenes were shot on video, so qualitatively it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between the real and the televisual or even the fantastical. This results in an aesthetic blurring effect, where it is impossible to tell the various formats (film, video and TV) apart. The two films follow completely different agendas; however, it is nonetheless important to note that Egoyan actively uses the medium of video as a resource to link his interest in human generations – both in terms of father-son, mother-daughter familial relations as well as Armenian national identity within the diaspora – to generations of audiovisual media, namely film, television and video. Haneke, on the other hand, uses the medium of video only as proof of the increasing visualisation and virtualisation of a post-modern, materialized consumer culture. Although both depictions of contemporary society are perfectly legitimate, one is clearly predominantly negative in the conclusions that it comes to – regarding both the state of the modern family as well as the influence of video technology – while the other is much less disapproving and uses video neutrally to analyse and reflect stylistically its narrative and thematic points.

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<sup>41</sup> see Romney 2003: 42

### Style and Theatricality

As mentioned earlier, Haneke's visual style creates an alienating effect – the connection to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* is no doubt intentional. While much of the film is actually shot on 35mm film, the vast majority of scenes are set inside with very little depth of field. Much of the action takes place in the family's flat and yet the only windows to the outside world, which would perhaps allow a multi-planar composition of space, are in Benny's room and have their blinds permanently pulled down. The view outside is only permitted when it is mediated via the video camera set up to transmit it live to a screen on Benny's desk. The few exceptions to this overwhelming flatness are set outside on the streets of Vienna and when Benny is waiting in a school corridor. Even group scenes are either presented via video – such as Benny's sister's party – or in close-up – such as the choir practice, which only shows the boys' faces or the illicit transactions behind their backs without ever giving the viewer the conventional long shot as a set-up. This enforced shallow depth of field throughout the sequences shot on film strongly echoes the flatness inherent to video; in comparison to film, video will always seem much flatter and more desaturated. The effect is most striking in the sequence when Benny and his mother flee to Egypt; instead of taking in the sweeping vistas at the beach or on day trips to the pyramids and other tourist sites with a wide angle film lens, Haneke presents them almost exclusively through the flattening eye of the video camera. In fact, this flatness is even reflected in the *mise en scène* – the flat's décor has a “very mannered quality”<sup>42</sup> derived from its many large, clinical and expansive surfaces. The kitchen, where Benny's parents communicate with him via notes, features stainless steel counters, and the living room – with its highly formal, almost comically long dining table and too many chairs – is defined by the angular collection of paintings and prints on the wall. While perhaps an accurate reflection of

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<sup>42</sup> Sharrett 2006: 13

upwardly mobile, middle class (Anna is an art dealer, Georg is in IT consultancy) interior design of the period, its *mise en scène* nonetheless gives *Benny's Video* a hint of mannerism and abstraction. While it is certainly an example of psychologically realist narrative cinema, the set design, combined with the formal composition of space and of course the almost detached performances of all of the main characters give it the impression of a stylised *Regietheater* production rather than a naturalist *Kammerspiel*.

Similarly, *Family Viewing* features more experimental elements within a predominantly character-driven narrative. The constant formal experimentation, juggling three different audiovisual media – film, TV and video – is perhaps the most obvious example. This interviewing of the various formats is in fact more complex than is immediately apparent. The scenes set in the flat were in fact shot in a television studio. Egoyan used two cameras recording simultaneously and edited the material on the spot, as one would for a live television broadcast.<sup>43</sup> Even when the intentional televisualisation of ordinary situations is taken out of the picture – the best example of which is the scene between Van and Sandra which morphs into a sit-com as the canned laughter from the TV set becomes part of the film's actual soundtrack – the scenes in the flat are conspicuously different in both the rhythm of montage and the texture of the image. As Romney points out, "the style of these scenes is televisual rather than video-inflected."<sup>44</sup> Aesthetic considerations and formal experimentation aside, the actors' performances are also highly stylised. As mentioned earlier, the interactions between Stan and Van are affected to the point of being Beckettian, and while Van's psychological motivation throughout the film is fairly understandable, his behaviour and actions are often inexplicable and illogical – a case in point being the sequence of events following the death of Aline's mother or his plan to rescue Armen by pretending she is a mentally ill homeless person and reporting her to the authorities.

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<sup>43</sup> see Romney 2003: 42

<sup>44</sup> Romney 2003: 43

Clearly, while not abstract to the degree of avant-garde cinema, both *Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video* do contain elements of theatricality. Ostensibly, this would seem to make it extremely difficult to talk about intimacy in the context of these films. If intimacy is about the back stage, how can we reconcile it with these front stage mannered performances and stylistic flourishes? However, both films are essentially still instances of narrative cinema, with psychologically realist character portrayals. Within their realist character portrayals, both films in fact do present Goffman's back stage space where individuals are freed from the obligation to perform an idealized version of their persona – the space I suggest as synonymous with intimacy. For Benny it is physical; he has his permanently video-taped room, a liminal space he has virtual control over with a remote control and where he can be himself, disconnected from the actual reality just outside his window, with its moral norms and social expectations. In Van's case it is virtual; he has his videos, a collection of audiovisual recordings which take on the role of actual memories of his identity, giving him access to his absent mother and his forgotten cultural heritage. The intimacy of *Family Viewing* is in many ways an example of Herzfeld's cultural intimacy. Van's Armenian identity is considered embarrassing or backward by Stan, who takes steps to hide it or erase it – his wife is driven away, Armen is sent to a care home, they move to a bland flat and the last remaining intimate space, the video recordings of the back stage interactions between Van and his Armenian matriarchy, are recorded over. In some ways, the last remainders of cultural intimacy lie in Armen. The scenes Van shares with her exhibit some of the few instances of truly intimate (present-day) familial relations in *Family Viewing*.

Both films do not just limit themselves to observations about the intimate workings of family life but rather present a complex picture of how video has become a crucial part of that intimacy within a wider filmic narrative. The portrayal of intimacy and formal experimentation with video are therefore not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, these two

films – as concrete examples of a particular period (i.e. the 1980s and early 1990s) in the development of the use of video practices in cinema – suggest that the potential to capture the back stage space of intimacy is precisely that property unique to video which was exclusive to the medium from its inception. Not only does it give video its medium specificity but also suggests a new will to art not based on the movement-image or time-image.

### Viewing the Family

From inside a dark barn unsteady, low quality video footage shows an open door to the outside. A pig is led out of the barn and the camcorder follows. Georg (unidentified at this point) is standing outside shaking his head critically at the cameraman, presumably Benny. A captive bolt pistol is pressed to the pig's head and the frame zooms in. The gun shoots and the pig falls to the ground, thrashing in its death throes. The camera closely follows the pig's convulsing body – then suddenly the footage is paused. The video rewinds to replay the slaughter in slow motion, emphasizing the hand-held barrel against the pig's forehead, the cartridge explosion and the animal's dying screams and shudders. The superimposed title "Benny's Video" appears, making it clear that what the spectator has just witnessed is in fact Benny's video – it is Benny who is viewing and reviewing the footage he shot himself while on the farm.

Of course, what soon becomes clear is that this is only one of many of Benny's videos. According to many critics Benny is easily classified and categorized as "a video freak,"<sup>45</sup> "a child of post-modernity [...] who is obsessed by the medium of video, who is used to and demands seeing everything – every reality – through the eye of the video camera"<sup>46</sup> and entrapped by "contemporary junk culture."<sup>47</sup> Benny obsessively reviews the

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<sup>45</sup> Frey 2002: 6

<sup>46</sup> Wessely 2005: 95-96\*

<sup>47</sup> Sharrett 2006: 11

video of the pig slaughter, watches violent films rented from a video store or on TV – and of course creates his very own snuff film later – all in the private space of his room. Much has been written about Benny's room as symptomatic of his fixation:

Thus Benny's darkened room, this Platonic cave of the video age, reflects nothing but his pathological urge to control the interior and exterior world, at least visually: the camera directed outside, which transmits the view of the road outside the window, the interior camera on a tripod next to Benny's desk, which captures most of the room including the door, the television screen where the range of images offered by cable television and video nasties is as available as the control images from the observation cameras are.<sup>48</sup>

Reality, the world outside his window, is only allowed into the room after it has been mediated through video – thus making it apparently controllable, exactly like the stream of images from the TV or videos.<sup>49</sup> However, the room is unarguably Benny's – his private, intimate space which his father does not enter until much later, only commenting that “giving the room an airing might be a good idea.” However, very little has been said about what happens when he brings someone from the outside world into his intimate space.

Benny's interactions with the nameless girl are very different in his room compared to outside. To begin with, he is clearly still very self-conscious – in Goffman's model he is still performing a persona in order to present a favourable impression of himself to the girl. Their dialogue is stilted and awkward; he asks about her family and offers her a cigarette, which she declines. His smoking is noticeably something he keeps secret from his parents, does with his classmates but not by himself – another part of the image he wants to present, in this case to his peer group, undoubtedly to fit in or seem cool. However, when she is impressed by the video equipment and his surveillance set-up and they begin talking about video films, Benny relaxes noticeably. Perhaps pleased by her implicit approval of his intimate sphere, he invites her to stay and even shares a pizza and, more importantly, his video of the pig slaughter with her.

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<sup>48</sup> Kilb 2005: 71\*

<sup>49</sup> see Wessely 2005: 97

This situation is echoed in Alejandro Amenábar's feature debut *Tesis* (1995) when the protagonist Ángela (Ana Torrent), a film student at Madrid Complutense University, asks one of her classmates, Chema (Fele Martínez), if she can have a look at his renowned collection of violent *mondo* films and other video 'nasties' for her research. While a university student and a few years older than both Benny and Van, Ángela is nonetheless of their generation. However, *Tesis* is a reversal of *Benny's Video* in terms of the contrast between the two characters and their background. Ángela, who dresses smartly and has a strict structure in her private life, as seen in "the immaculate order of her bedroom, as well as in the stability of her upper-middle class suburban Madrid home and her economically well-off family,"<sup>50</sup> comes into Chema's intimate space to watch the splatter films. Chema, like the girl in *Benny's Video*, is marked by his unkempt and dishevelled appearance and his rundown flat is an untidy shrine to violence and the macabre. Nonetheless, there are remarkable similarities between the two scenes, not least in the interactions between the characters once they have entered the intimate sphere of the (in both cases male) video aficionado. After initial distance and coolness, the male and female characters connect via their shared interest in violent videos, which effectively means that they can drop their fostered persona – the class misfit or the smoking and rebellious teenager – and can have an intimate (though in both cases not sexual) relationship within the back stage space of their private rooms.

However, what differentiates the scene in *Benny's Video* from *Tesis* and makes it relevant to this discussion is of course the fact that these intimate interactions – and later on, the murder – are of course being recorded on video in Benny's room. Haneke, unlike Egoyan, uses video much more conventionally in *Benny's Video* – that is to say the vast majority of the narrative is presented from the traditional perspective of the non-diegetic film camera. Only a few times does a pre-recorded or live video image fill the entire frame,

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<sup>50</sup> Klodt 2007: 8

for example at the very beginning with the video of the pig slaughter, the home videos of the party, a film Benny is watching in the video store and the holiday recordings captured during their stay in Egypt. The rest of the time, video images are strictly relegated to a screen within the diegesis of the film – most strikingly during the off-screen murder, where all we see is a static, two and a half minute shot of the small television set on Benny's desk, which in turn is transmitting a static shot of the other end of Benny's room captured by his internal surveillance camera. The girl's final moments and Benny's repeated shooting remain resolutely out of frame – except for Benny dashing across the room twice to reload the captive bolt pistol – so that all the viewer is given is the audio track: the girl's screams and Benny's panicked pleas for her to be quiet.

This recording seems to be unintentional, as does the murder itself – although Arno Frisch's performance as Benny is so detached it is extremely difficult to judge whether the act, its recording or perhaps even both are premeditated. Benny's response when his father asks him about his motivations after the stay in Egypt ("I don't know. I wanted to see what it's like ... probably") is highly ambiguous due to Benny's ironically inflected intonation of "probably." The issue of determining intention in this specific situation aside, there are two significant instances in *Benny's Video* when the video camera is intentionally present to moments of intimacy. One example has already been mentioned, namely when Benny shows the girl his room. Once inside his private space, Benny turns the camera on her and follows her movements around the room, prompting at first a bashful then amused reaction from the girl. Even when he switches over to the outside view again, the implication is that the interior camera continues to record uninterrupted. While Haneke chooses not to show that footage, apart from briefly when it is streamed to the small screen on Benny's desk in the background in one shot, the viewer is nonetheless aware that this entire intimate situation is simultaneously being recorded within the diegesis of the filmic world. This is the first decisive instance when a video camera is present to and records intimate back stage

interactions. In this case, the back stage space is Benny's room in the family flat and the intimate – that is, not public or front stage – interactions take place between Benny and a girl his own age.

The second instance where a video camera is party to a back stage familial moment only becomes apparent retroactively. When Benny goes to bed after having shown his parents the video of the murder, Georg and Anna try to grasp the consequences of the deed. Georg coldly rationalizes the legal and punitive consequences if the murder is reported; even if he and Anna were not implicated and charged with negligence, the best Benny could hope for would be a mental institution or a juvenile prison, which would ruin his life. He adds, “not to mention the other consequences ... it would hardly be the ideal image maintenance.” Rather than operating by moral absolutes when assessing his son's actions, Georg explicitly places the family's collective and Benny's individual public image over any ethical implications. In fact, Georg perfectly internalizes Goffman's notion of social interaction as stage performance, where the key is “image maintenance” or impression management; thus, “Benny's father immediately prescinds the private affair by perceiving it from the public perspective. The public threat to his own reputation is first and foremost in his mind.”<sup>51</sup> As Benjamin Schacht points out, the priorities in this family operate by a different standard; the only reprimand Benny gets from Georg is the commandment “you must not lie” – rather than ‘Thou shalt not kill’.<sup>52</sup> What follows is Georg's cold-blooded analysis and rational formulation of a plan of action to cover up the murder and dispose of the girl's body.

This scene is another example of Goffman's back stage area of intimacy. In *Benny's Video*, the family living room becomes “that hidden or private place where information that might discredit the fostered impression is controlled, kept secret.”<sup>53</sup> In their conversation,

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<sup>51</sup> Schacht 2005: 177\*

<sup>52</sup> Schacht 2005: 178

<sup>53</sup> Treviño 2003: 36

Georg and Anna prepare the family's 'team performance', one which will create the impression of 'business as usual' while in fact hiding a grisly secret. Haneke again presents this scene fairly conventionally, although the sequence of shot/reverse shots of Georg's and Anna's faces in close-up does foster an atmosphere of grim claustrophobia, enhanced by the featureless, grey decor of the living room. Only at the end of the film does it become apparent that Benny was in fact awake during this entire exchange and was recording it on the video camera in his room – a recording with which he goes to the police and confesses, implicating his parents in the process. Like the recording of the actual murder, the visual image is static and does not reveal anything apart from a small gap between his bedroom door and its frame, through which light is spilling from the hall or living room into Benny's darkened bedroom. Once again, the only information the video gives is conveyed through its soundtrack. While obviously not desired by or indeed even known to Benny's parents, a video camera is yet again privy to an extremely delicate and intimate family space.

The third and final case in point for video's access to intimate spaces, albeit one somewhat less negatively charged than the previous two, is the active repositioning of the video camera into the family sphere when Benny and his mother flee to Egypt. Benny records his time at the beach, day trips to various tourist attractions and even a one-off video diary in the form of direct address. In all of these cases, even when the camera is recording in public, such as on the tour coach or on the beach, the video recording becomes part of the domestic sphere – part of a holiday custom for middle-class tourists from the mid-1980s onwards, when camcorders became affordable and readily available. The holiday video becomes part of the family narrative to be reviewed and shared in the intimate space of the family home. This is one of the few instances where video technology does not create distance between the characters. While it could therefore be regarded as the only point where Haneke concedes that video may have positive uses, this is mitigated by the fact that Haneke chooses to present Anne's emotional breakdown in front of Benny in

the hotel room – one of the rare moments in which characters actually show their emotions – via film rather than video.

Nonetheless, the holiday is the first time it is not only Benny who films; on a number of occasions, for example on the night-time trip to the pyramids or when Benny goes parasailing, Anna also operates the camera. In the earlier instances, Benny is the only one who either directly – through his bedroom door – or indirectly – while the girl is in his room – controls the video camera. Tellingly, this sharing of ownership over the video gaze is also reflected in the composition and framing of the image. No longer are the images static and incomplete, now the camera moves freely and – for perhaps the first time – there is a real depth of field. Most remarkably, even the earlier disparity between image and sound is totally reversed in one sequence; while flicking through television channels in their Cairo hotel room Benny stops on a performance of the Bach organ piece *Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier*. Strongly in contrast to the Arabian pop music on the other Egyptian television channels, Bach is relevant because we see Benny and his equally privileged, middle-class classmates first practising the Bach choral *Jesu, meine Freude* and then later performing it to their parents. As Christopher Sharrett remarks, the actual words of the choral (“*Trotz, trotz, trotz dem alten Drachen / [...] Steh ich hier und singe*”)<sup>54</sup> seem to turn Bach’s profession of faith “into an incredible act of bourgeois defiance, the lyrics expressing a social class’s absolute sense of self-assurance.”<sup>55</sup> Bach’s organ music on television then takes on a non-diegetic function and accompanies the footage shot by Benny in the markets and slum areas of Cairo to the extent that all diegetic sound is rendered inaudible. This jarring juxtaposition of Baroque European music with images of extreme poverty in the developing world is all the more intense considering it is a stark reversal of the audiovisual sensory hierarchy in the two previous examples. In all of these three instances in *Benny’s Video*, video is not only present to an intimate family or private back stage space, it is also

<sup>54</sup> Defying the ancient dragon / [...] I stand here and sing \*

<sup>55</sup> Sharrett 2006: 12

tacitly accepted as a natural part of that space. Video is thus not only capable of recording intimacy, but is also part of that intimacy itself.

### The Generation Gap

In *Family Viewing*, this potential of video to access intimate back stage spaces is handled somewhat differently. Rather than entering a pre-existent family sphere, as in *Benny's Video*, the home videos in *Family Viewing* practically become the only intimate family space. Stan's second attempt at creating a nuclear family unit, after Van's mother leaves and they move from the house into a flat, seems curiously artificial – both aesthetically and psychologically – and entirely devoid of intimacy.

In contrast to most of the other scenes, all the scenes in the flat – which were deliberately shot in a television studio – are noticeably flatter and visually blander. Even though the videos showing Van's childhood and mother are also shot on video, and should therefore be equally flat and desaturated, they are in comparison relatively rich in colour and offer a greater sense of depth. This is due in part to the fact that they are either shot outside, in the family garden, or through a window facing outwards. It is almost as if Stan's dominance over the family sphere – and eradication of all traces of Van's Armenian cultural identity – has completely drained it of life, of colour. He moves Van and himself away from the house with a garden to a sterile, modern block of flats. However tenuously, the garden is the only unmediated interaction with nature the characters had in *Family Viewing*, all that remains in the present are the nature documentaries broadcast on TV. Jonathan Romney describes the sequences in the flat as being “bled of colour, everything seems to happen on a stage set without depth or shadow, redolent of sitcom décor going back to *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Where other scenes emphasise chiaroscuro and depth –

Aline at the call centre, the deep-focus shot of Armen watching TV in Aline's flat – the condo scenes drastically reduce colour and shadow.”<sup>56</sup>

‘Stage set’ is a useful analogy here, both in terms of the actors’ performances as well as more generally in the context of Goffman’s concept of social interactions as a form of stage performance. The figures in *Family Viewing* seem less like fully rounded, three-dimensional characters and more like theatrical archetypes: father, stepmother, son, grandmother, sister, mother.<sup>57</sup> Apart from Van’s quest to save Armen and reclaim his lost identity, none of the other characters have any particularly strong motivations in the film, instead simply reacting to arbitrary occurrences, such as Aline’s mother’s death, and Van’s actions. Taking the home videos of Van’s childhood aside, none of the characters seem to have a past history prior to that point – their memories are either suppressed, forgotten or nonexistent in the first place. For example, in one of the few references to figures outside the visible cast of characters, Sandra mentions to Van that her father fought in the Second World War and that he told her stories about it when she was a child. When pressed by Van, she cannot even remember them. Identities are so unstable and interchangeable that Stan, when he goes to visit the care home on Armen’s birthday, smiles vaguely at a woman whom he takes to be Armen – only to be informed that Armen was moved to another room a while ago and he was smiling at a stranger.

In particular, Sandra’s role within the family and her relationship to Stan is bewildering. Beyond her domestic duties – she cooks for the men, goes shopping and serves them beer – and her apparent willingness to participate in (or perhaps simply tolerance of) Stan’s sexual practices, it is unclear what exactly Stan wants from a relationship with her. More importantly, *her* reasons for being with Stan are never made apparent. The look Sandra gives the (diegetic) camera during one of their taping sessions makes it clear that there is little affection between them. It appears as though Stan chose her

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<sup>56</sup> Romney 2003:48

<sup>57</sup> see Romney 2003: 46

for her Anglo-Canadian background as much as anything else. Sandra can be heard humming the tune of *Greensleeves* repeatedly throughout the film, while she is in the kitchen and in the shower. This specifically English folk song stands in stark opposition to the only other singing in the film – Van singing Armenian songs on the home videos. Just as Stan wipes out the footage of Van’s mother in order to establish a new, sanitized family unit, so too does he erase Van’s musical and linguistic heritage. In one of the videos, Van as a child is seen and heard singing a song in Armenian; foreshadowing his later intents, Stan asks “Van, can you sing Daddy an English song?” In a later video, Van sings Stan *Baa Baa Black Sheep* and by the time the action of the main film takes place, all traces of his Armenian accent are gone. The cultural intimacy evident in the videos is thus suppressed by Stan who clearly regards it an embarrassment before potential external observers.

As mentioned earlier the interactions between Stan, Van and Sandra are highly theatrical. When speaking, the characters often leave long and cryptic pauses between lines of dialogue, making their conversations seem extremely stilted and artificial – as though they were reading off a script. Reminiscent of the theatre of the absurd, there is frequent repetition, resulting in enigmatic, Beckettian dialogue:

|         |                               |
|---------|-------------------------------|
| SANDRA: | Why would I w-?               |
| VAN:    | Want to?                      |
| SANDRA: | Yes.                          |
| VAN:    | To do something.              |
| SANDRA: | About what?                   |
| VAN:    | About changing things.        |
| SANDRA: | Why would we want to do that? |
| VAN:    | Because things change.        |

This connection to and interest in Beckett is not totally coincidental; Egoyan later directed an adaptation of *Krapp’s Last Tape* for the *Beckett on Film* (2001) project. In the context of Goffman’s model of dramaturgical analysis, this sense of theatricality in the family’s intimate performances can be seen as extremely out of place. The family sphere, in this case the shared flat, is meant to be an intimate space where ‘performers’ can let their guard down, that is not have to perform a public persona to an audience. The performances in the

family space in *Family Viewing* however are just that: extremely affected and unnatural performances, as though in front of an audience. The only character who is depicted as having a “healthily functioning emotional core”<sup>58</sup> is Sandra. Clearly unhappy with her partner, the relationship she has with Van is however only quasi-parental. While there is some intimacy in the way they share and hide secrets from Stan, the sexual and therefore incestuous overtones prevent their liaison from becoming a completely normalized, intimate family relationship. Stan’s attempt to create an intimate family idyll after erasing his first wife has clearly failed.

As there is evidently no intimacy in the present, Van finds it instead in the past, captured on the videos of his childhood. Emma Wilson suggests that in *Family Viewing*: “technology provides the prop, the fantasy shield for re-creating a family space, for negotiating a return to a space like home.”<sup>59</sup> While there is certainly an element of nostalgia in Van’s viewing of the tapes, they also serve as an impetus to action. At the moment when Van takes possession of the tapes, the power dynamic within the film drastically changes. Van is no longer passively a part of Stan’s version of family life, he “takes control of his destiny, audaciously devising and directing his own narrative.”<sup>60</sup> The most immediate difference is illustrated with Armen: for most of the first third of the film she lies motionless in bed, staring at the TV in her room. When Van puts the tape with footage from his childhood in, she comes alive and reacts for the first time with a smile. From that point it is Stan who is forced to take the passive role, seemingly unable to have sexual intercourse without the simultaneous erasing of the home videos. Unlike in *Benny’s Video*, intimacy here in *Family Viewing* is not to be understood as the back stage locus of preparations for a tactical team performance. Instead, intimacy – the space depicted only in the videos – is the

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<sup>58</sup> Romney 2003: 55

<sup>59</sup> Wilson 2009: 28

<sup>60</sup> Romney 2003: 44

place where Van, his mother and his grandmother can be themselves without conforming to the language, social expectations or customs of the society they now live in.

In *Family Viewing*, video is thus clearly the format used to represent the intimate sphere – though obviously this is not only limited to familial intimacy, but also sexual intimacy. Crucially, the point where Armen and Van accidentally discover that Stan had been involving Van's mother in bondage games marks another key shift in the film. Only after Van's mother has effectively bridged the gap between the two types of intimacy – familial and sexual – within the only space available to her, the realm of video, can she return to the present, to Van. As Wilson highlights: "it is only after her sexuality has been confronted – made visible frontally, stared in the face – that she can be refound in the film, that she can lose the erotic and mnemonic gloss that has surrounded her, that she can become an animate woman and not a forbidden lost object."<sup>61</sup> In many ways, generations within the family are closely linked to generations of audiovisual media. While the outside world (Aline, the care home, the video store, the hotels) and Van's escape from Stan is rendered through the use of film; and television – both as an aesthetic referent and the diegetic presence thereof – indicates Stan's sphere of influence; video becomes the only representational space for Van's Armenian cultural identity.

Even arguably the most intimate moment during the entire film, the reunion sequence at the end, is captured by a video camera. Armen has been taken in by a homeless shelter and Van and Aline, as his surrogate sister, come to visit. The sequence is intercut with short excerpts from the home videos seen earlier. Back in the shelter, the camera pans up to a surveillance camera taping the room. As they approach Armen's bed, Van's mother is already sitting there. Elena del Rio argues that "notwithstanding the strong potential for closure implicit in this kind of narrative resolution, the moment radically departs from a traditional family encounter and seems instead to flow directly out of the longing

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<sup>61</sup> Wilson 2009: 32

inaugurated by the video images of the family's past. Here, Egoyan resists the conventional melodramatic desire of a family long separated to end their separation by resorting to physical contact and speech."<sup>62</sup> However, the juxtaposition of video footage and film suggests more. Van has in fact triumphed over his father and succeeds in restoring not only his own lost identity but also a family space which is truly intimate. The sterile and cold Anglo-Canadian patriarchy has been replaced with an intimate Armenian matriarchy, as Van surrounds himself with Aline, Armen and his mother.

The home videos depicting the family idyll shown throughout *Family Viewing* are remarkable because apart from Van's singing and Stan's questions, they are practically silent. Neither Armen nor the mother ever speak audibly, their voices too quiet to make out. Their silence in the final scene can be attributed to the fact they have up to that point always been silent on video. If the intimate sexual, albeit incestual, relationship between Van and Sandra is taken to be a titillating televisual fantasy made real<sup>63</sup> – which therefore has to obey the regulations governing television and pause or cut before anything sexual is explicitly shown – then the climax too can be read as a form of transubstantiation of the video fantasy of the idyllic family sphere. Consequently, it must follow the same rules: when family intimacy becomes a reality again, it can only recreate the (silent) intimacy dictated from the earlier video images. In other words, "the present image is ghosted by the past image of female intimacy it recalls."<sup>64</sup> The juxtaposition of the shelter's video camera and the video images of Van as a child in the last scene create the impression that from the perspective of the video camera, Van, by coming into the presence of Armen and his mother, has successfully reinstated the positive cultural intimacy associated with the matriarchal structures of his childhood.

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<sup>62</sup> del Rio 2007: 48

<sup>63</sup> see Romney 2003: 49

<sup>64</sup> Wilson 2009: 32

### Sex, Lies and Videotape

Unlike *Benny's Video*, *Family Viewing* seems at first to make use of video in two very different modes – recording not only domestic but also public spaces. There are some surveillance cameras throughout the film, most prominently in the various hotels Aline uses for her work as an escort and a phone sex worker and of course in the film's closing moments. However, both of these instances are somewhat problematic. While the surveillance camera in the shelter is technically recording a public space and could therefore feasibly be interpreted as symbolizing the watchful eye of a disembodied, voyeuristic authority, we have seen that in fact this is not the case. The camera in the scene instead acts as figurative link between the intimacy in the present moment and the intimacy of the lost family idyll, as captured by Stan's camera. Similarly, the cameras that film Aline with her client should not simply be taken for manifestations of a panoptic authority tracking her with all-seeing CCTV cameras. Even taking the seediness of the hotels in question into account, it seems highly implausible that there would be cameras inside the actual hotel rooms, intruding into privacy of the hotel guests. Instead, the grainy and silent video footage of Aline submitting to her client's desires acts as an evocation of the other predominant use of video in the film: the representation of sexuality. The ostensible dichotomy between the private and public functions of video is therefore not actually central to the film at all. The only use of video in *Family Viewing* is in fact within the private domain. However, what does become apparent is that video offers insights into two distinct aspects of intimacy – the familial and the sexual. Their common background – both are obviously examples of intimate relationships – is underlined in *Family Viewing* by the fact that Stan diligently films both areas of his life.

As a video equipment salesman, he practically has more in common with Benny than with Van (or indeed than Van has with Benny); for both of them video technology is their life. Like Benny, he seems to be addicted to the medium of video. Although he obsessively

captures video footage, unlike Benny, he rarely seems to watch what he has recorded. As well as recording the intimate family sphere during Van's childhood, Stan now primarily records his intimate sexual activities with Sandra – as he had previously done with Van's mother. At first it seems simply that he cannot achieve sexual gratification without the awareness of being recorded. Moreover, del Rio argues that "Stan and Sandra, father and stepmother, use video primarily to establish the power dynamics of their relationship."<sup>65</sup> However, the issue surrounding Stan's sexual needs is more complex and cannot simply be reduced to a narcissistic fetish for video paraphernalia. For one thing, there are two other processes taking place at the same time during his intercourse with Sandra. Firstly, he also needs Aline's voice directing them via the telephone. In her role as phone sex worker, Aline spins a fantasy about what she would do to Stan if she was there; unbeknownst to her, Stan puts her on loudspeaker and Sandra silently acts out whatever Aline suggests – all the while, the entire set-up is being recorded by the video camera. This complex choreography suggests more than a simple sexual encounter, but rather a structurally elaborate performance.

On another level, Stan is of course also simultaneously wiping out the images of intimacy by recording over the earlier footage. As has been pointed out, "Stan's home porn activity is less about recording than about erasure, and yet the nature of this erasure is hardly straightforward."<sup>66</sup> When Van first discovers the tapes while Sandra is in the shower, he does not seem particularly shocked by the idea that his father tapes his sex sessions. His reaction to finding out the true nature of Stan's actions is much stronger:

|         |                                                                         |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SANDRA: | I'm sorry, Van, I had no idea. It's a thing he has. He likes to record. |
| VAN:    | And to erase, he prefers to erase.                                      |

Of course, what is so remarkable about video technology is that the two representations of intimacy can coexist on the same screen, and even the same tape. In Van's case, this

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<sup>65</sup> del Rio 2007: 42

<sup>66</sup> Romney 2003: 52

discovery serves as an impetus in the second half of the film to challenge Stan's patriarchal authority and reappropriate his own past, thereby constructing an identity of his own in the process. Needless to say, by overlaying his sexual activities over his son's "memory images,"<sup>67</sup> Stan effectively contaminates them. In fact, Romney even suggests that "it is the very desecration of this material that makes it sacred in Van's eyes."<sup>68</sup> By sharing the same space – the video space – the innocent footage of familial intimacy becomes equated with the forbidden material of Stan's sex life.

However, just like Stan's dysfunctional version of the family unit, his sexual activities are also problematic in relation to my concept of intimacy. Sexual relations are unarguably a prime example of intimate interactions between individuals; they should be relaxed, based on mutual trust and free from the obligation to perform an idealized version of one's persona. The family circle is similarly meant to be an intimate back stage space where performers can let their guard down. Just as the highly mannered interactions between Stan, Van and Sandra in the family sphere were identified as stilted front stage theatrical performances, in the framework of Goffman's model of dramaturgical analysis, Stan's sexual activities are likewise front stage rather than back stage. The complex processes involved in his sexual activities are strongly performative; Stan therefore effectively performs his sexual acts to the video camera, in lieu of an audience. Hence the question arises whether Stan's sex scenes in *Family Viewing* are actually valid instances of intimacy or instead – like Aline on the phone or in the hotel rooms – a sterile transaction rather than an intimate interaction.

In comparison to Stan, Van – like Benny – is essentially portrayed as asexual in the film. While a relationship with Sandra is hinted at multiple times, Egoyan's formal playing with the rewind effect means that not only is physical contact never shown between them, it also remains ambiguous whether it actually ever occurred; "the scene is effectively erased,

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<sup>67</sup> Wilson 2009: 30

<sup>68</sup> Romney 2003: 52

as if this particular narrative path has been reconsidered and cancelled – as if this quasi-incestuous encounter has been happening only in Van’s head, a masturbatory daydream unwinding as he sits in the dark, and interrupted by Sandra’s actual entrance.”<sup>69</sup> Equally, Van shows absolutely no sexual interest in Aline despite her obvious attractiveness and their similar age. Aline becomes a symbolic sister figure for Van, linked by more than just an elderly relative in the same care home; both are naturally aware of adult sexuality – Aline of course actively employed in the sex industry – but find it somehow distasteful.

In *Benny’s Video*, Benny is similarly disinterested in sex. While obviously drawn to graphic depictions of violence in the videos he watches, it is worthy to note that he never seems to show any curiosity in the nudity and explicit sex scenes inherent to the exploitation genre. More generally, *Benny’s Video* seems to totally downplay the sexual, almost suggesting that Benny’s insistence on living in an illusory, virtual space means he has lost all touch with the real world and the budding sexuality typical of adolescence. He is old enough to smoke, yet during the few interactions he has with boys his own age – such as when he spends the night at his friend’s after the murder – they do not talk about girls and in the short scene in the night club it is plain that they specifically do not go after the girls who enter at the same time. When he does take the unnamed girl home with him, it genuinely seems that his interest in her is not sexual – even though narrative conventions may encourage that expectation. In fact, at one point while filming her dead body, he reaches down and pulls her skirt, which had lifted up to reveal her undergarments during the struggle and when he moved the body, back into place and covers her. Benny’s relationship to his mother – the only other major female presence in the film – seems to be bordering on indifference on Benny’s part, even in the claustrophobic scenes in the hotel room in Egypt. One critic’s proposition that because “during the trip to Egypt, Benny and

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<sup>69</sup> Romney 2003: 54

his mother sleep very close to each other,”<sup>70</sup> somehow suggests the “tentative destruction of the incest taboo,”<sup>71</sup> reflects perhaps more on his own prudishness rather than any particular Oedipal desire Benny may have.

Arguably the only sexual act in *Benny's Video* comes after the murder: in an autoerotic spectacle, Benny strips naked and films himself in the mirror, smearing his body with the girl's blood. Matthias Frey goes so far as to claim that this scene is the cinematic confirmation of Baudrillard's concept of the ‘digital Narcissus’:

in the postmodern moment the myth of Narcissus is now the guiding myth/trajectory/paradigm that structures experience and narrative, rather than the Oedipus initiation story. This is sealed when he rearranges the girl's skirt so that she is ‘properly’ covered, a lack of curiosity that further distances him from normative heterosexuality. [...] the Baudrillardian Narcissus myth as found in *Benny's Video* instructs Benny that mediated, digitally manipulable violence is the ‘authentic’ experience in a ‘me’ world without connections, so why not ‘see how it is’?<sup>72</sup>

The suggestion here seems to be that after having murdered the girl, what a person with a healthy sexuality would do is have a look at her genitalia. Although Benny's autoerotic smearing of blood across his body could feasibly indicate a narcissistic urge – especially considering his doubled reflection, in the mirror and on the screen – Frey's claim essentially equates ‘normative heterosexuality’ with necrophilia. While it might be tempting to read this scene psychoanalytically – perhaps in terms of the Lacanian mirror stage – the fact that Benny's facial expression or emotional state is never shown, as he either has his back to the camera or the shot is framed as a close-up of his torso, means there can be no definitive interpretation of his reaction one way or the other. Moreover, in the context of the entire film, it is the only potentially narcissistic act; at no other point does Benny seem particularly interested in his own reflection, either in the mirror or video, instead preferring to stay behind the video camera for practically all of the film. Thus there is no conclusive evidence to suggest an inherent narcissism in Benny's obsession with the

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<sup>70</sup> Sharrett 2006: 13

<sup>71</sup> Sharrett 2006: 13

<sup>72</sup> Frey 2003: 12

video image. As Vinzenz Hediger argues: “*Benny’s Video*, even though set in Vienna, has no place for psychoanalysis.”<sup>73</sup>

Even if this incident in *Benny’s Video* does constitute a narcissistic experience, it does not necessarily imply that narcissism is intrinsically linked to video technology. After all, in *Family Viewing* Stan explicitly has no interest in watching his recorded sex session with Sandra. If anything, Stan’s need for the presence of the video camera suggests a pathological exhibitionism<sup>74</sup> rather than narcissism. Consequently, unlike the potential to capture the intimacy of the family back stage, there is no common representational approach for video when it comes to sexual intimacy. Haneke is highly critical of the effect that postmodern mass media technologies like TV and video have on the family; *Benny’s Video* is thus a testament to the process described by Andreas Kilb:

With the rise of video technology, television has not only gained a commercial competitor in the form of video rental services [...] but also a powerful equal in capturing and playing back visual images of privacy, intimacy and the family. The camcorder has audiovisually socialised this sector, which had previously only partially been covered by Super-8 and 16mm cameras, at a rate which is unprecedented in modernity.<sup>75</sup>

In both films there always seems to be another visual medium running in the background of the filmic world, often to the extent that it distracts from the action. The viewer is practically forced to decide between focussing on either one or the other, attempting to take in both at the same time. While television is generally presented as a passive medium in both *Benny’s Video* and *Family Viewing*, essentially echoing Guy Debord’s concept of a ‘society of the spectacle’ based on Marx’s critiques of the commodity fetish<sup>76</sup> – condemning the medium for disenfranchising the spectator and prohibiting him from fulfilling his social potential – video does appear in a positive light in certain contexts. Egoyan – and to some extent even Haneke – suggests that video has appropriate and inappropriate uses. Romney stresses that while in *Family Viewing* “it is presented as right

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<sup>73</sup> Hediger 2010: 104

<sup>74</sup> see Romney 2003: 52

<sup>75</sup> Kilb 2005: 74\*

<sup>76</sup> see Chapter 2

and proper to record the intimate moments of family life, Stan's sexual recordings are seen as unhealthy and abusive."<sup>77</sup> In some ways, this mirrors the conclusions drawn so far: video is able to fully accomplish its potential of capturing intimacy when present to the back stage space of family life but its success in capturing sexual intimacy depends on the situation and context. Taking Tolstoy's axiom as a model, it seems as though 'happy' video representations of families are all alike; but every 'unhappy' video representation of sex is unhappy in its own way.

### **Fetish and Commodity**

My hypothesis at the beginning of this chapter was that the unique artistic potential of video – its will to art – is the ability to capture intimacy. While we have seen that this claim is accurate in terms of the recording of familial intimacy, the depiction of sexual intimacy is more problematic. At this point it might therefore be worthwhile to observe some negative conceptual positions on video in relation to the two films in question. The first of these is simply that the video image is fetishistic. For some critics, such as Andreas Kilb, the heightened control due to the electronic nature of video means that video is in fact the supreme manifestation of a fetish: "For Benny, this image is a fetish [...] unlike the narrator's memory image in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the image of the dying pig is always immediately available and rewindable."<sup>78</sup> From this analytical perspective, video technology is fetishistic because it offers complete control over the image. How are we to understand the term fetish in this technological context? Following Sigmund Freud's interpretation, the psychoanalytic model suggests that a fetish object attempts to substitute something which has been lost as the result of a strong emotional or traumatic experience. Del Rio illustrates that in this sense,

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<sup>77</sup> Romney 2003: 54-55

<sup>78</sup> Kilb 2005: 69\*

a fetishistic technological practice aims at denying the losses and limitations that threaten to diminish a person's sense of power over his or her reality. As fetish, the image behaves as if it encompasses the whole of reality, as if nothing exists outside its frame – indeed, as if it has no frame to limit and contain its field of action and vision.<sup>79</sup>

At first, this may of course seem an accurate and compelling description of the processes at work in *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing*. Benny and Stan (and to some extent Van) are obsessed by video technology because it offers them control in an increasingly alienating postmodern world. Along these lines, Matthias Frey argues that Benny's ability to rewind represents the ability to control his reality.<sup>80</sup>

However, rather than forcefully projecting this psychoanalytical model onto the medium of video, a better strategy would perhaps be to examine objectively both the practice of video recording and the actual video images themselves in *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing*. For example, does the pig video at the start of *Benny's Video* truly offer totality? All it really provides Benny is one perspective. While he can rewind the tape or replay it in slow motion, he can never see what happened outside of the frame. One of the advantages of video over film is its inherent mobility and ease of recording. Analogue film needs to be set up, lit correctly and so on – video can start recording immediately. While this may bestow video with a *cinéma vérité* sense of authenticity, this is not the same as offering totality. On the contrary, it is specifically film, rather than video, that offers totality. The conventional *suture* of shot/reverse shot is based on the notion that specifically because the cinematic camera is external – i.e. non-diegetic – is it able to capture all angles and offer a total representation of the scene. The video camera on the other hand is very much present in the diegetic world in these films. Unlike film, video does not and cannot rely on the montage of various shots. A video tape will always show what was filmed in chronological order; it can never show the totality implied through the juxtaposition of simultaneous events like film can. As a matter of fact, *Benny's Video* serves as a perfect

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<sup>79</sup> del Rio 2007: 30

<sup>80</sup> Frey 2002: 13

example of this point, completely undermining the notion that video offers totality and is therefore inherently fetishistic. What is so remarkable about the video recording of the murder and the parents' plan to cover it up is that in both cases, we do not actually ever see anything. In one, the video camera only captures the far side of the room with Benny dashing across it twice, and in the other it is only the illuminated gap of the slightly ajar door. In fact, as we shall see in later chapters, formally experimental horror films such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* rely exactly on this notion that the video image is incomplete, that there is always something outside of the frame of the video image.

*Family Viewing* may at first also seem like a tempting example of a fetishistic application of the video image; sexually for Stan and as a replacement for lost memories for Van. However, both of these interpretations are problematic. As established earlier, Stan never watches what he records; so while the presence of the object of the video camera during his sexual activities may have fetishistic qualities, the video image per se does not. Moreover, del Rio analyses Van's appropriation of the video images of his childhood not in terms of fetishism but within a problematic of loss. It is essential to remember that the videos in *Family Viewing* are not strictly speaking simply Van's memories; he did not film them and the point of view is from an outside perspective (mainly Stan's) observing him rather than Van's own point of view. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's notion of the aura, del Rio suggests that the video image is therefore "potentially evocative of an auratic moment in the subject's history."<sup>81</sup> Contrary to Kilb's claim that the video camera "tolerates no subjective gaze; it objectifies the proceedings,"<sup>82</sup> it is clear that in fact *all* it offers in *Family Viewing* – and indeed in *Benny's Video* – is a single, subjective perspective. Benjamin's notion of the aura suggests that a particular object or medium only triggers a mnemonic event rather than claiming full influence over reality. Del Rio elegantly concludes that

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<sup>81</sup> del Rio 2007: 31

<sup>82</sup> Kilb 2005: 73\*

fetishism thus appears to be a matter of epistemological choice, rather than a consequence of the ontological status of the technology itself. However unconsciously generated, fetishism operates as a structure of subjective intentionality, stemming from the desire to contain and forget the corporeality and morality that both limit and enable human existence. Simply stated, technology is not inherently fetishistic, but [...] the user can deploy it as a fetish.<sup>83</sup>

This means that while in *Family Viewing* the telephone and the video equipment fulfil Stan's paraphilic needs, one cannot simply extrapolate fetishistic qualities from them onto video in general.

The second criticism brought against video, not unrelated to psychoanalytical ideas of fetishism, is that it is a consumer commodity – in other words, an example of Marx's commodity fetish. Some commentators argue that Benny's – and Stan's – fixation on video is the result of an "entrapment by contemporary junk culture (represented best in the pop art-like scenes at McDonald's)."<sup>84</sup> This position is deeply techno-essentialist at its root, truly believing that video technology – indeed, any digital technology – fundamentally impoverishes human potential and social interaction. As Schönhart explains, "the glut of reproducible and manipulable information in Benny's universe is harshly contrasted by the lack of 'real' experience based on physical reality. [...] The contacts with other people depicted in the film seem emotionally frigid and are marked by a lasting distance."<sup>85</sup> This does of course ignore the fact that Van actively chooses video technology over anything else as a way of reconnecting with his cultural identity – indeed, Egoyan shows that Van taking control of the video tapes is equivalent to taking control of his destiny, or directing his personal narrative. The techno-essentialist stance on video, frequently based on a materialist world view, is problematic because it presupposes a fixed practice of technology without allowing the reinvention central to the history of cinema as proposed by Deleuze. So while Anne Friedberg, for example, rightly points out that the videocassette as a market commodity destroys the myth of cinema projection;

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<sup>83</sup> del Rio 2007: 31-32

<sup>84</sup> Sharrett 2006: 11

<sup>85</sup> Schönhart 2005: 148\*

the market of commodified video-movies available to the home viewer has meant that the 'aura' of the original moment of cinema exhibition also disappears. [...] As a 'commodity-experience', the videocassette [...] offers a loss of aura of the second order, a temporal loss (which the opportunities for repetition-replay produce),<sup>86</sup>

she fails to consider what auratic effect the viewing of personal home videos, capturing the back stage intimacy of family life on videotape, can have on those watching themselves in the past.<sup>87</sup> As del Rio points out, in *Family Viewing* Egoyan makes it clear that repeated viewing of home videos, rather than being antithetical to aura, can "further an auratic mode of vision."<sup>88</sup> Through repeated viewings of the video recording of her mother's funeral, Aline comes to terms with her guilt at being out of town when her mother passed away, and those images become part of her subjective experience. The repetition and juxtaposition in the final scene of footage seen earlier throughout the film against the surveillance camera in the shelter also underlines the individual and subjective memorializing function of the video camera. Echoing Kittler and others, the critics of video – and indeed Haneke himself – seem to subscribe to "the view that subjectivity is a mere afterthought to media technology."<sup>89</sup> Ultimately, while the techno-essentialists correctly highlight some problematic uses of video, their conceptual position is overwhelmingly framed in a discourse of loss. As a result, their essentialism prevents them from articulating what the artistic potential of video may be.

### Video's Will to Art

Much of the discourse surrounding video is marked by a deep mistrust of the technology. Many commentators see the various effects of video on social habits and interactions as primarily negative. However, from the outset, my aim has been to approach video without theoretical preconceptions or an ideological agenda. Deleuze does not see

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<sup>86</sup> Friedberg 1993: 139-140

<sup>87</sup> see Odin 2008: 259-260 and Chapter 3

<sup>88</sup> del Rio 2007: 46

<sup>89</sup> Hediger 2010: 104

technology as the solution to humanism's emancipatory ideals – but neither is he a techno-essentialist, as some critics of video seem to be. As a sort of moral conservative, Deleuze is much more neutral, only suggesting that “the new automatism is worthless in itself *if* it is not put to the service of a powerful, obscure, condensed will to art.”<sup>90</sup> My question was therefore simply whether this will to art can be established for video.

This chapter began with the hypothesis that representing intimacy could be a unique capacity of video. Since the 1980s the primary focus of film-makers' cinematic explorations of the moral, social and aesthetic impact of video certainly appears to have been based on the domestic and familial uses of video. Expanding on Erving Goffman's theatrical analogy, I defined intimacy as a back stage space way from an audience, allowing individuals to drop their public persona and prepare for either individual or team performances on the front stage. According to Herzfeld, intimacy provides insiders with their assurance of common (cultural) sociality and a space where they can be themselves without thinking about potential causes for embarrassment. The intersection of intimacy and video can thus either be recordings of family life – everyday events or special family occasions – or recordings of sexual activity. As Egoyan and Haneke demonstrate in their films, these conflicting types of intimate recording can even coexist on the same tape. So perhaps the fact that video is not only able to capture these intimate spaces – denied to film – but actually be a part of them is precisely what makes it so unique. Deleuze asserts that video's will to art must be one not based on movement or speech, the aspects underpinning the movement-image and the time-image. The initial proposition was thus that underpinning the will to art of video is the idea of a new 'intimacy-image', based on the fundamentally inimitable capacity of video to reflect and be a part of intimacy.

*Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video* only serve as two specific examples of a particular historical moment in the larger development from traditional analogue to

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<sup>90</sup> Deleuze 2007: 255 [emphasis added]

contemporary digital cinema. The interplay between various formats – whether film, video or television – in *Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video* has the effect of making these various levels discrete, and their differences more pronounced to the viewer. The diegetic video camera and video footage are used only sparingly in these films; and it is precisely the rarity of video and its juxtaposition against the predominant film and televisual sequences that give it such impact. The unique potential of the video camera to be present to intimate moments is emphasized when shown alongside the inability of the analogue film camera to do the same, and the coldness of the simulacrum of familial intimacy offered by television. However, as video technology progressed from these early stages in the late 1980s and early 1990s and became digital, the differences became more illegible and difficult to decode. This development is termed convergence. Haneke's later film *Caché* is a perfect example of this trend, and will be the focus of the final chapter of this thesis.

Limiting the scope of the analysis to video in this chapter led to the conclusion that the will to art of video, in its historical moment, is indeed intimacy. However, video has not only changed contemporary cinema, in terms of what is represented, how it is represented and how it is read, but social habits in general. As Andreas Kilb observes:

in western industrialized states, the video apparatus has replaced substantial parts of the classic bourgeois culture of writing: the family book, travel notes, literature, correspondence. The images that it creates are displayed on the same screen as the offers of television channels and video rental services. Commercial and private image production intermingle and cancel each other out. With the newest generation of home PCs, the audiovisual coup has become complete.<sup>91</sup>

The question that now must now be addressed in the following chapters is how the will to art of video relates to that of all of contemporary digital cinema. Twenty years after the release of *Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video*, it remains to be seen whether technological developments and new film-making practices allow for the sublimation of the intimate within the wider cinematic image. In other words, whether the will to art of video has over time become synonymous with that of cinema in general.

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<sup>91</sup> Kilb 2005: 74\*

## Chapter 2

### *Reconciling Spectacle*

In a key scene early in the cult blockbuster *Cloverfield*, shot from the perspective of the group of young protagonists who have joined a crowd on the streets of downtown Manhattan, something outside the line of sight brushes up against the side of a skyscraper hundreds of feet up, causing massive damage and bringing part of the building down. The scene, like the entire film, is captured with a hand-held camera within the diegesis of the filmic world, inexpertly operated by one of the characters. As a giant cloud of dust heads for the group, the character filming seemingly forgets that the camera is still recording as he runs trying to find cover from the approaching dust and debris. The audience, just like the characters, are left wondering what has caused this destruction and mayhem; terrorists, or perhaps a natural catastrophe? In any other context, this would simply be yet another moment of spectacle in an action blockbuster filled with moments of visual excess. In fact, *Cloverfield* shares many of its dramatic themes, visual motifs and even its setting with the late 1990s remake of *Godzilla* (Roland Emmerich, 1998). Yet there is something about this scene in particular, with its hints of amateur footage from 9/11, which gives it an immediate sense of authenticity uncommon to a cinema of spectacle.

In the previous chapter, it was established that the defining will to art of the video era is intimacy. If the same artistic potential is to be applicable to all of contemporary digital cinema and not just video in a specific historic moment, then the concept of intimacy must be reconciled even with this cinema of spectacle. After all, perhaps the most recognisable feature of contemporary digital cinema is its visual excess. The continued prevalence of CGI effects in films from the spectacular *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) to quiet historical dramas such as *The King's Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2011) and the dozens of digitally animated children's films released every year would certainly seem to suggest that spectacle, rather than intimacy, is the will to art of contemporary digital cinema. However, as Hansen points out:

despite their apparent close correlation with the digital image, none of these effects [...] is specific to it. Rather, these effects cumulatively represent the achievements of the more radical products of time-image cinema.<sup>92</sup>

In other words, though perhaps more impressive and technologically refined, the spectacular effects of contemporary digital cinema are not aesthetically or conceptually separate from those of traditional analogue cinema in which the function of the image is based on time or movement. Thus, while the overwhelmingly digital *Star Wars* prequel trilogy (George Lucas, 1999-2005) is a prime example of visual spectacle, there is in fact little to distinguish it from the original *Star Wars* trilogy (George Lucas/Irvin Kershner/Richard Marquand, 1977-1983).

As suggested in the first chapter, the filmic explorations of the intimate potential of video are primarily realist; that is to say, *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing* are on the whole examples of psychologically realist narrative cinema. Their thematic exploration of the intersection between intimacy and video practices is possible despite – not because of – the non-realist theatricality and stylistic flourishes of Haneke and Egoyan. In classical film theory, realism, which subordinates style to notions of truthfulness or authenticity, is

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<sup>92</sup> Hansen 2002: 52

generally posited against anti-realist modes of cinema, which celebrate style or visual excess. Visual spectacle in cinema, a staple of various cinematic genres – from musicals to science fiction, from horror films to action films – is conventionally regarded as antithetical to both narrative progression and realist aesthetics. There are numerous examples across many genres where cinematic spectacle is indeed simply intended as visual pleasure for its own sake. So, how can intimacy be reconciled with this notion of spectacle?

The presumption that spectacle is inherently anti-realist may be a little rash. The history of spectacular cinema is in fact littered with repeated attempts at greater realism. Examples of such attempts include photo-realistic special effects, as in *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (George Lucas, 1977) or a simulated documentary mode of presentation, such as the end credits of *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968). If spectacular cinema is really limited to an anti-realist aesthetic, how are we to understand these realist ambitions? There is of course a difference between a film merely aiming to be ‘realistic’ and one adhering to a realist aesthetic in the formal sense. Nonetheless, it suggests that spectacle and realism are not entirely incompatible.

*Cloverfield* only uses footage recorded within the diegesis of the filmic world. Unlike *Family Viewing* and *Benny’s Video*, there is no juxtaposition of externally and diegetically recorded footage. Everything the audience sees is from the perspective of a camera held by one of the characters. The consequences of this simple formal device are that notions of authenticity and realism – which appear irreconcilable with action genre conventions – are introduced into a cinema generally associated with spectacle. They would even seem to suggest that intimacy could also be the new principle, the new function of the image, the new artistic finality of spectacular contemporary digital cinema. How else, considering they are similar on so many other levels, can *Cloverfield* offer a much more authentic – even intimate – back stage portrayal of its characters than *Godzilla*?

So that we may unravel how *Cloverfield* is able to create this sense of back stage authenticity and allow for intimacy in what would conventionally be considered a 'shallow' and spectacular blockbuster, we must first chart the attempts of realism in mainstream spectacular cinema that have gone before it. In order to contextualise both spectacle and realism in cinema, it may be useful to examine their wider conceptual backgrounds. Moreover, there are three predominant methods used by film-makers to merge their realist ambitions with traditionally anti-realist forms of spectacular cinema. *The Blair Witch Project* – in many ways the decisive progenitor to *Cloverfield* – manages to go beyond these generic devices used to recreate the illusion of realism and instead relies on amateur video practices to imply truthfulness. Crucially however, *Cloverfield* builds on aspects from *The Blair Witch Project*, successfully creating a new form of hybrid film reconciling intimacy with spectacle.

### *Qu'est-ce que le spectacle?*

The concept of spectacle posited by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* has had a major impact on a variety of contemporary theories of society and culture – not least film theory. Debord's study provides an extensive reinterpretation of Marx's work, most notably in its application of commodity fetishism to modern mass media. For Debord, spectacle constitutes the overarching concept of a media-saturated and consumerist society, in particular the packaging, promotion and display of commodities and the production and effects of all contemporary media.<sup>93</sup> At the core of his argument, Debord traces the development of a modern society in which authentic social life has been replaced with its representation: "All that was once directly lived has become mere representation."<sup>94</sup> Consequently he argues that spectacle is an inverted image of society, an image in which relations between commodities have supplanted relations between people and passive

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<sup>93</sup> Kellner 2005: 24

<sup>94</sup> Debord 1994: 12

identification with the spectacle supplants genuine activity. In his words: “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”<sup>95</sup> Prefiguring the media theories of Kittler and others, he claims that the spectacle of modern media dispossesses humans of the use of their powers of creative praxis and immerses them in a totally engulfing imagistic consumerist environment that alienates them from ‘real life’.<sup>96</sup> Debord argues:

Since the spectacle’s job is to cause a world that is no longer directly perceptible to be seen via different specialized mediations, it is inevitable that it should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch; the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society’s generalized abstraction. This is not to say, however, that the spectacle itself is perceptible to the naked eye – even if that eye is assisted by the ear.<sup>97</sup>

Just as Debord develops his concept of the ‘society of the spectacle’ within a materialist discourse, Jean Baudrillard follows a similar route in semiotics. Applying it to contemporary cinema, Baudrillard argues that cinema has become preoccupied with the maximisation of its own technological, economic and spectacular potentials: “cinema has become the spectacular demonstration of what one can do with the cinema.”<sup>98</sup> The cinema of spectacle thus serves as an example of Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum, where the relationship between reality and representation breaks down and the sign only signifies itself (or another sign). The logic of this critical position suggests that because spectacular cinema is self-reflexive and revels in its status as fiction, it stands in clear opposition to narrative cohesion – and therefore narrative realism. Andrew Darley argues:

If, ultimately, the spectacular aspect has always been viewed as subordinate to and in a sense subject to the control of a repressive narrative logic, this is precisely because spectacle is, in many respects, the antithesis of narrative. Spectacle effectively halts motivated movement. In its purer state it exists for itself, consisting of images whose main drive is to dazzle and stimulate the eye.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Debord 1994: 12

<sup>96</sup> Lockwood 2005: 74

<sup>97</sup> Debord 1994: 17

<sup>98</sup> in Bignell 1996: 177

<sup>99</sup> in Wood 2002: 371

What many theorists therefore suggest is that instead of providing coherence and unity, the exaggerated spaces of spectacle make no obvious contribution to the progression and closure of the narrative and only draw attention to themselves as surface, “an excess that distracts from the temporal flow.”<sup>100</sup> For this critical position, dialogue constitutes the most important basis for narrative progression and as Debord states himself: “[Spectacle] is the opposite of dialogue.”<sup>101</sup> ‘Classical Hollywood’, the common argument goes, subordinated the spectacle of movement-image cinema to causal, character and dialogue-driven narrative, while specific genres – such as the action film, horror films and musicals – continued to privilege spectacle at the expense of storytelling.<sup>102</sup> While not necessarily nostalgic for the storytelling of ‘classical Hollywood’, this position is highly critical of spectacle in cinema on a socio-political level. Such interpretations have much common ground with techno-essentialist media theories: the criticism that the cinema of the spectacle disenfranchises the spectator, and prevents them from fulfilling their social potential is the same one levelled at other new media – including video.

However, just like in that discourse, there are alternative views. Unlike Debord and Baudrillard, Geoff King opposes the view that spectacle has diminished the importance of narrative in cinema. At the core of his claim is the belief that:

spectacular Hollywood blockbusters continue to invest strongly in narrative dynamics, and at more than one level. They tell carefully organized, more or less linear cause/effect stories organised around central characters. They also manifest what a structuralist analysis would term ‘underlying’ narrative structural patterns. [...] *Terminator 2* has strong and carefully orchestrated narrative dimensions. Like most other spectacular blockbusters, it offers a combination of spectacular and narrative appeals, a quality clearly marked from the outset. [...] Outbursts of spectacle and special effects are narratively situated; they serve narrative purposes.<sup>103</sup>

Special effects sequences, he concedes, are designed to show off the effects. This would suggest that one of the key components of the internal logic of cinematic spectacle is its

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<sup>100</sup> Wood 2002: 372

<sup>101</sup> Debord 1994: 17

<sup>102</sup> Higgins 2008: 75

<sup>103</sup> King 2003: 121-122

self-referentiality. If spectacular special effects are experienced as effects, this necessarily entails that there is a sense of alienation from the narrative of the film, “something less than total engrossment in the ongoing events of the diegetic universe.”<sup>104</sup> Essentially, the viewer is aware of the nature of the image as construct. However, King argues that to interpret spectacle and special effects as interruption or bracketing of the narrative would be to suggest that the normal model of film spectatorship is essentially total and undivided absorption and engrossment in the diegesis of the film world. Instead of seeing filmic texts as *unified*, based on a one-dimensional narrative model, he argues that cinema has always been far more *multilayered*. This conceptual dichotomy between unified versus multilayered texts reoccurs in various discourses on contemporary digital cinema.<sup>105</sup> Even though spectacle is self-referential, it nonetheless may feature narrative closure. King therefore suggests that elements of spectacle and narrative can operate with, rather than against, each other.<sup>106</sup> This claim certainly appears to correspond to the finding in the last chapter that the mannered performances, stylistic flourishes and formal experimentation of *Family Viewing* and *Benny’s Video* – all theoretically non-realist elements – can still coexist in a predominantly realist, character-driven narrative.

### Ontology and Omniscience

The cinema of spectacle – whether one chooses to interpret it as antithetical to narrative or not – has nonetheless frequently aimed for an aesthetic of realism. Gary D. Rhodes, in his study of realist horror films, remarks that “the genre’s history is peppered with repeated attempts at greater and greater realism in various forms, even if many horror films have intentionally sought less-than-realistic qualities.”<sup>107</sup> Indeed, his claim echoes those narrative interpretations of cinematic spectacle that suggest spectacular effects can

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<sup>104</sup> King 2003: 121-122

<sup>105</sup> see Chapter 4

<sup>106</sup> Wood 2002: 373

<sup>107</sup> Rhodes 2002: 50

intensify – rather than detract from – the verisimilitude of an imagined world. Thus spectacle may be realigned with narrative unity and realism rather than excess.<sup>108</sup>

At this point it may be useful to clarify – however loosely – what a realist aesthetic entails. In order to do so, we should distinguish between two separate definitions of cinematic realism. On the one hand, ontological realism, as originally suggested by the French film theorist Andre Bazin, refers to the aesthetic imperative of the ontology of the cinematic image. Essentially, there are two propositions at the heart of Bazin's cinematic realism: the first is that realist ambitions have always been the motivation for creating art: "if the history of the plastic arts is less a matter of their aesthetic than of their psychology, it is essentially the story of resemblance, or if you will, of realism."<sup>109</sup> Secondly, that by virtue of the mechanical causality of the photographic process, the photographic image is seen as a commitment to the objective reproduction of an antecedent reality. The invention of photography has thus freed art from its need for realism – allowing for expressionism and abstraction – but at the same time now dictates the aesthetic imperative of photography and by extension cinema. As he states in his essay 'The Screen and the Realism of Space': "the realism of cinema follows directly from its photographic nature."<sup>110</sup> Bazin's notion of cinematic realism is therefore often expressed through a list of attributes, movements and directors that fulfil this function in an exemplary way; for example deep focus, the long take, Italian Neo-realism, Jean Renoir and Orson Welles.<sup>111</sup> While a director's personal style does contribute to Bazin's understanding of realism, for him it is primarily motivated by the photographic image's inherent referentiality.

On the other hand, realism can be taken to mean a particular convention of filmmaking, one which focuses on the truthful representation of action while adhering to psychological and narrative conventions descended from the nineteenth-century realist

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<sup>108</sup> Wood 2002: 373

<sup>109</sup> Bazin 2005a: 10

<sup>110</sup> Bazin 2005b: 108

<sup>111</sup> Morgan 2006: 444

novel. Colin MacCabe is noted for advocating this narrative interpretation of realism, claiming that:

narrative prose achieves its position of dominance because it is in the position of knowledge and this function of knowledge is taken up in the cinema by the narration of events.<sup>112</sup>

For MacCabe then, the camera takes the same position of knowledge and truth as the omniscient narrator in what he calls the ‘Classic Realist Text’ – the nineteenth-century novel. In his words: “the camera shows us what happens;”<sup>113</sup> and consequently, if the camera is as truthful and knowledgeable as nineteenth-century narrative prose then it must be considered equally realist. This theory of realism stresses the potential of cinema to convey a representation of reality which appears to conform to reality, not just visually (through the use of photographic fidelity) but by representing reality as a continuous and unfragmented narrative whole.<sup>114</sup> Realism in this case suggests a cinematic style with the aim of truthfully depicting reality as it is; its narrative authority stems from the ‘truthfulness’ of the camera.

### Realist Devices

When a spectacular film has realist ambitions, it often has to walk a fine line between a representation which shares these aims of depicting reality truthfully, and one which conforms to certain genre expectations – such as spectacular fight and/or chase sequences in an action film, or over-the-top violence and gore in a horror film. There are however three devices or representational methods which enable film-makers to balance these two seemingly irreconcilable aesthetic ambitions.

The first of these is the use of photorealistic special effects – now increasingly done with computer generated imagery (CGI). Using this approach, the cinematic images must, on the one hand, create the visual impression of photographic fidelity and, on the other

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<sup>112</sup> MacCabe 1974: 10

<sup>113</sup> MacCabe 1974: 10

<sup>114</sup> Brown 2007: 97

hand, the action within the image must seem to adhere to the physical laws of the real world. This approach, which has been termed ‘perceptual realism’, extends the aesthetic norms of realism even to spectacular cinema, arguing that the relation between *any* filmic reality and our own is based on visual resemblance and our experience of the world. Stephen Prince, in his influential essay ‘True Lies’, bases his approach to spectacular cinema – specifically, films which use digital effects – on a reading of Bazin heavily indebted to phenomenology. Rather than insisting on an indexical correspondence between the image and what was in front of the camera, he suggests that because there is a psychological connection between any cinematic image and our extra-diegetic reality, a spectacular realist film must simply recreate a ‘normal’ experience of the world. He points out that digitally created imagery is paradoxically made to look more ‘realistic’ by lowering its high-definition precision to imitate photographic qualities: for instance by adding faux film grain, motion blur or lens flares – which do not occur the same way in a digital recording. Perceptual realism is therefore determined by the imaginary image’s correspondence with the audience’s expectations about how objects look and move through space in the real world, rather than by the ability of the camera to imprint traces of those objects in celluloid.<sup>115</sup> He argues that in traditional analogue cinema, “cinematic realism is viewed as a discourse coded for transparency such that the indexicality of photographic realism is replaced by a view of the ‘reality effect’ produced by codes and discourse.”<sup>116</sup> In the case of digital cinema he claims:

Digital imaging practices suggest that contemporary film theory’s insistence upon the constructedness and artifice of cinema’s discursive properties may be less productive than is commonly thought. [...] Indexicality cannot furnish us with the basis for understanding this apparent photographic realism, but a correspondence based approach can. Because the computer-generated images have been rendered with such attention to 3D spatial information, they acquire a very powerful perceptual realism, despite the obvious ontological problems in calling them ‘realistic’. These are falsified correspondences, yet because the perceptual information they contain is

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<sup>115</sup> Allison 2009: 150

<sup>116</sup> Prince 1996: 31

valid, the dinosaurs [in *Jurassic Park*] acquire a remarkable degree of photographic realism.<sup>117</sup>

Thus, to use his example, while Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) is unquestionably a spectacular – and therefore potentially anti-realist – blockbuster, it nonetheless conforms to this perceptual realism. To see how this realism operates, let us first consider an example Bazin gives to illustrate the psychological effect of ontological realism. Bazin cites a scene in *Where No Vultures Fly* (Harry Watt, 1951) in which dramatic impact is increased when the director presents “parents, child and lioness all in the same shot. This single frame in which trickery is out of the question gives it immediate and retroactive authenticity.”<sup>118</sup> The effect on the viewer is so strong according to Bazin, because of their inherent awareness of the indexicality of the filmic process – the awareness that the lioness occupied the same physical space as the actors.

Yet an identical effect is achieved in *Jurassic Park*, but here the dinosaurs and actors are only present to each other in a virtual space – there is no indexical link. The scene in which velociraptors and children come together within a single frame nonetheless offers the same authenticity and emotional impact as the shot in *Where No Vultures Fly*. Both the images themselves as well as the figures and actions contained within them correspond with the audience's experiences and expectations of reality. That is to say, while the possibility of living, breathing dinosaurs cloned from a drop of blood for an amusement park run by an ominous biotech corporation is obviously a fantasy, the dinosaurs' visual representation in the film is more or less scientifically accurate and corresponds to what we expect dinosaurs to look like. To achieve this, Spielberg and his crew closely collaborated with palaeontologists to construct both digital and animatronic models which resemble both the appearance and movement of these extinct creatures. Furthermore, while the film probably contains innumerable scientific flaws or even outright impossibilities – in order either to

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<sup>117</sup> Prince 1996: 34-35

<sup>118</sup> Bazin 2005a: 49

gloss over plot holes or to justify a particular effect – both the human characters and the dinosaurs nonetheless conform to the physical laws of reality. Thus, no character has any super-human powers, objects with a certain mass (whether cars or dinosaurs) obey the laws of gravity and motion and everything within the diegesis of the filmic world naturalistically interacts with and impacts on the world itself – for example, both the indexically recorded actors and the digitally created dinosaurs have shadows and reflections. All these special effects, some of which may be employed during the shooting of the film and others added during post-production, give spectacular cinema the ability to represent simultaneously indexical reproductions and perceptually realistic yet referentially false images in the same frame. Photorealistic special effects can thus represent the factually impossible with a high degree of visual fidelity to our expectation of reality.

In representing the impossible or sublime, perceptual realism can overcome reality's limitations and even represent the hyper-real, "a construction with signifying powers beyond the simulacrum."<sup>119</sup> So for instance, there does not superficially seem to be a massive difference between the opening battle between Roman legions and Germanic barbarians in *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2002) and the final one between humans and orcs in *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Peter Jackson, 2002). The same could be said of the assault on Omaha Beach in *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) and the human invasion of the alien planet in *Starship Troopers* (Paul Verhoeven, 1997). All of these examples are unquestionably scenes of violent visual excess which also share the same motif or theme. Ostensibly, the only immediate differences are genre distinctions; while *Gladiator* and *Saving Private Ryan* are historical spectacles, *The Two Towers* and *Starship Troopers* fall under the equally spectacular genres of fantasy and science-fiction, respectively. While film reviewers and audiences may have lauded the former two for their gritty realism in their relatively accurate historical depictions of war, there are arguably no

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<sup>119</sup> Everett 2003: 9

visual, aesthetic or even ontological differences between them and the latter two examples. They are all simply filmic representations of warfare. In short, it can be said that if a spectacular film visually recreates a ‘normal’ experience of the world – in line with our earlier definition of realism as a cinematic style with the aim of depicting reality as it is – then it may be considered ‘perceptually realist’ even if the narrative or genre do not conform to classical cinematic realism’s conventions. This then is the first way film-makers may attempt to reconcile realism with spectacular cinema. As the examples provided illustrate, it primarily operates on a visual level.

The second method, on the other hand, functions mainly on a narrative level. A relatively recent development, it is the increased emphasis on narrative realism and psychologically-realist character development within otherwise ‘shallow’ mainstream spectacular cinema.<sup>120</sup> From a historical perspective, the modern media spectacle – so preoccupied with the maximisation of its own technological, economic and spectacular potentials that it immerses audiences in a totally engulfing imagistic consumerist environment which alienates them from ‘real life’ – appeared to reach its saturation point in the late 1990s. The cinema of spectacle was in crisis, resulting in some notable critical and commercial flops; this was particularly evident in ongoing filmic franchises, which tend to be prime examples of spectacular cinema. Notable in this respect are *Batman and Robin* (Joel Schumacher, 1997) and *Die Another Day* (Lee Tamahori, 2002), from the Batman and James Bond franchises respectively. Audiences seemed to tire of the relentless onslaught of spectacle for spectacle’s sake, and so the market-based system behind such blockbusters adapted and allowed the cinema of spectacle to evolve into something more commercially viable. In particular, film producers and studios increasingly turned to a cinema of spectacle which simultaneously offered greater narrative depth to ensure continued financial success for their franchises – though of course films celebrating visual excess for its own sake

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<sup>120</sup> see Kipnis 1998: 694

continue to be widely produced. As King points out, spectacle in contemporary cinema now tends to conform to existing conventions of narrative realism: “Outbursts of spectacle and special effects are narratively situated; they serve narrative purposes.”<sup>121</sup>

The critical and commercial success of the Bourne franchise is a testament to this development in contemporary action films. While *The Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman, 2002), the first in the series, undoubtedly caters to traditional action film conventions with its mix of combat and chase sequences, it also – unusually for the genre – features a solid psychological narrative about the existential identity crisis of the amnesiac secret agent Jason Bourne (Matt Damon), combined with an explicit critique of the Bush-era covert intelligence apparatus. Clearly, the film showed that spectacle is not unavoidably the antithesis of realist, character-driven narrative or political commentary.<sup>122</sup> While Andrew Darley may claim that in *all* cases “spectacle effectively halts motivated movement [...] In its purer state it exists for itself, consisting of images whose main drive is to dazzle and stimulate the eye,”<sup>123</sup> the interplay of action and psychology in *The Bourne Identity* confirms that a synthesis between realist and spectacular elements within a single film is perfectly feasible. The success of the Bourne films in turn influenced other major film franchises which had faced critical and financial problems in the 1990s – especially the Batman and James Bond series. Both had become increasingly fantastical in their narratives and in their visual excesses and seemed to privilege spectacle at the expense of storytelling. This resulted in a resurgence of the ‘reboot’, in which successful characters are retained but narrative and often visual continuity to other films in the franchise is broken. In both instances, a prequel – *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005) and *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell, 2006) – allowed film-makers not only a break from the established franchise, but also meant that they could focus more closely on the psychological genesis

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<sup>121</sup> King 2003: 121-122

<sup>122</sup> see Higgins 2008: 76

<sup>123</sup> in Wood 2002: 371

and personal motivations of the protagonist, instead of merely staging a simplistic moral situation (an evil antagonist who must be defeated) as traditional action film conventions would have stipulated. Thus, the sequel to *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008), is thematically less related to a super-hero action spectacle along the lines of *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002) and more to political dramas about a city struggling with organised crime and police corruption such as *The Untouchables* (Brian de Palma, 1987). If, as before, we assume that cinematic realism is the desire to portray reality truthfully, then fully rounded characters as opposed to simplistic cardboard cut-outs are certainly compelling examples of realism on a narrative level. Another key device for a spectacular film with realist ambitions is therefore the stronger reliance on character development and narrative cohesion.

Finally, the third method for reconciling realism with spectacle exploits a representational mode which has immediate associations with truthfulness, and therefore with realism: the documentary. As Bazin notes in his analysis of the documentary *Kon Tiki* (Thor Heyerdahl, 1950), the structure of the film inherently acknowledges documentary film-making practice. As he points out: “whenever something of significance occurred, the onset of a storm for example, the crew were too busy to bother running a camera [...] the making of it is so totally identified with the action that it so imperfectly unfolds.”<sup>124</sup> However, it is perhaps too complicated for spectacular films to employ documentary methods or structures consistently while retaining the conventions of spectacle. What they can do to capture the authority and veracity of documentaries is either quote them directly or emulate their rhetoric.

The most direct way for film-makers to apply this method is simply to include actual documentary or newsreel footage within an otherwise fictional film. This simple textual nesting of documentary texts may thus confer the intrinsically ‘truthful’ relation between

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<sup>124</sup> Bazin 2005a: 161

reality and representation from the documentary to the fictional. An excellent example of this is *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959), which combines documentary footage with a fictional narrative, echoing the parallels between the horrors of forgetting the Hiroshima bombing and the horrors of forgetting a lost love. In fact, *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* – Resnais’ first fiction feature – actually started out as a documentary project on the Hiroshima bombing.

The second method used by film-makers to capture the effect of documentaries is to emulate the formal rhetoric of documentary or newsreel footage. One key technique is the otherwise atypical use of direct address:

It had become a generally-established cinematic convention by the late teens that characters in fiction films did not gaze directly into the camera lens [...] it was very much left to the realm of non-fiction, the newsreels and documentaries. Despite this overall lack of usage in dramatic fiction horror did occasionally incorporate the direct gaze [...] intended to strengthen the realism effect.<sup>125</sup>

While many documentaries in fact do not feature interviewees gazing directly into the camera, the conventions of television interviews and home movies<sup>126</sup> mean that audiences nonetheless associate this gaze with a rhetoric of truthfulness.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, film-makers can also imitate the hand-held cinematography and visual coarseness usually associated with documentary footage. As Kari Hanet points out:

the newsreel footage Resnais uses as pro-filmic event is read as newsreel, i.e. unmodified, ‘real’, because the content of those images corresponds to those other visual and non-visual sources established as true documentation of that historical event [...] the different grain and at times wobbly camera peculiar to newsreel techniques.<sup>128</sup>

The rise of filmic recordings during World War II and the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam as well as the prevalence of *cinéma vérité* documentaries in the 1950s and 1960s were crucial in establishing many audience assumptions about the rhetorical and visual qualities of documentaries.

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<sup>125</sup> Rhodes 2002: 49

<sup>126</sup> see Chapter 3

<sup>127</sup> Rhodes 2002: 56

<sup>128</sup> Hanet 1973: 61

In some cases the two methods may even be intentionally blurred by film-makers to further enhance the effect of realism. In these instances, historical footage is mixed with new footage, altered to make it look the same as the vintage film stock. In fact, even the historical footage itself may now, with the advent of digital technologies, be altered.<sup>129</sup> Thus, in *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994) Tom Hanks is not just edited into historical newsreel footage of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, but they are even digitally manipulated to appear to interact with him. In short, it can be said that if an otherwise spectacular fiction film visually recreates the formal code associated with documentaries, then it is aiming for a realist aesthetic. Alternatively, a spectacular fiction film can also appropriate non-fiction footage, which may then impart its 'truthful' relation to reality onto the entire filmic text. This annexation of the documentary status in a cinema of spectacle is the third of the three primary methods used by film-makers to combine realist aesthetics with a traditionally anti-realist form of cinema.

In any cinematic text, realism can operate on numerous levels: visually, narratively or rhetorically. Spectacular films can employ any combination of the devices and representational methods discussed above to tap into the effects of realism. An aesthetic of realism is not just limited to certain genres or restricted to specific historic movements of cinema. As Christopher Williams points out:

realism is not a singular or univocal style. It is not a homogeneous or finished effect, nor is it a side effect of a genre. Different generic configurations may well make their own versions of realism, and realism in itself does not emerge out of a work conforming with generic norms to 'produce the illusion of realism'.<sup>130</sup>

It is therefore unhelpful to separate spectacle and realism into two incompatible entities. Part of the appeal of studying realism in cinema is not just examining how a filmic text conforms to generic forms of realism but rather how conventionally anti-realist films blend elements of spectacle and realism to create new hybrid forms of realism:

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<sup>129</sup> Rhodes 2002: 47

<sup>130</sup> Williams 1994: 289

An important part of the excitement and interest of both media is the active interplay between the elements which can be defined as realist, and the others which function simultaneously and have either a nonrealist character (primarily formal, linguistic or conventional) or one which can be called antirealist because the character of its formal, linguistic or conventional procedures specifically or explicitly tries to counteract the cognitive dimensions we have linked with realism.<sup>131</sup>

Many of the films mentioned so far illustrate that realism has very much been an aesthetic aim of spectacular cinema for some time now. However, what all these films have in common is that they only partially apply these methods. That is to say, applying documentary methods and structures for the entire duration of a spectacular film is virtually unheard of. Equally, the widespread overuse of special effects – however photorealistic – means that most attempts at realism in spectacular cinema are often simply overshadowed by visual excess. Realist ambitions and visual, narrative or rhetorical devices alone are simply not enough to support the claim that intimacy is compatible with spectacle.

### The Intimacy of Video

However, the unexpected and, to many critics, inexplicable success of *The Blair Witch Project* in the summer of 1999 is testament to fact that at the turn of the millennium something had fundamentally shifted. Why was *The Blair Witch Project* different to countless other generic horror films, many of which may have had varying realist ambitions of their own? Unlike any other film before it, *The Blair Witch Project* uses a narrative device well established in literature but unprecedented (with one exception, detailed below) in feature-length narrative cinema: the epistolary format of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. Its spiritual predecessors are generally considered to be the controversial 1970s Italian exploitation film *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1979), which is so graphic that it was refused classification in many countries and remains heavily cut even in its September 2011 UK DVD release, and the Belgian 'mockumentary' *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* (Rémy Belvaux/André Bonzel/Benoît

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<sup>131</sup> Williams 1994: 289

Poelvoorde, 1992). However, there are two factors that distinguish *The Blair Witch Project* from these antecedents. The first is that while these films technically feature diegetic cameras and ‘found footage’, they employ them in a documentary – rather than intimate – mode. That is to say, *The Blair Witch Project* invokes the back stage of home videos rather than the front stage of documentaries. While there are documentary moments, the majority of *The Blair Witch Project* presents the making of that documentary.<sup>132</sup> The second factor is that, like *Peeping Tom* before them, *Cannibal Holocaust* and *C’est arrivé près de chez vous* are still noticeably pre-video – both are shot on film and thus require strict lighting conditions and a separate sound recordist and boom operator. This ties in to the first element; unlike video, film is a resource which cannot be wasted, and so characters in both films frequently ask the diegetic camera operator “Are you filming?” or “Is it running?” before noticeably altering their performances to suit that front stage documentary context.

*The Blair Witch Project* tells the story of three film students who – as part of a final-year practical project – set out to make a documentary about the ‘Blair Witch’, which, according to local legends, is supposed to be wandering in the woods around the small American town of Burkittsville, Maryland. In order to get close to the witch, the director of the documentary Heather Donahue, having enlisted the help of Michael Williams and Joshua Leonard, plans to spend a weekend interviewing locals about the legend of the Blair Witch and then exploring the woods near Burkittsville to look for further evidence of the Blair Witch. The opening title card immediately emphasizes the supposed authenticity of the filmic document:

In October of 1994, three student film-makers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland, while shooting a documentary. . . . A year later, their footage was found.

Soon after setting out, they become hopelessly lost; their situation worsens when Michael, in frustration, throws their only map away without telling the others. Over a period of

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<sup>132</sup> see Chapter 4

several days, a number of terrifying, mysterious and possibly supernatural events occur. In one scene, the crew hikes for more than half a day only to end up in the same spot where they had started. Shot in a mixture of low-quality DV and black and white 16mm footage, with shaky hand-held camera movements and using only natural lighting, the film is partly comprised of 'official' material that was intended to be used in the documentary, but mostly shows the back stage interactions of the three students as they wander through the woods. Many of the events captured seem highly ambiguous, including the finale; few concrete indications are given as to the eventual fate of the three film-makers but it is suggested that all three have become victims of the Blair Witch.

The first major innovation of *The Blair Witch Project* was the consistent investment, over the entire duration of the film, in a subjective camera. The conventional reading of the subjective camera is that this perspective theoretically allows the audience much greater insight into and empathy with on-screen characters because they share the point of view with one or more of them. Stanley Cavell argues:

It is sometimes said, and it is natural to suppose, that the camera is an extension of the eye. Then it ought to follow that if you place the camera at the physical point of view of a character, it will objectively reveal what the character is viewing. But the fact is, if we have been given the idea that the camera is placed so that what we see is what the character sees as he sees it, then what is shown to us is not just something seen but a specific mood in which it is seen.<sup>133</sup>

This subjectivity is what enables us to identify with the character whose point-of-view we are sharing, theoretically allowing for an intimate relationship between the viewer and the character. One way of thinking about the use of the point-of-view shot is therefore to see it as a kind of guarantee of emotional authenticity; a translation of the first person in literature to the language of film.

Perhaps one of the most striking and extreme examples of the use of the subjective camera is Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1947), an adaptation of a Raymond Chandler novel of the same name. What makes it so unusual is that the entire film, with a

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<sup>133</sup> Cavell 1979: 129

few exceptions, is composed of a series of travelling point-of-view shots. The protagonist, the detective Philip Marlowe, never actually appears on screen except when he is reflected in a mirror (where he is played by the director himself, Robert Montgomery). However, the accepted view is that while the film may be considered 'subjective', the continuous and fairly unimaginative use of the point-of-view soon renders it a gimmick, the novelty of which soon wears off.<sup>134</sup> Jean Mitry even argues that the effect is quite alienating for the viewer,<sup>135</sup> which raises the question why the point-of-view has the reputation of encouraging spectator identification in the first place:

The subjective image is not necessarily (indeed is never) the whole representation of a particular 'subjective view' impossible to externalize. It is completely impossible to represent a mental image, since, having become visual, it ceases to become mental. [...] People feeling dizzy never see the world swaying or out of focus. This entirely 'internal' sensation is not of a particular 'view' of things but of an impulse toward the void against which we fight desperately, producing a feeling of anxiety.<sup>136</sup>

Interestingly, the subjective camera is a frequent device in the horror genre. Horror films often use a point-of-view perspective to delay the appearance of the monster or murderer on screen, thereby building tension; on a practical level this has the added bonus of keeping the screen time of the antagonist in question down to a minimum in order to hide the inadequacies of the special effects, make-up or prosthetics. However, this convention has an unusual side effect: as the bobbing and weaving subjective camera – from the point-of-view of the monster, killer or, for comic relief, an innocent member of the group of victims – stalks its oblivious prey, leading up to the inevitable climax of the pounce, the audience becomes aligned with the role of the antagonist, the stalking monster.<sup>137</sup> That point-of-view reaction shot of a victim screaming at the subjective camera is as clichéd as it is overused. What therefore makes *The Blair Witch Project* so remarkable is that it reverses this genre convention – to great effect: “in *Blair Witch*, the subjective camera locates the audience not

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<sup>134</sup> Branigan 1984: 10

<sup>135</sup> Mitry 1997: 210

<sup>136</sup> Mitry 1997: 208-209

<sup>137</sup> see McDowell 2001: 141

in the monster's position, but in that of the victim's, thereby increasing audience identification and anxiety. The serial elimination of the cast is reminiscent of 'body count' films, but without the gore."<sup>138</sup> As a result, *The Blair Witch Project* manages to adapt the associations of the point-of-view in order to suggest emotional intimacy, while simultaneously side-stepping precisely those conventions identified as flawed by Mitry. In this case, an unfocused shot does not mean the character is dizzy but simply that the diegetic camera is literally out of focus.

However, while *The Blair Witch Project* has a total commitment to the subjective camera, it almost seems as if the film-makers were worried that this was too much for audiences. By giving the characters two cameras – one 16mm and one video – they allow for multiple subjective perspectives. A large part of the pleasure of watching *The Blair Witch Project* comes precisely from this interplay of conflicting points of view:

That instability allows us to shift and share sympathies, as when Josh, filming Heather, upbraids her for getting them lost, while it also allows us another register of feeling when, from her subjective vantage, we see the familiar scenery that indicates they have gone in a circle, and the faces of Josh and Mike accusingly look to Heather. That same systemic instability allows as well for our acceptance of the shifty environment in which these events transpire.<sup>139</sup>

A related effect of *The Blair Witch Project*'s use of the subjective camera is the extraordinary power of off-screen space. Rather than assuming a position of power and superior awareness, as in the conventional stalking monster POV shot, the students film their surroundings from a position of overwhelming inferiority; in the dark – both literally and figuratively. After nightfall, the students – and of course the spectators – hear strange and extremely unnerving noises, but the cameras are only able to illuminate and capture their immediate surroundings. Off-screen space, that which is *not visible* in a *visual* recording, becomes infinitely larger and scarier than the visible space.<sup>140</sup> As Paul Wells observes in his study of the horror genre: "*The Blair Witch Project* emphatically succeeds

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<sup>138</sup> McDowell 2001: 141

<sup>139</sup> Telotte 2001: 37

<sup>140</sup> see Atkinson 1999:74

in doing this by essentially recovering ‘suggestion’ and ‘illusion’ in the horror film, and with them the idea that the most persuasive horror is the one suggested in the mind of the viewer, rather than that which is explicitly expressed on screen.”<sup>141</sup>

Not only did this novel use of the subjective camera generate a highly effective device to increase dramatic tension (which is highly sought after in the horror genre), but also offered the audience unique glimpses into the relaxed and intimate interactions between the on-screen characters, while never suggesting that the point-of-view is a character’s internal or mental perspective. The frequently forced proximity of the characters, for example in the tent at night, allows for privileged access to intimate back stage moments that would otherwise be denied to the conventional filmic use of non-subjective, shot/reverse shot camera set-ups. Instead of offering the totality of the convention of *suture*, the film-makers recognized that subjectivity and a fragmented perspective of reality – where what we cannot see is as important, if not more so, than what we do – is the unique function of the video image. For the first time, it appears as though authentic back stage intimacy – the will to art of video – is possible even in the horror genre. This would suggest that cinematic spectacle, conventionally regarded as antithetical to realist aesthetics and of which the horror film is a prime example, is not as incompatible with intimacy as could be assumed.

The second key innovation of *The Blair Witch Project* was the coherent adoption of amateur film-making practices, and video practices in particular, in combination with accurately contextualised performances. In this context, an amateur digital video recording is thus taken to offer a more authentic representation of intimate interactions than an analogue, filmic one. As Rhodes points out, the film-makers behind *The Blair Witch Project* recognized

what viewers have come to believe reality looks like, the visual aesthetics that are almost automatically embraced by audiences as representative of

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<sup>141</sup> Wells 2000: 108-109

non-fiction film-making. [...] Technical imperfections are understood to be part of the form, and part of what reality on film looks like.<sup>142</sup>

More so than any of the devices previously used by spectacular films with realist ambitions, the shaky camerawork, bad framing and unfocussed shots – all visual signifiers of video practices – signal that these are unintentional recordings of the most personal and intimate spaces; recordings of the back stage with candid conflicts between characters, embarrassing tantrums and long periods of nothing happening at all except the odd observation or throw-away comment. Only with video's potential for constant recording is the audience given access to moments that would otherwise be considered unnecessary, unimportant or too much effort to film.

Like much reality TV or docu-soap, the style looks rather amateurish, which for us as viewers tends to signify authenticity and heightens the feeling that we are seeing the world as it is. [...] The aesthetics of the camcorder look, the shaky frame, the movement in and out of focus, the inability to keep the subjects within the frame and the camcorder's portability are most often associated with intimacy and authenticity.<sup>143</sup>

There is therefore a crucial difference between *The Blair Witch Project* and all earlier examples of films with diegetic cameras, *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* for example. *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* is attempting to mimic the official, front stage discourse of documentaries, while *The Blair Witch Project* is trying to present the intimate, back stage discourse of personal video recordings.

Just as essential as the 'look' of amateur video practices is that the on-screen characters are aware of the camera. In *The Blair Witch Project*, this is made clear in their mode of address: some things are said to the person holding the camera (made clear by the sight lines of the character speaking), while at other times, the characters address the camera itself – most notably Heather towards the end of the film with her famous and often parodied confession. As Kim Newman notes, it is crucial that: "the onscreen characters be aware of the camera, undermining the supposed realism of fly-on-the-wall by

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<sup>142</sup> Rhodes 2002: 56-57

<sup>143</sup> Roscoe 2000: 5

demonstrating that the presence of an observer affects the outcome of the experiment.”<sup>144</sup> This Heisenbergian notion of subject awareness is a major part of video performances and in *The Blair Witch Project* it is accurately reflected in the interactions of the students.

The final innovation of *The Blair Witch Project* was a hitherto unprecedented combination of paratextual (i.e. elements typically added during the distribution process such as title cards and opening/closing credits) and extra-textual (i.e. elements external to the primary filmic text) features in combination with the already established formal, visual and rhetorical devices. That is to say, on the one hand it was marketed to audiences as a non-fiction filmic document; and on the other, there was nothing within the film itself suggesting the text was anything other than actual ‘found footage’. One of the most significant precedents for this marketing ploy in the history of modern mass media is Orson Welles’ 1938 adaptation of H.G. Wells’ novel *The War of the Worlds*.<sup>145</sup> As is well documented, Welles transformed the novel into a radio-play masquerading as a news bulletin – complete with interviews with ‘specialists’, on-site reporting and ‘interruptions’ of ‘scheduled’ music broadcasts. Listener assumptions about non-fiction radio reporting were thus expertly manipulated by a semantic hybrid: an entirely fictional text posing in the guise of non-fiction. Margrit Schreier observes in her study of the viewer reactions to *The Blair Witch Project*, “in evaluating nonfiction products, recipients will apply the criteria of truth and utility, expecting the products to say something about ‘reality’. In the case of fiction products, these expectations are suspended.”<sup>146</sup> Thus, listeners in 1938 were accustomed to accepting newsflashes as reliable and Welles’ imitation of the format reportedly caused mass hysteria and, in the aftermath of the reported panic, a public outcry. While contemporary cinema audiences, situated within a pervasive multimedia environment, are arguably much more sceptically predisposed toward such devices than

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<sup>144</sup> Newman 1999: 6

<sup>145</sup> Rhodes 2002: 50

<sup>146</sup> Schreier 2004: 313-314

previous generations of cinema-goers, *The Blair Witch Project* and its successors nonetheless essentially tap into the same idea. As Schreier points out: “No paratextual signals of the film’s fictionality are available, not even the names of the actors and the directors, which are completely unknown to the public. On the pragmatic level, the paratext thus locates the film within the category of nonfiction products, casting some doubt upon this status in the credits only.”<sup>147</sup> The lack of opening credits and use of completely unknown actors – which is further compounded by the fact the actors’ names are also their characters’ – make the film’s fictional status not immediately decipherable.

The hype promoting *The Blair Witch Project* – while obviously primarily a commercial tool designed to increase ticket sales – was more than just a simple added-on marketing ploy. Its promotional campaign can be considered the successful prototype which all subsequent ‘found footage’ films have tried to emulate. In combination with an extensive conventional advertising campaign – including television adverts, ads in print media and the distribution of ‘missing’ posters of the three protagonists<sup>148</sup> – the campaign’s primary channel for information was a website further expanding on the film’s back-story: with numerous ‘sources’ and documents to corroborate both the existence of the historical Blair Witch as well as an investigation into the disappearance of the three film students. This was further supplemented by a TV documentary, *The Curse of the Blair Witch*, produced by Artisan (the company that had produced *The Blair Witch Project* itself) and shown on the American Sci-Fi Channel shortly before the official release of the film. This forty-five-minute feature presented further details surrounding the case, such as additional interviews, for instance, with the professor who had given the students their assignment.

This is not to say that other films do not offer similar extra-textual experiences. Websites are essentially inexpensive press kits for the digital age,<sup>149</sup> not only providing the

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<sup>147</sup> Schreier 2004: 320

<sup>148</sup> Telotte 2001: 33

<sup>149</sup> see Caldwell 2005 and 2008

same sort of background expository information as found on *The Blair Witch Project*'s site, but also storyline synopses, cast lists, biographical details of the cast and crew, promotional excerpts from the film, various competitions and give-aways, downloadable screensavers and trailers, chat rooms or forums, games tied to the films' plotlines and (crucially) the option of forwarding or recommending the site – thus inadvertently promoting the film – to friends via the social networks of Web 2.0.<sup>150</sup> However, as Telotte observes, websites

provide their own level of entertainment to visitors, they also ultimately point to the film experience and suggest that we see their narratives within a tradition of cinematic horror. [...] While their games and on-line trailers afford net surfers a hint of the movies' atmosphere and some brief entertainment, these sites, in keeping with the long tradition of movie advertising, are basically 'teasers', lures suggesting that the real thrills are to be found in the movies themselves – and in a tradition of similar movies. They guide our experience by situating their films in the context of the film industry and pointing to the entertainment power of the movies.<sup>151</sup>

Crucially, these websites – just like conventional behind-the-scenes documentaries and previews – rarely propagate the films' authenticity, relying instead on conventional selling-points such as name recognition (of actors, directors or producers), genre expectations or particularly spectacular special effects in promoting the individual films to a specific market demographic.

However, in the case of *The Blair Witch Project*, neither the website nor *The Curse of the Blair Witch* documentary nor the film itself – that is to say, nothing internal or extra-textual – betrays the fictional nature of the filmic text. *The Blair Witch Project*'s predecessor *Cannibal Holocaust* arguably took this strategy one step too far. To enhance its status as 'found footage', the director contractually obligated all cast members whose characters were murdered in the film's narrative not to take on any film roles for a year and to stay out of the public sphere as much as possible. This plan backfired as he was arrested on obscenity charges after the premiere and accused of making a snuff film – it was believed that the actors were actually murdered in order to film their deaths. Ironically,

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<sup>150</sup> see Chapter 3

<sup>151</sup> Telotte 2001: 34

when Deodato insisted that he had not killed the actors, questions immediately arose as to why they had disappeared from the public eye if indeed they were still alive.<sup>152</sup>

Why was *The Blair Witch Project* different to countless other generic horror films? It was its unprecedented blending of formal, visual and rhetorical, and textual aspects: the subjective camera, the diegetic recording by amateurs and the hype. To introduce a concept that underlies this entire thesis, the success of *The Blair Witch Project* can certainly be traced in part to the increasing convergence of digital media in the 1990s. As Telotte notes:

In describing the success of *The Blair Witch Project*, Libby Gelman-Waxner has also linked the film's technological bent and its successful computer-based promotion. As she comments, its success must be 'partially attributed to the heavy promotion of the movie on the Internet, and that makes sense: it's a movie for men and women [...] who prefer to see the world entirely through technology – it's nature downloaded.' That is, it seems to present us with a kind of raw human experience framed by technology, a technology that allows us a safe, almost aesthetic distance on events – much as we might find on the Internet.<sup>153</sup>

Above all, *The Blair Witch Project* took the literary devices employed in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* and rather than just allude to them – for example through direct address and voice-over – was the first to transfer them fully to the language of film. Crucially, it is the appropriation of amateur video practices that enables *The Blair Witch Project*'s total commitment to truthfulness. Exhibiting an acute knowledge of how amateur texts are read in a digital media landscape, the film-makers were able to appropriate precisely those associations. While black and white 16mm footage makes up part of the film, the vast majority is digital video footage. Echoing the conclusions of the first chapter of this thesis Jane Roscoe suggests, "the video camera footage seems more natural and honest, while the film footage seems more *staged*, more a *performance* for the camera."<sup>154</sup> It is precisely because *The Blair Witch Project* features a diegetic video camera that an authentic representation of back stage intimacy is even possible. An analogue camera would only capture the front stage. Realist ambitions alone are not enough; only by

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<sup>152</sup> Rhodes 2002: 52

<sup>153</sup> Telotte 2001: 38

<sup>154</sup> Roscoe 2000: 6 [emphasis added]

emulating that immediately recognisable aesthetic and performative rhetoric – as seen in countless home videos or YouTube clips – did *The Blair Witch Project* become the first feature-length narrative film in an otherwise spectacular genre to suggest that intimacy could be the will to art of all contemporary digital cinema.

### Monsters versus Witches

However, *The Blair Witch Project* – while undoubtedly a horror film – is not exactly spectacular. While the horror genre is generally considered a visceral cinema of spectacle, *The Blair Witch Project* is unusual because we actually see nothing that could be considered horrifying – in fact, we see very little at all. As discussed earlier, its thrills come from the implication that there is something just off screen moving too quickly for the camera to catch. But in order for the will to art of video to be applicable to all of contemporary digital cinema – which, as stated is often spectacular – we need a filmic example that fully does justice to both aspects. The 2008 cult blockbuster *Cloverfield* is that film. It achieves a successful synthesis of both visual excess, as exemplified by *Godzilla*, and intimacy, as pioneered by *The Blair Witch Project*.

*Cloverfield* follows a group of young Manhattanites – all extremely photogenic, neo-yuppie twenty-somethings – who have organised a surprise leaving party for Rob (Michael Stahl-David). One of the group, Hud (T.J. Miller), is roped into filming the party and collecting testimonials for Rob. This introductory sequence takes up 20 minutes of the film's relatively short runtime of 81 minutes. After an earthquake and power cut hit the building the party is taking place in, the guests go up to the roof in time to witness a huge explosion in lower Manhattan. The party-goers run down the fire escape and onto the street, which is filled with panicked crowds, just as the head of the Statue of Liberty suddenly crashes down onto the road near their building. All of this is captured by Hud, who continues to film everything with the camera. As the group attempt to escape Manhattan,

Rob realizes that his love interest Beth (Odette Yusterman) is still trapped in her flat and so spends the second half of the film trying to reunite with her and get out of the city – which, as has now become clear, is being attacked by a 30 story tall monster, whose origins are never explained. Apart from the unusual camera perspective (echoing *The Blair Witch Project* – all we see is the footage from Hud’s diegetic camera), the two aspects that mark *Cloverfield* out from the generic ‘500ft monster attacks major city’ movie is the uncommon ending for such a spectacular film – none of the party survives the attack and the fate of the monster is left unclear – and the fact that the film ‘skips’, revealing footage filmed a month earlier on a romantic outing with Rob and Beth. These sequences essentially serve as flashbacks to the events proper, but nonetheless conform to the notion that the footage is being filmed continuously.

One of the key problems that many critics cited with *The Blair Witch Project* lies in its seeming lack of credibility: it is understood why the students go out into the woods with cameras, but Heather’s insistence on continuing to film the increasingly tense events is somewhat enigmatic – especially considering the other characters repeatedly ask her to stop. As Rhodes identifies, the problem is simply:

the (un)believability of film crews shooting the kind of terrifying environments depicted. The nexus between the use of a documentary aesthetic and a narrative’s success or lack thereof is believability, whether or not we ‘believe’ documentary crews would shoot under such conditions. Even cinematographers in wartime [...] have generally figured out when to turn off the camera and find a safer vantage point from which to shoot.<sup>155</sup>

At the time of *The Blair Witch Project*’s release, the continued filming in extreme conditions was seen as highly implausible. This echoes Bazin’s observations on *Kon Tiki*: “whenever something of significance occurred, the onset of a storm for example, the crew were too busy to bother running a camera.”<sup>156</sup> Yet when *Cloverfield* was released nine years later, no one appeared to criticize the unlikelihood of Hud’s continued filming. This is due in no small part to the fact that the makers of *Cloverfield* identified this weakness and

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<sup>155</sup> Rhodes 2002: 59

<sup>156</sup> Bazin 2005a: 161

actively tried to counteract it; in an interview its cinematographer Michael Bonvillain and director Matthew Reeves explain:

‘When I read the script, I had a problem with why [Hud] kept filming,’ recalls Bonvillain. ‘How could we show Rob’s face and his anguish and not make it look like Hud was just standing there with a camera? We couldn’t *not* show it.’ Reeves explains, ‘[The solution] came down to just slightly tipping the camera so it didn’t feel like the scene was being actively filmed. It’s a tiny camera that sits on his hand, so he wouldn’t really think about it. Somebody might come up close, and the camera would cut his face in a slightly odd way so it didn’t look framed.’<sup>157</sup>

Apart from this technical contrivance there are two further elements which enforce the plausibility and consequently the authenticity of *Cloverfield*. The first of these is a number of narrative justifications given for the continued presence of the diegetic camera. The group actively relies on the camera in a variety of situations: using the zoom function to get a clear picture of what is occurring a long way away, using the night vision mode to navigate a pitch-dark subterranean tunnel, and on two occasions reviewing the existing footage to understand what happened earlier.

The other element stems more from our altered relation to amateur recordings. A discernible cultural phenomenon is the increasing prevalence of filmic recordings of any major or minor event. The expectation is that whenever and wherever a natural catastrophe (the 2005 tsunami in the Indian Ocean or the 2011 earthquake in Japan) or political event (the 9/11 attacks on New York or the recent revolutions in the Middle-East) occurs, someone will be filming it on their camcorder or mobile phone. *Cloverfield* is so firmly rooted in our time, that the motivation for Hud’s constant filming is completely believable. On more than one occasion in the film, we see other members of the crowd also filming the events. As critics have pointed out, “far from being gimmicky, this, like the characters’ response to disaster, feels like an authentic presentation of the way we live now.”<sup>158</sup> Yet *Cloverfield* is more than just of its time, it is also uniquely appropriate to its setting. The scene mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter is intentionally evocative of footage

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<sup>157</sup> in Witmer 2008: 37

<sup>158</sup> Miller 2008: 51

taken by eyewitnesses on 9/11 – collected in *102 Minutes That Changed America* (Nicole Rittenmeyer and Seth Skundrick, 2008) for example – with its depiction of the massive explosions, the falling skyscrapers, the cloud of dust and debris, and the whitened and traumatized faces of those caught in the cloud.

The production's special effects team specifically gathered samples of 9/11 footage as a benchmark for shot design. As the lead special effects designer recalls, "I particularly remembered one of the 9/11 home videos [...] As this big wall of dust came toward camera, the operator appeared to forget he was filming as he ran and hid behind a car; so all the camera saw was glimpses of a foot and a car tire, with the sound of the operator breathing – it was terrifying."<sup>159</sup> Between *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* there appears to have been a fundamental shift in how viewers perceive these amateur filmic recordings. An even better approximation of amateur film-making practices, in combination with evolving expectations of what amateur footage looks like, enable *Cloverfield* to bridge the gap between intimate modes of representation and the visual excess of spectacular cinema. Consequently, *Cloverfield* exactly meets our expectations of what filmic evidence of a large-scale catastrophe – whether real or fantastical – in an urban centre looks like.

*The Blair Witch Project*, though totally committed to the authenticity of its 'found footage', nonetheless has a few logical flaws in its production myth. The footage in *The Blair Witch Project* has clearly been edited, mixing footage from the 16mm and video cameras, often with overlapping audio tracks. The four or five days the students spend lost in the forest – presumably recording hours of footage – are thus reduced to 86 minutes of runtime. While there is no paratextual reference to identify that the footage has been edited by another party, it nonetheless follows – even within the logic of the film's fiction – that someone other than the students must have been involved in the post-production montage. *Cloverfield's* authenticity on the other hand is reinforced by the meta-structure of the two

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<sup>159</sup> in Fordham 2008: 113

narrative strains; the primary one (recorded over the earlier footage) focuses on the group during the attack, with flashes of the secondary (earlier) footage of Rob and Beth's romantic outing coming through where there are gaps in the primary recording. Narrative and montage progression remains strictly chorological, the jumps forward in time are merely moments when the camera was not recording, while the 'flashbacks' are explained as moments when the primary footage was rewound to be viewed by the characters in the diegesis.

The directors of *The Blair Witch Project* also sought to emphasize that the film was actually shot by the actors themselves, who had a crash course in operating the cameras before being sent out to the woods to film. Daily directions, scene/acting instructions and gradually reduced rations were left in prearranged spots and the directors supposedly frightened the actors by leaving the mysterious bundles of sticks and playing eerie noises in the vicinity of their tent at night. Parallel to the claim that the myth of the Blair Witch and the disappearances were real, the film-makers seemed keen to suggest in interviews that the heightened emotions and fraying tempers of the characters were the actual emotional states the actors were going through. However, as Janet Wasko suggests, it would be naive to accept unquestioningly the myths Hollywood so readily fosters about how these films are made: "by accepting the myths or concentrating primarily on [...] film technology, corporate influences on film activities, as well as the actual power structure of the industry, can be obscured."<sup>160</sup> *Cloverfield* on the other hand simply sidesteps this accusation. Within the fiction of the film, Hud is certainly meant to be operating the camera – incidentally we learn more about his character than any other because "he provides, in the manner of home-video documentarians everywhere, an inane running commentary"<sup>161</sup> – but the film-makers made no secret of the fact that for the vast majority of the film, it was an experienced cinematographer behind the camera. While the makers of *The Blair Witch Project* hyped its

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<sup>160</sup> Wasko 1994: 19

<sup>161</sup> Miller 2008: 51

creation myth, *Cloverfield*'s makers make it clear they only *appropriated* the representational signifiers of cinematic authenticity.

In the nine years that have passed between *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield*, use of the Internet as a promotional tool for the marketing of films has also evolved considerably. The online marketing for *The Blair Witch Project* arguably came at a time when the Internet was much less developed. It was nonetheless effective as the target demographic for the film was the most likely one to be online anyway. *Cloverfield* could afford to be much more ambitious. A first trailer for it was released in July 2007 on YouTube [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvNkGm8mxiM>], which only showed cryptic reaction shots of the protagonists and then the tagline: 'In theatres 1-18-08.' As Ben Walters notes: "it is established teaser-trailer practice not to show the monster; to withhold even a title is bolder."<sup>162</sup> A corresponding website was the starting point to a viral 'alternate-reality game' – a digital paper chase through the Internet, revealing clues in seemingly random and authentic (but in fact intricately constructed) photos, MySpace pages and advertising campaigns for fictional products and companies. The only precedent for such a radical, complex and large-scale marketing campaign was *The Lost Experience* in 2006, a tie-in to the successful TV series *Lost* – whose creator J.J. Abrams incidentally served as the executive producer for *Cloverfield*. The complexity of *Cloverfield*'s marketing strategy is thus the culmination of an idea pioneered by *The Blair Witch Project*:

the deft insinuation of a movie world into the 'real' pages of the Internet. Just as the movie itself promises to be salvaged camcorder footage, so the ARG [alternate-reality game] is effective because it repeatedly achieves the illusion of authenticity. Players are invited to treat fantasy as if it were reality in three tenses. Uncovering the backstory of the crisis demands the kind of conspiracy investigation for which the web caters so well.<sup>163</sup>

Just as *Cloverfield* visually recalls the eyewitness recordings of 9/11, its online hype echoes the conspiracy theories on the Internet after the terrorist attacks. As Walters points out: "the 9/11 parallels are hard to overlook, from the lower Manhattan fireball and dust cloud [on an

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<sup>162</sup> Walters 2007: 66

<sup>163</sup> Walters 2007: 67

internal level] to the hysterical online identification of ‘devil faces’ within them.”<sup>164</sup> The perception of the Internet as source of instant information, with the suggestion made by some that its ‘democratic’ status somehow guarantees the same level of accuracy as established media,<sup>165</sup> means that information accessed on the web is much more likely to be taken at face value.

*Cloverfield* builds and improves on *The Blair Witch Project*’s innovations in almost every way, without falling into the trap of implausibility or contradictory production myths. Consequently, it achieves a successful synthesis of both visual excess and intimacy. The question whether the will to art of video is compatible with all of contemporary digital cinema – even the spectacular – has then been answered affirmatively. Moreover, there are indicators that ongoing technological developments contribute towards a new mode of perception, and reinforce the claim that the intimacy-image is being sublimated within the wider cinematic image. This technological process is the convergence of digital media. At this point however, suffice it to say that *Cloverfield* is the confirmation that the will to art of video can be reconciled with a cinema of spectacle.

### Video Killed the Cinema Star

From a historical perspective, *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* offer nothing but an accurate filmic representation of contemporary social habits by which we play out our engagement with the world. In the eighteenth century, these representational ambitions took the form of letter writing and thus the epistolary genre became the basis for *Robinson Crusoe* and *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. In the early twentieth century it was radio, whose mode of address Welles so accurately mimicked in his infamous broadcast. Returning to a quote at the conclusion of the last chapter, Kilb observes that “the video apparatus has replaced substantial parts of the classic bourgeois culture of writing: the

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<sup>164</sup> Walters 2007: 67

<sup>165</sup> see Chapter 3

family book, travel notes, literature, correspondence.”<sup>166</sup> If using video appears to have become the letter writing of the present day, then the intimacy of the personal letter must now lie in amateur film-making practices.

As Gary D. Rhodes remarks, it is perhaps surprising that cinema – despite all its ambitions of realism – did not adopt these amateur film-making practices any earlier.<sup>167</sup> The success of *Cloverfield* is testament to the fact that this practice is a natural extension of the realist aspirations of spectacular cinema. ‘Found footage’ films – perhaps unsurprisingly all from the traditionally spectacular genres of horror, fantasy and science-fiction – are currently undergoing a major renaissance. In the last five years alone the zombie films *[REC]* (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2007), *Quarantine* (John Erick Dowdle, 2008) and *Diary of the Dead* (George Romero, 2007), the occult thrillers *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007) and *The Last Exorcism* (Daniel Stamm, 2010), the moon landing conspiracy *Apollo 18* (Gonzalo Lopez-Gallego, 2011) and the Scandinavian fantasy horror *Trolljegeren* (André Øvredal, 2010) have all used diegetic cameras and ‘found footage’.

It is only the combination of a range of elements – formal, visual, rhetorical, performative, textual and extra-textual – far less powerful individually, but which together “elaborately propagate the notion of authenticity, attesting to the film as, quite literally, a ‘found-footage’ type of documentary rather than a fictional work, and more particularly, as a different sort of attraction than the movies usually offer, a reality far stranger than that found in any ‘classic old-style horror film’.”<sup>168</sup> It could be assumed that any film-maker who wants to reconcile intimate, back stage representations with the prevalent aesthetic conventions of contemporary digital cinema merely has to adhere to this check-list of ingredients. As explored in the next chapter, many have nonetheless failed in their attempts

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<sup>166</sup> Kilb 2005: 74\*

<sup>167</sup> Rhodes 2002: 50

<sup>168</sup> Telotte 2001: 35

to do just that. It appears that *Cloverfield*, a reflection of fully digitized twenty-first century epistolary social practices, is one of only a few films managing to incorporate the social and technological developments since *The Blair Witch Project*'s first experiments with digital 'found footage' fiction almost a decade earlier astutely enough to reconcile fully the will to art of video – the intimacy-image – with a cinema of spectacle.

### Chapter 3

#### *Amateur Practices*

The approach in the last two chapters, exploring whether the will to art demanded by Deleuze for contemporary digital cinema is intimacy, has been primarily hermeneutic. It began with an examination of *Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video* as two films exploring a particular mode of expression in a specific historical moment – the era of video – set against the larger transition from traditional analogue to contemporary digital cinema. The focus then shifted on reconciling intimacy with spectacle, one of the predominant forms of contemporary digital cinema. *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* demonstrate how by appropriating amateur practices from the era of video, situated against a rapidly changing digital media landscape in the first decade of the new millennium, the will to art of video converged with that of contemporary digital cinema.

At this point however I would like to ‘zoom’ out and take a wider context-based approach, already partly evident in the examination of the films’ reception and internet hype in the previous chapter. As Roger Odin argues: “semiology completely underestimates the determining role of context in textual construction. [...] The modalities of textual construction change in relation to context. Meaning is not everything: affect and the

interactions during production and reception must be analyzed.”<sup>169</sup> Context is a very broad term. On the one hand, it can refer to how aesthetic and genre conventions impact on various representational and narrative elements within a single film. It can also be the formal framework within the film in which various media – whether film, video or television – are contrasted against one another, with the effect of making these various formats more discrete. These internal contexts have been the focus of this thesis thus far. However, context can also refer to an external framework; that is to say the social and media landscape in which amateur filmic practices of recording, sharing and viewing operate. So while the first two chapters of this thesis deal with how diegetic recordings function within the unity of an individual film, my aim now is to explore how amateur recordings function in a broader media context. In doing so, this thesis moves away from a purely hermeneutic approach to one termed ‘semio-pragmatic’ by Roger Odin. In many ways, elements of this methodology have already been hinted at. For example, according to Goffman, performance varies depending on the social space it takes place in. In other words, performance changes according to context. Similarly, *Cloverfield*’s online marketing strategies were far more complex than those of *The Blair Witch Project* because of the changing role of the Internet in our social habits.

This chapter also differs from earlier ones in that the object of my analysis is not limited solely to cinematic works but rather a variety of audiovisual ones. This includes exemplary clips from online media sharing platforms such as YouTube. The framework for my approach is to explore amateur recording practices from a number of perspectives which, when taken together, will illustrate that context is as vital to reading contemporary digital cinema as hermeneutic analyses. The antecedents of the online video clip, the home movie and the home video, suggest that an exclusively back stage reading of amateur footage is flawed, as intentional and deliberate performances to the camera were established

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<sup>169</sup> Odin 2008: 255

early on in its history. While the home video mode does have the potential to capture intimacy – as established in the first chapter – the fact that it has always shared the screen with commercial content means that the context of reception was never exclusively private, as it had been with home movies. The potential to be present to intimate performances was therefore eventually undermined by both corporate media interests which appropriated amateur recordings, making them public and effectively commercializing them, but also by the fact that amateur film-makers chose to share their footage beyond the domestic sphere – whether as political activism, for monetary gain or out of a desire for fame. This suggests that knowledge of the space of reception alters the production of a filmic text.

In light of the underlying theme for this thesis – intimacy – the subgenre of intimate video diaries and video confessions is useful in understanding the personal, social and ideological context of amateur practices. Coming from this historical background, it is perhaps no surprise that many YouTube clips thus take the form of the confessional. Brian de Palma's *Redacted* also attempts to situate itself within this context, accurately recreating a wide variety of audiovisual material relating to the Iraq conflict – fragments of soldiers' video diaries, their wives' video blogs, documentaries, 24 hour TV news coverage, CCTV footage, Al-Qaida recruitment videos, YouTube rants and so on – in an effort to present an intimate and authentic representation of the occupation of Iraq. As suggested in the last chapter, it could be assumed that any director who wanted to appropriate these associations of contemporary amateur film-making practices merely has to tick off a list of ingredients. Though more nuanced than this reductive reading would suggest, *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* certainly appear to have been successful in their approaches.

However, as the wider context-based approach of this chapter will illustrate, an awareness of future spaces of reception affects the production of filmic texts. Appropriating the intimacy-image of video is not based on technological or aesthetic devices, but rather the accurate portrayal of context-appropriate performances. If contemporary digital cinema,

which is ultimately commercial and professionally produced, is to base the function of its image on intimacy, as amateur video practices allow, then it must follow the logic of those practices even in a professional mode of production. As we shall see, in its endeavour to appropriate the authenticity and intimacy of those practices, *Redacted* arguably fails for a number of reasons – however, most crucially because it ignores the basic conclusion of this chapter: that knowledge of the space of reception alters the production of filmic texts.

### **From Home Movies . . .**

8mm and 16mm film formats and cameras had been available to amateur film-makers since before the Second World War; however it was the development of Super 8 in 1965 by Kodak that really made home movies accessible to a large market. The cameras were made of plastic and thus much cheaper than their earlier counterparts and later versions even offered colour and sound. Usually, these home movie reels were both shot and screened within the domestic sphere. Rare instances, like the Zapruder footage of the Kennedy assassination, can be part of the public sphere, both in terms of the context of production, subject matter and reception, but they are the exception to the rule.<sup>170</sup> Traditional home movies, as Odin argues, are essentially ritualistic in nature, both in terms of what they capture – weddings, birthdays, holidays and similar family events – and how they are viewed – one had to set up a special screen and a projector, darken the room and so on. Furthermore, they do not have a formal or narrative structure; the only structure is the chronological progression of events captured: ‘first we went there, then there, and then something else happened’. The home movie is thus less a filmic document and more a by-product of a family event to which the camera was present as a unifying prop. Discussing a particular sequence of a home movie Odin concludes: “this sequence was not produced to be viewed. It is evident that during its production, the greatest pleasure was in the

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<sup>170</sup> see Vågnes 2010

participants finding themselves in front of a camera. The film produced an effect *before* its exhibition.”<sup>171</sup> Moreover, the intended audience is already clear at the moment of recording; the audience is most likely going to be the subject(s) of the movie itself. Odin goes on to suggest that home movies thus simply function as a memory aid, an animated family photograph:

Reading a home movie does not summon the documentarist mode of reading but the *private one*. If I construct a real enunciator (the Family), I do not ask the truth question nor expect information. Home movie images function less as representations than as *index* inviting the family to *return to a past already lived*. [...] Consequently, home movies seem boring for those outside the family because outsiders lack the contextual frame that positions the disjointed images.<sup>172</sup>

This equating of the home movie with the photograph is not as offhand as it may appear. Many amateur film-makers of the 1960s came from a background in amateur photography and certainly carried over techniques learned in that field. More importantly, amateur film-makers of the home movie era not only took the techniques of amateur photography, but also its ambitions: enthusiasts aspired to make their photos – and subsequently films – as professional-looking as possible. As a result, home movies of the time are framed extremely statically; footage of landscape or architecture (filmed during holidays for example) is either completely still or else pans very slowly. The framing of the shots would also be derived on the basis of photographic, rather than filmic, aesthetics.

Whether instructed to do so by the cameraman or acting on some instinct in the presence of the camera, groups of people in old home movies tend to stand still, facing the camera – often holding a single pose or facial expression, as though posing for a photograph. Home movies are marked by a strong awareness of the camera, passers-by may even stop and stare into the lens – unlike in home videos from the 1980s onwards, where everyone tries their hardest to ignore the presence of the camera and ‘act naturally’. Moreover, until the early 1970s and the release of sound capable Super 8, the majority of

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<sup>171</sup> Odin 2008: 257

<sup>172</sup> Odin 2008: 259-260 [original emphasis]

home movies would have been silent. In itself perhaps not a significant factor – after all, so is silent cinema – but taken in combination with all of the above, it certainly underlines the essential photographic nature of home movies. Even when capturing motion, traditional home movies remain fundamentally pre-cinematic; a Bergsonian image of movement rather than a Deleuzian movement-image. This is due in large parts to the technical limitations of 8mm home movies; the fact that the reels were so short – at best somewhere between two and a half and four and a half minutes, running at 12 to 18 frames per second – and editing was all but impossible to the average home movie maker means that the footage rarely progresses beyond a series of (moving) snapshots.

In home movies the space of production and the space of reception is identical – usually the domestic sphere. If both spaces remain familial and intimate, the assumption is that the interactions to which the home movie camera is present must be intimate too. Are home movies therefore inherently intimate? The acknowledgment of the presence of the camera in home movies would certainly appear to be one major obstacle. Furthermore, the back stage production and reception of home movies implies not just intimacy, but also authenticity – i.e. that it is a truthful representation of events. This question of veracity is implicit in the documentarist mode of reception; defined by Odin via two expectations:

- (a) The director and the camera were there when the events happened; they saw them.
- (b) These events would have happened in the same way if the director and the camera had not been there.<sup>173</sup>

While home movies may invite the reading that they present truthful and intimate depictions of what happened – for example, on a particular Christmas morning – this is not actually the case. The acknowledgement of and performance for the home movie camera mean that the events would *not* have happened in the same way had the ‘director’ and the camera not been there. Home movies are therefore simply incompatible with a

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<sup>173</sup> Odin 2000: 58

documentarist mode of viewing. Even though they appear to be recorded within the back stage, the subjects are actually consciously performing *for* the camera. The home movie camera is thus standing in for an audience. This is an example of how knowledge of the future space of reception alters the performance at the moment of production. Instead of offering a glimpse into ‘relaxed’ – in other words, intimate – back stage interactions, all home movies have ever presented are front stage performances.

### **. . . to Home Videos**

However, by the 1980s, the mass proliferation of video technology meant that home videos – as distinct from home movies – were already being produced and received in a different context. Video tapes were less expensive than 8mm and 16mm film reels, had longer recording capabilities and, perhaps most importantly, were re-recordable. This drop in the initial investment and subsequent running costs meant that an even larger number of people were able to afford home video equipment. The expense of owning and operating 16mm, 8mm or Super 8 home movie equipment – which included paying for a camera, film, individual development of each film roll and a projector and screen – had limited the number of amateur film-makers to enthusiasts and the well-off. Video’s affordability resulted in much higher adoption rates. Another major difference was that the equipment was less complicated. One did not need to be an enthusiast with an understanding of light levels, exposure and framing to use a video camera. As controlling it became child’s play, everyone – even children – could operate the camera. Amateur film-making was no longer a niche interest, limited by class and financial restrictions or family hierarchy.

As a result, cameras were left to record for longer periods of time – and sometimes even recorded by accident. If nothing else, video technology increased the sheer quantity of family representations. It took the video camera, which may or may not be recording at any given time and is therefore often just ignored, to capture performances which were

spontaneous and genuinely back stage. Now “that hidden or private place where information that might discredit the fostered impression is controlled, kept secret,”<sup>174</sup> could be recorded at any time. Suddenly, potentially embarrassing pratfalls, accidents or family arguments – which specifically undermine the impression of the ‘happy family’ – were caught on tape. This is specifically what constitutes Goffman’s back stage space of performance and, as argued in the opening chapter, only video has the unique ability to capture it. The difference between home movies and home videos is therefore not based on any kind of technological determinism (one format is ‘better’ than another) or even on the space of reception (projector versus TV screen) but rather on the context of the performance given.

Just like the recording process, viewing the recordings also became much more casual and spontaneous. Home videos shared their space of reception, namely the TV screen, not only with television but also with cinema, in the form of feature films widely available on video tapes – either recorded off the air, rented or bought. This fundamentally changed the context of reception of amateur footage. Watching a home video was no longer a ritual in its own right – with no complex set-up of projector, screen and darkened room, viewing amateur footage became as easy as watching a recorded television show or film. While the ritualistic status and rarity value were drastically reduced due to the casual viewing experience, the potentially simultaneous coexistence within the same space of communication – the TV screen – of these different types of media seemed to elevate (or reduce, depending on the viewpoint) the status of amateur footage to the equal of commercially produced footage.

At this point, as amateur video began sharing the screen with television and cinema, it started to be regarded as a dangerous challenger by its rivals for viewer attention. Much like the film industry today battles against online piracy, it was feared in the mid to late 1980s

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<sup>174</sup> Treviño 2003: 36

that the ease with which films could be recorded off the air or copied from tape to tape would result in drastic losses at the box office. Similarly, television broadcasters were anxious that audience numbers and advertising revenue would decrease as viewers could record shows rather than watching them live – and crucially fast-forward over commercial breaks. However, almost by chance, a commercial strategy was developed which effectively served to absorb and deflect the perceived threat posed by home videos. In the mid 1980s, a popular television variety show in Japan, *Kato-chan Ken-chan Gokigen TV* (*Fun TV with Kato and Ken*), was notable for being the first to have a segment featuring amusing home videos sent in by viewers, which the hosts would comment on. The format was developed further in the United States into a standalone programme, *America's Funniest Home Videos* – initially hosted by the comedian Bob Saget and first broadcast in 1989. The weekly show featured a collection of viewer-submitted videos, usually of accidents caught on camera though sometimes depicting particularly funny or endearing children or animals, selected and edited by the producers for maximum effect and commented on sarcastically by the host. Every week, three videos were chosen by the producers and voted on by the studio audience. The winner received \$10,000 and was in the running for the \$100,000 prize at the end of each season. Early on, other prizes also included TVs, VCRs and video cameras – thus effectively closing the circle of production and implicitly encouraging the creation and submission of more home video content. Even with the prize money offered, the low production costs and high viewing figures meant that the format proved to be highly successful and to this day, *America's Funniest Home Videos* is still being produced after more than twenty seasons. Both the universality of the core concept and indeed the majority of video clips themselves proved easily exportable and the format remains popular – and instantly recognisable – around the world.

Suddenly, the very same technological potential which enabled and promoted the accidental recording of spontaneous and unselfconscious performances was being usurped

by commercial interests. Back stage recordings genuinely not intended for an audience gradually came to be viewed in a front stage space – national television. Intimacy, in Herzfeld's terms literally "a source of external embarrassment,"<sup>175</sup> was made public and exploited. This basic shift in the context of reception had clear consequences for the context of production. As certain types of recording were being publicly celebrated and even rewarded financially while others were rejected, a blueprint for a successful submission to *America's Funniest Home Videos* became apparent. Technological advances which allowed for much longer recording spans and even rudimentary editing capabilities within the camera itself meant that amateur film-makers could construct mini-narratives. Canny contributors began staging elaborate set-ups or pranks with a humorous payoff to increase their chance of winning the prize money. Corporate media providers capitalized on this assumption – a clip on *America's Funniest Home Videos* had the same entertainment value and potential for generating revenue as other, commercially produced, content. This is the point at which amateur footage became to be regarded as 'content'; in the present, what would have been called a home video ten or fifteen years ago has simply become part of the blanket term 'user generated content'.

The accidentally captured moments of embarrassment still made up the majority of video clips, but the enduring popularity of *America's Funniest Home Videos* and its imitators fundamentally changed how home videos were recorded. Now, every family gathering, social occasion or other private event at which a video camera was present had the potential of being broadcast or even making a profit for its creators. The mode of reception was once again changing performance at the point of production. Performing to and *for* the video camera became just as endemic as it had been in the era of home movies – with one difference. With home movies, while the presence of the camera would prompt a conscious performance for that camera, the implied audience was only ever the performers

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<sup>175</sup> Herzfeld 1997: 3

themselves at some point in the future. Odin suggests the pleasure was primarily in performing, but this does not mean that the performance was intended to be public. Home movies would most likely be screened in the family home, and while there was a certain pleasure and freedom in performing to the camera, behavioural expectations and family hierarchies would check the performance – a kind of automatic self-censorship by each performer. Even though the presence of the camera encouraged performance, the knowledge that the footage would be reviewed collectively within the family prevented individuals from saying certain things or behaving particularly offensively. Illustrating once again its photographic heritage, the underlying caveat was not to ‘spoil’ the moment captured on film. With unintentionally recorded home videos on the other hand, unwitting or accidental performers would not be aware of the potential audience – instead exhibiting back stage behaviours not limited by the need to present a favourable or even socially acceptable impression of oneself before others. In addition to the already existing implication – based on expectations carried over from home movies – that the footage may be reviewed in future by its performers, the future audience of home video footage was much wider and potentially even global. Thus as soon as the presence of the video camera was made clear, the performances became just as conscious and deliberate as they were in earlier home movies. In home videos, the potential for a much wider future audience lead to a form of double self-censorship; as well as behaving in a way acceptable within the family space, performers now also had to conform to wider social norms beyond familial expectations.

Even though amateur recordings in the era of home movies appeared to present an intimate representation of the family, the presence of the camera altered performances to the point where this assumption is clearly untenable. The advent of video, with its promise of an inexpensive and uncomplicated means of recording for home use, allowed for casual and spontaneous recording of unselfconscious back stage behaviour. Truly intimate

recordings were now possible, suggesting that the will to art of video was its capacity to reflect the intimate. However, because home videos shared their space of reception with commercial representations – television and films – meant that the context of reception was no longer exclusively private. Video's potential to record unselfconscious performances and capture intimacy was thus eventually undermined by the notion that any home video could be widely circulated in the public sphere and even generate revenue for its creators and broadcasters. Television formats modelled on *America's Funniest Home Videos* thus appropriated amateur recordings of the domestic sphere, made them public and effectively commercialized them. Once again, knowledge of future spaces of reception altered performances at the moment of production.

### The Utopian Medium

By the mid 1990s, a theoretical backlash developed among commentators who proposed resisting and reclaiming amateur video footage from this hegemonic and what they considered alienating context. Against a trend of radical television expansion and domination of the domestic space with ever more channels being offered both terrestrially and via satellite and cable, video was regarded as potentially fulfilling positive social and political functions, as well as helping maintain individuality in the face of increasing homogenisation. Thus, in an essay from 1994, Peter Miller suggested that:

Television audiences have demonstrated an increasing demand for authentic and intimate human stories, but programmers have frequently met this demand with superficial or exploitative fare. [...] video diaries can reclaim some of the ground staked out by confessional talk shows; their subjectivity and authorship can inject sensitivity and honesty to issues muddled by exploitative television.<sup>176</sup>

Using similar terminology and drawing similar conclusions, in an article which can be read as a sort of manifesto, Jon Dovey observed only a year later:

The pleasures of the camcorder begin with the private, domestic, the intimate, the subjective, the 'closed circuit'. When we encounter camcorder

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<sup>176</sup> Miller 1994: 13

footage on TV the domestic movie connotation is inescapable. This connotation brings certain qualities to the image, dignified by its actual texture and form. [...] The pleasures of domestic camcorder culture are all about defining our own individual family identities around a TV screen that usually pumps out bland, homogenised otherness; representations of other lives and other families that could never match the specific delights afforded by your own personalised, intimate, closed circuit production.<sup>177</sup>

These advocates of video shared three core beliefs: firstly, that video is implicitly democratic; secondly, that it is anti-authoritarian by allowing for grassroots counter-surveillance discourses; and finally, that video diaries or video confessions can serve as therapeutic tools for self-understanding and healing.

There were two basic elements to the assumption of video's democratic potential: the first is the resistance of the individual to corporate media interests. Suggesting that anyone with a video camera could produce films in the early 1990s which could rival professionally produced and commercially funded content may seem absurd, but was actively proposed by the advocates of video: "40 million camcorders worldwide, a whole lot more folks progressing a little further along the arc of TV literacy; writing TV as well as reading it [...] speaking of difference, [...] rather than the endless replication of homogenous Dallas culture."<sup>178</sup> The other key element was minority representations opposing majority discourses and globalization. Examples given included aboriginal cultures filming themselves rather than letting first-world anthropologists record their lives and Palestinians using video to subvert Israeli media representations of their conflict. Thus, it was argued, amateur video filming practices enable and uphold democratic values: "video here is seen as implicitly democratic when used in contexts that are concerned to challenge dominant power relations."<sup>179</sup>

However, both arguments underlying this notion had some inherent weaknesses. Within the individual versus corporate opposition, what was overlooked is that however much a private mode of production challenges the predominance of commercially produced

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<sup>177</sup> Dovey 1995: 26-27

<sup>178</sup> Dovey 1995: 27

<sup>179</sup> Dovey 1995: 27

content, it has no way of competing with it in circulation terms. The only way for a home video to be seen by as wide an audience as a television sitcom for instance is for it to be broadcast on television; and to do so it has to be submitted either to commercial formats such as *America's Funniest Home Videos* or community initiatives run by public broadcasters, such as PBS's *P.O.V.* or the BBC's *Video Nation Shorts*, both broadcast briefly in the 1990s.<sup>180</sup> Thus, to compete with television programming, video would have to yield precisely to those dominant power structures it is meant to challenge. The question is also whether "TV literacy" necessarily includes production; whether it is even possible for private individuals – or "folks" in Dovey's terms – to "write" television. Moreover, if amateur footage is genuinely produced in and thematizes the back stage, then it cannot have the ulterior intention of being received in anything other than the domestic space. As illustrated earlier, if there is an awareness of future contexts of reception then this informs the performance. Similarly, in the minority versus hegemony opposition, the status quo is generally upheld – how else are aboriginal tribes going to have access to video equipment, if not from visiting anthropologists? Arguing that the performance for the camera is somehow more natural or authentic simply because the anthropologists have left seems decidedly naive.

The second proposition, that amateur video footage is anti-authoritarian, was arguably more convincing, partly because there are concrete examples of it working in this manner. Described as a "grassroots response"<sup>181</sup> to the surveillance mechanisms of the state, video recordings in this case function as a means of collecting evidence of oppression or official wrong-doing. Perhaps the best known historical example is George Holliday's video recording of the Rodney King beating. In the early hours of 3 March 1991, Holliday heard a commotion outside his residence in Lake View Terrace, a northern suburb of Los Angeles. From his balcony he could see an African-American man surrounded by police officers and

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<sup>180</sup> see Matthews 2007: 435 and Dovey 1995: 26

<sup>181</sup> Miller 1994: 13

began filming the confrontation. His tape begins when King charges one of the LAPD officers, and is knocked to the ground with a baton. The four police officers beat King for over a minute; his injuries were so severe he required subsequent hospitalization. At the trial a year later, the four white police officers were acquitted by an all-white jury – a decision which led to the 1992 Los Angeles race riots. While Holliday recorded almost ten minutes, only a minute and a half of footage was broadcast by a local television station and later picked up by national and international news media; a minute and a half which “triggered a media sensation and, after the acquittal of the officers, helped ignite the riots that led to 54 deaths, 2,383 injuries, hundreds of destroyed buildings and more than 12,000 arrests.”<sup>182</sup> Holliday’s tape of the Rodney King beatings is frequently cited as the prime example of video as a means of counter-surveillance, turning the camera back on the organs of state, and a model for others to document police brutality or other abuses.

However, once again, this interpretation also exhibited a number of flaws. While the Rodney King tape illustrates perfectly that back stage performances are given when the performers are not aware of the camera; ideological advocates insisted that such instances of ‘video advocacy’ should be developed further. They proposed for example that groups regularly subject to human rights abuses should be issued with cameras to document their predicament. In his enthusiasm, Jon Dovey even misappropriated the Holliday tape: “this seemingly chance recording comes in a context where black groups such as the LA based ‘Coalition Against Police Abuse’ have organised camcorders to surveil the police.”<sup>183</sup> But of course, this was not what actually happened: Holliday was a white man who randomly decided to videotape the events which happened to take place outside his home – it *is* a “chance recording.” There was no organized counter-surveillance group he was working with. The fundamental flaw in these politically motivated proposals for counter-surveillance is that the distinct uses of video in private and public contexts were

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<sup>182</sup> Goldstein 2006

<sup>183</sup> Dovey 1995: 27

compounded. The possibility of capturing intimate, back stage performances which may be embarrassing – and in these cases socially unacceptable or even illegal – is inherently linked to how video operates in the domestic sphere; and even then, as we have seen, only given certain conditions. Proponents of video advocacy argued that this effect could still be attained even when the space of recording changes to the public sphere. Somewhat astoundingly, charities, activist groups and NGOs such as the WITNESS project were keen to associate their own work with the tradition of George Holliday – even though his one-off recording of admittedly historical proportions was neither externally funded, politically motivated nor intentional or premeditated. The notion that video has anti-authoritarian potential certainly has some merit, especially given notable precedents, but it fails to take into account that in the majority of cases such recordings are accidental rather than planned.

The third proposition, that video in the form of video diaries or video confessions can serve as a therapeutic tool for self-understanding and healing, also had distinctly idealistic undertones. Michael Renov, for example, suggested that video technology gives people the opportunity “to reveal hidden parts of themselves through direct address to a camera that they control. Video, as apparatus and potentiality, becomes in these works a facilitator to self-examination.”<sup>184</sup> While the suggestion that video diaries and video confessions may be initiated for therapeutical reasons appears fairly reasonable, video advocates insisted that the potential goes far beyond personal therapy. Again, Renov claimed that

video confessions produced and exchanged in nonhegemonic contexts can be powerful and tools for self-understanding, as well as for two-way communication, for the forging of human bonds and for emotional recovery. [...] video confessions of this sort afford a glimpse of a more utopian trajectory in which cultural production and consumption mingle and interact, and in which the media facilitate understanding across the gaps of human difference.<sup>185</sup>

While this may be optimistic, the wider claim is actually fairly realistic. In part, this is down to a reduction in scope, from the medium of video as a whole to video confessions by

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<sup>184</sup> Renov 1995: 97

<sup>185</sup> Renov 1995: 97

themselves. However, the concept of confession carries with it a number of associations, which need to be examined further before this claim can be substantiated.

As we have seen, these three propositions had the idealistic aim of reclaiming amateur video footage from what some commentators considered the hegemonic and alienating context of commercial television – with which video had to share the screen. However, what these commentators fundamentally overlooked is an absolutely crucial detail: VCRs were always cheaper, and therefore more widely adopted, than video cameras. This simple reality had major consequences for video; it meant that the emphasis was always on consumption over production.<sup>186</sup> Contrary to what Renov, Dovey and Miller wanted, the vast majority of content consumed on video was always professional rather than amateur. Furthermore, the handful of truly back stage moments caught on video that were widely available to the average consumer, predominantly on shows such as *America's Funniest Home Videos*, strongly emphasized entertainment and traditional family values rather than alternate or minority discourses.

The critical positions on video seemingly exist on two opposing ends of the spectrum; when they are not techno-essentialist and overwhelmingly negative, as illustrated in the first chapter, they are instead wildly idealist. The connections and conclusions made by commentators such as Renov, Dovey and Miller are not at all based on the actual uses of video. Instead, as Nicole Matthews suggests: “there is an attempt in some writing on confessional television to produce a taxonomy of representation strategies that correspond with the political value or meaning of different programmes. The aim of these taxonomies is to rescue ‘good’ programmes from a surrounding morass of more commercial, entertainment oriented or exploitative programmes.”<sup>187</sup> Just like the techno-essentialist critique of video, which argues that technology fundamentally impoverishes human potential and social interaction, the idealist position illustrated here is essentially a value

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<sup>186</sup> see Salvato 2009: 71

<sup>187</sup> Matthews 2007: 443

judgement. In this case, it insinuates that there are positive uses of video (video diaries, independent video artists and political activism) versus negative ones (anything produced commercially). Ultimately, neither of these two extremes is particularly helpful in thinking about video. What they have in common is their unwillingness to examine the actual uses of video in any greater depth for fear that this would undermine their argumentative position. My combination of a hermeneutic and a wider historical context-based approach not only allows a neutral exploration of the representational potential of both video in a particular historical moment and contemporary digital cinema in general, but also takes into consideration specific caveats. As demonstrated, most technophile critics certainly appear to ignore the conclusion that an awareness of future spaces of reception affects the mode of production.

### Video as Confessional

It was suggested that the third proposition of video advocates, that video confessions can serve as therapeutic tools for self-understanding and healing, was somewhat problematic because the term confession carries with it associations with a number of discourses. Foucault's observations in his *History of Sexuality* make it clear that the confession is an extraordinarily complex form:

The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites: one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, what is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else. [...] Western man has become a confessing animal.<sup>188</sup>

Thus for example, a clarification of confession's legal connotations may help to illuminate some of the confusion evident in the political ambitions of video activists discussed earlier, while the psychological elements are useful for a hermeneutic film analysis on the use of

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<sup>188</sup> Foucault 1978: 59

video in cinema, for example in *sex, lies, and videotape* (Steven Soderbergh, 1989). More so than any other film, Soderbergh's feature debut illustrates how video and confession were inherently linked during the era of video. Crucially, when exploring the conceptual framework in which video confessions operate, there is not just a single association in play but rather a multitude of connotations.

The first of these is perhaps the one that springs to mind most readily: the theological. Within the theological discourse, confession is traditionally seen to address an internal need for moral purity and penitence.<sup>189</sup> However, role of the priest as confessor is highly regulated in Church doctrine and, in accordance with the Code of Canon Law, every Catholic is required to confess at least once a year but preferably much more frequently. This makes both the autonomy and power dynamics in theological confession problematic. If the confessant is obligated to confess regularly by Church law, how can it be based on an internal need for penitence? Similarly, the necessity for the confessor as authority figure who can dole out absolution raises the issue of the power structure inherent to the theological mode of confession. Within this theological discourse, confession – however much it invokes purity and the absolution of sins – is clearly mandated from above and is therefore external to the confessant.

The second discourse in which confession figures prominently is legal. In legal terms, both the statements of the defendant and witnesses are referred to as testimony. However, there is a crucial distinction between the testimony of the defendant and that of the witnesses. In the courtroom or prior to the hearing, the defendant may admit their guilt. As Susannah Radstone notes: “in such cases, they place themselves in the position of the confessant. The defendant/confessant's responses to the questions directed to them by the defence and the prosecution will concern themselves – their actions, their motivations. At

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<sup>189</sup> see Berggren 1975: 4

stake in the discourse of the confessant is the question of their guilt or innocence.”<sup>190</sup> Witness testimony, on the other hand, is not about the witness themselves but rather an event external to the witness – it may have happened *to* them, or perhaps they were just present to it. So while in confession it is the self “that is scrutinised and implicated – the self that is the subject and object of the confession,”<sup>191</sup> in witness testimony it is always an other. Simply put, the difference between the two is whether the speaker uses the first or third person when discussing the criminal act. Two features are particularly notable within this legal discourse, in that they have similarities to the theological one: the first is the suggestion that the act of confession needs an audience; though the difference is that one is private, with a one-on-one confessor and the other takes place before an entire courtroom. The second aspect is the power structure; once again, the impetus for confession is imposed from above and is therefore arguably external.

The third discourse on confession is psychoanalytical. Unlike the previous two, this discourse does not construct confession in terms of the submission of the confessant to an external authority or source of power. In this discourse – going back all the way to the Augustinian model – confession is regarded as a cathartic, healing process. In his 1925 work *Geständniszwang und Strafbedürfnis*, the psychologist Theodor Reik argues that the fundamental basis for confession is guilt. For Reik, confession functions as an attempt to make repressed psychic material conscious again; it thus “represents the superego function of reconciliation between ego and id forces; [...] the result is a massive tension between superego and ego, resulting in what has often been called conscience.”<sup>192</sup> He also argues that the need for confession as expression of repressed impulses is further fostered by an internal need for punishment. When subject to psychoanalysis, confession can thus facilitate the transfer of unconscious impulses to the preconscious and thereby treat the

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<sup>190</sup> Radstone 2007: 168

<sup>191</sup> Radstone 2007: 169

<sup>192</sup> McConnell 1969: 81

underlying neurosis. In these instances the presence of a confessor, in the form of an analyst, is not compulsory but recommended in order to facilitate the cathartic healing process. There is nonetheless an internalized hierarchical division in which one element of Freud's structural model of the psyche, the super-ego, functions as the higher authority which gives the impetus to confess.

The fourth confessional discourse is informed by Michel Foucault. For Foucault, confession fundamentally functions as "one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth."<sup>193</sup> However, unlike in the other discourses, Foucault inverts the power relations of the confessional mode. He identifies a historical shift in how it functions, from the Middle Ages, where subjects were incited to confess through an external power, towards the point where it becomes a question of individualisation of power. The urge to confess, he argues,

is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place [...] Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence.<sup>194</sup>

In this model repression is not an internalized neurosis, as in the psychoanalytic discourse; instead, repression is that external restriction of individual freedom which prevents confession.

By virtue of the power structure immanent in it, the confessional discourse cannot come from above, [...] through the sovereign will of a master, but rather from below [...] Its veracity is not guaranteed by the lofty authority of the magistery, nor by the tradition it transmits, but by the bond, the basic intimacy in discourse between the one who speaks and what he is speaking about.<sup>195</sup>

Because the production of truth is the central motivation for confession, it means that the confessant is on the one hand empowered, but also internally obligated to be truthful. While Foucault stresses the centrality of truth in the confessional mode, he also identifies the

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<sup>193</sup> Foucault 1978: 58

<sup>194</sup> Foucault 1978: 60

<sup>195</sup> Foucault 1978: 62

transformative nature of the act, which, as Radstone points out “changes the signified self in the process of signification.”<sup>196</sup> Thus he argues that while confession works on the basis of a stable and unfixable notion of truth, there is also a certain mutability within the subject or confessant themselves:

the confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; [...] in which the expression alone, independent of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it.<sup>197</sup>

So how do these four key discourses impact an analysis of video practices? The legal distinction between confession and witness testimony for example may help to clarify some of the confusion evident in the political ambitions of video activists discussed earlier. The proponents of video activism were in fact proposing amateur video as witness testimony. Witness testimony firmly falls in the public sphere however – no one is called to testify privately, only publicly – which illustrates why video advocates compounded two very distinct concepts. They celebrated the intimate modes of production that amateur video practices offer but simultaneously wanted them to operate in a public space.

These discourses on confession also impact the dichotomy between professional and amateur filmic practices in other ways: a traditionally filmed interview, with a camera crew and a director or interviewer present, evokes the pre-modern mode of elicited or coerced confession. By contrast, a self-taped video confession seems to contradict this traditional power structure, suggesting instead the mode of religious and therapeutic confession which, while requiring or at least recommending the presence of a confessor, is not ‘directed’ in the same way. The camera, in lieu of the active interviewer, is merely a passive listener but nonetheless remains vital; as Foucault points out: “one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession.”<sup>198</sup> A video confession is thus a prime example of

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<sup>196</sup> Radstone 2007: 173

<sup>197</sup> Foucault 1978: 61-62

<sup>198</sup> Foucault 1978: 61

Foucault's bottom-up power structure. Renov, for example, suggests that "the presence of the camera or recorder is sufficient to spur self-revelation. In the case of video confessions, the virtual presence of a partner – the imagined other effectuated by the technology – turns out to be a more powerful facilitator of emotion than flesh-and-blood interlocutors."<sup>199</sup>

The question remains whether the performance in a video confession is solely directed at the camera, whether a form of transference takes place in the confessant's mind between the figure of therapist or confessor and the object of the camera, or whether the confession is in fact directed at a much wider (absent or future) audience. Only in the first instance can the performance be regarded as back stage, in the latter two, performances are clearly front stage. Proponents of psychoanalysis may argue that the relationship between patient and analyst is deeply intimate – but that premise is questionable. The patient's performance on the analyst's couch is just as much a planned and intentional performance as that before a wider (implied, future or virtual) audience.

A perfect example of this tension is found in Steven Soderbergh's breakthrough film, *sex, lies, and videotape*. Each of its four characters negotiates their attitudes to sexuality through confession. Ann (Andie MacDowell) is a sexually repressed housewife, who confesses her paranoia and dislike of masturbation to her therapist; her unfaithful husband John (Peter Gallagher) is an unlikable lawyer, who eventually confesses his adultery to Ann; her promiscuous sister – and John's lover – Cynthia (Laura San Giacomo) consents to Graham (James Spader) interviewing her about her sex life on tape and later confesses this to both Ann and John; while Graham, John's college friend, confesses to Ann that he is impotent and cannot achieve sexual arousal without watching his videotapes of women's sexual confessions. As Alice Templeton remarks:

The discourse of therapy, as well as secular and religious images of confession, recur throughout the film. [...] Ordinary dialogue resembles confession. [...] In almost every scene, the characters play confessant and

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<sup>199</sup> Renov 1995: 89

confessor, naturalized roles whose artificiality is brought into relief by the film's self reflexive comment on the coercive powers of the video camera.<sup>200</sup>

Following the structure of classical comedy, with a final re-pairing of couples, the film critically engages with the performativity of the confessional mode. When Cynthia agrees to be interviewed by Graham, she is visibly gearing up to a self-conscious performance – one that she knows will be taped. Her questions, “how do we start? [...] do I sit or stand? [...] are you ready?” and her initial stilted delivery which Graham then corrects (“speak in a normal voice”) all serve to underline that her confession is deliberate and front stage. Even when Ann voluntarily decides to be interviewed on video at the end of the film, which could suggest a Foucauldian assertion of power, the inherent epistemological instability of her mode of performance remains – does she confess to the camera, to Graham or for herself? Graham's tapes contain not confessions but rather interviews, nonetheless, as Templeton suggests, “the drive to confession compels the story and makes the film highly self-reflexive. As the viewer watches the characters make and watch their videos, the camera within the camera – the videos within the film – replicates and comments on its own confessional distancing.”<sup>201</sup> While the film potentially portrays Graham as committed to a Foucauldian extraction of truth from himself and others, Graham in fact simply appropriates – much like the proponents of video advocacy – both the discourse of confession and the technology of video to fulfil an aspiration; in his case, regaining lost sexual intimacy. Focussing on the confessional mode's capacity for cathartic healing is widespread both in theoretical and popular discourses – as well as within cinematic texts themselves. Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape* therefore serves as an ideal example of confessional modes of performance and the discourses they interact with in the video era. As will soon become apparent, video's confessional function is relevant not only in film

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<sup>200</sup> Templeton 1998: 18-19

<sup>201</sup> Templeton 1998: 16

analyses – featuring in *The Blair Witch Project* and *Redacted*, as well as *Caché* – but also to an understanding of amateur modes of address in contemporary online video blogs.

### Amateurism 2.0

As already suggested, one analytical tradition in particular has tried to resist the overwhelming tendency to privilege the professional mode of production and undermine the amateur in twentieth century cultural production.<sup>202</sup> Proponents of video advocacy actively aimed to counter the hegemony of corporate media interests – but their goals never quite seem to have been achieved satisfactorily. Building on the basis of this utopian ideology for amateur video practices, some commentators see the distribution channels offered by the Internet combined with digital video technologies as ultimately fulfilling video's original promise. Amateur film-makers, so the argument goes, no longer have to sacrifice their integrity by conforming to commercial or political expectations in order to be widely distributed; whereas previously, in the video era, the only way to reach a broad audience was to be broadcast on television, amateur film-makers can now simply upload videos to the Internet. Online media platforms – such as DailyMotion, MetaCafe, Vimeo or YouTube – emphasize how content created by an ordinary user can sit side by side with content created in a professional context. Home videos have become only one element of 'user generated content'. The two buzzwords central to this discourse are 'democratized media'<sup>203</sup> and 'grassroots alternative media'<sup>204</sup> – both of which directly echo the language used a decade earlier by video advocates such as Dovey and Miller.

Since then, not only have the modes of distribution changed, but also the modes of production. Whereas video cameras recorded on magnetic tape, and had to be individually converted into a digital format before they could be edited on a computer and disseminated,

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<sup>202</sup> see Salvato 2009: 69

<sup>203</sup> see Keen 2007: 14

<sup>204</sup> see Hilderbrand 2007: 50

newer generations of cameras are able to immediately record in a digital format. Stored as data on memory cards, the recordings can not only be reviewed immediately but also, depending on the model, even be rudimentarily edited within the camera itself. If the footage is taken on a mobile phone, it can even be uploaded to the Internet directly from the appliance, bypassing the need for a computer completely. As the technology improved over multiple iterations, the quality of the image also became noticeably clearer. Whereas footage from the early to mid 2000s frequently looks pixelated, with screen tearing and digitally compressed, tinny sound, more recent footage shot in high definition looks as crisp and clear as any commercial content – which is not surprising, considering even professional film-makers use cameras aimed at the consumer market.

This drastic improvement in the production capabilities of digital technologies within a relatively short space of time meant that for the first time, there was truly no discernible visual quality which distinguished amateur from commercially-produced content. Amateur footage finally looked as ‘good’ as professional footage. Moreover, the practically instantaneous distribution via the Internet meant that while it took hours before Holliday’s video of the Rodney King beating was broadcast by the local Los Angeles television station which bought the rights – and even then with minor edits undertaken by the broadcaster – similar footage is now uploaded to the Internet in its original, untampered form within moments of recording. For the first time, amateur footage is as ‘live’ as television, while potentially reaching audiences on the same scale. For advocates of ‘democratized’ media, it appears as though their ambitions are finally being realized on a grand scale.

However, unlike in the 1990s, there are some critical voices arguing against the ideological assumptions drawn by the proponents of ‘democratized’ media. This conceptual opposition is perhaps best personified in the conflict between two influential commentators: Tim O’Reilly and Andrew Keen. O’Reilly is the founder of O’Reilly Media and an influential supporter of the free and open source software movements. An avowed

technophile, he hosts an annual business retreat, nicknamed FOO Camp (an acronym of ‘friends of O’Reilly’), whose 2004 iteration was influential in widely propagating the concept and usage of the term ‘Web 2.0’. The concept of Web 2.0 is loosely taken to include the enabling of users in content production, enhanced participation and social interaction, new forms of website development which stress possible financial exploitation, and a new way of thinking about the Internet in general. O’Reilly and his followers earnestly advocate Web 2.0 as a utopia in which user generated content – which includes creative products such as video clips and music as well as opinions in the form of reviews or blogs – not only shares the same platform, but is also given the same recognition as professional or expert content. O’Reilly thus argues that Web 2.0 democratizes amateur discourses and brings them to the same level as commercial or professional ones, while simultaneously suggesting that corporate interests can profit from targeted advertising and of course users’ personal data:

One of the key lessons of the Web 2.0 era is this: *Users add value*. But only a small percentage of users will go to the trouble of adding value to your application via explicit means. Therefore, Web 2.0 companies *set inclusive defaults for aggregating user data and building value as a side-effect of ordinary use of the application*. [...] They build systems that get better the more people use them.<sup>205</sup>

The conflicting interests of major corporations and ‘democratized’ media do not appear to be incompatible to O’Reilly.

Andrew Keen is an Internet entrepreneur and, motivated by his attendance at the 2004 ‘FOO Camp’ conference, wrote the book *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet is Killing Our Culture* in reaction to O’Reilly’s Web 2.0 evangelism:

There was one word on every FOO Camper’s lips in September 2004. That word was ‘democratization’. [...] Media, information, knowledge, content, audience, author – all were going to be *democratized* by Web 2.0. The Internet would *democratize* Big Media, Big Business, Big Government. It would even *democratize* Big Experts, transforming them into what one friend of O’Reilly called, in a hushed, reverent tone, ‘noble amateurs’.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> O’Reilly 2005: 3 [original emphasis]

<sup>206</sup> Keen 2007: 14 [original emphasis]

Keen's polemical dismissal of the term Web 2.0 and the notion of democratized media rests on his distinction between professional and amateur content production – especially when it comes to amateur filmic practices:

The Internet's infinite monkey experiment is not limited to the written word. T.H. Huxley's nineteenth-century typewriter has evolved into not only the computer, but also the camcorder, turning the Internet into a vast library for user-generated video content. [...] YouTube eclipses even the blogs in the inanity and absurdity of its content. Nothing seems too prosaic or narcissistic for these videographer monkeys.<sup>207</sup>

He associates amateur creative output with “mediocrity”<sup>208</sup> and “inanity and absurdity”<sup>209</sup> and also argues that websites driven by user generated content are actively undermining scientific knowledge, expert analysis and trained professionalism in favour of uneducated, biased and unprofessional – not to mention poorly written – misinformation and opinion. Keen uses the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and Wikipedia to illustrate his point: four thousand expert contributors and hundreds of trained editors versus a portal that can be edited by anyone, resulting in constantly changing and frequently inaccurate entries.

Ultimately, both of these positions are polemical extremes, designed to provoke strong reactions and further debate. Neither is particularly subtle or comprehensive; O'Reilly's essay ‘What is Web 2.0?’ reads like an economic-political manifesto, preaching democratization while simultaneously happily enabling the corporate status quo. Keen's polemic on the other hand is at times little more than a personal rant; ironically, his line of reasoning, examples and writing style are all evocative of the very same online blogs he so colourfully vilifies.

However, the problems with the former position are graver: firstly, Web 2.0's democratizing ideal is completely undermined by the very sites O'Reilly suggests are the standard-bearers of the movement. YouTube's motto ‘Broadcast Yourself’ stands at odds with the way the site structures and promotes videos according to popularity. This practice

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<sup>207</sup> Keen 2007: 4-5

<sup>208</sup> Keen 2007: 3

<sup>209</sup> Keen 2007: 5

can be easily hijacked by astute professional contributors who beat the ranking system at its own game by paying to have their clips featured more prominently or producing fake ‘amateur’ content. Viral marketing campaigns often appear to be ordinary user generated video clips but are in fact professionally made and usually feature subtle product placement. Alternatively, echoing those premeditated home videos made in order to be submitted to *America’s Funniest Home Videos*, a clip can act as a sort of portfolio of talents, proof of concept or show reel in order to promote its creator or sell an idea. Moreover, professional content such as excerpts from television, promos, trailers and even ads tend to be more popular than any user generated amateur content anyway and are consequently displayed more prominently. Much like Google, its parent company – whose unofficial corporate ethos is ‘don’t be evil’ – YouTube may affect democratic ideals but is at heart a for-profit corporation. Google acquired YouTube in November 2006, for \$1.65 billion and YouTube’s revenue from advertising sales is currently estimated at just under \$1 billion annually.<sup>210</sup>

Consequently, the ‘democratizing’ ideology for user generated content on the Internet proposed by O’Reilly and his followers is shown to be as romanticized as that of supporters of video advocacy, a discourse to which it is inherently related. While the interconnected digital technologies for production and dissemination – including digital cameras, digital editing suites and the Internet itself – doubtlessly facilitate the creation, distribution and consumption of amateur footage, the power structures which ultimately control access to these video clips nevertheless remain corporate and hegemonic rather than democratic and free. This is clearly demonstrated in YouTube’s policy of immediately deleting any video clip whose copyright status is even tenuously disputed, in Google’s willingness to collaborate with the Chinese authorities by censoring search results in China or even in Apple’s stance on third party software in their App Store, which sees them refusing any

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<sup>210</sup> see Kafka 2010

applications which compete with their own products. In fact, in some cases these online corporate entities are actively undermining and threatening truly democratic and publicly-owned institutions. As Hilderbrand makes clear: “archivists and librarians have criticized [Google] not only for circulating low-resolution copies of unauthorized content but also for skewing general perceptions that sites such as YouTube may render traditional archives irrelevant and introduce unrealistic demands for access.”<sup>211</sup> Ultimately, just as with the utopian ideology of video advocacy, the conclusions and propositions made by advocates about amateur content production practices on the Web are not based on the actual configurations and use of online media sharing platforms.

### **Amateurs on YouTube**

With this conceptual opposition in mind, we can turn to a concrete analysis of a number of exemplary video clips on YouTube. They broadly fall into five categories: amateur documentary, corporate marketing, mash-ups, the home video mode and fake amateurism. The first, second and third are easily comprehensible and have been already briefly mentioned. A good example of the amateur documentary in its current YouTube form is the leaked footage of Saddam Hussein’s execution [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4M6Lgb2eCmw>], shot on a mobile phone by one of the guards present and uploaded within hours of the event. Functioning similarly to the Zapruder or Holliday recordings, in that it operates within a public rather than private mode, what is unique to contemporary amateur documentaries is that the film-maker does not have to go to a news media outlet to distribute the footage as was the case with the Rodney King tape. Instead, it is uploaded and news broadcasters take the footage from the media sharing platform itself. The corporate marketing is similarly straightforward, either outright advertising products with commercials, promos or trailers – such as Disney’s YouTube user ‘channel’ promoting

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<sup>211</sup> Hilderbrand 2007: 54

upcoming releases [<http://www.youtube.com/user/DisneyMovieTrailers>] – or even building on popular online ads, such as the ‘The Man Your Man Could Smell Like’ Old Spice commercial [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owGykVbfgUE>], by engaging viewers in Web 2.0 marketing strategies and responding to questions posed via Twitter and other social networking or blogging services [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqoc6wTNotI>]. This category actively takes O’Reilly’s suggestion to “leverage customer-self service and algorithmic data management”<sup>212</sup> to heart. The last of these straightforward categories is the mash-up, in which amateur users alter existing professional content by editing the footage, changing the soundtrack or compiling a collage of materials from various sources. Particularly infamous is the alteration of subtitles in the bunker scene of *Der Untergang* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004), so that Hitler (Bruno Ganz) appears to react to various current events [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfkDxF2kn1I>].

The other two categories are somewhat more interesting in that they can take a more complex, liminal form. The first of these is the contemporary version of the home video mode. Instead of being submitted to television shows, it is now simply uploaded. Like in *America’s Funniest Home Videos*, amusing children or animals seem to be extremely popular, with ‘David After Dentist’ [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txqiwrbyGrs>] receiving over 100 million views and ‘Charlie Bit My Finger’ [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OB1gSz8sSM>] over 375 million views. The darker aspect to clips such as these is that their uploading can occur without the permission of those featured in the clip, as in the case of ‘Star Wars Kid’ [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPPj6viIBmU>]. The video is a recording a Canadian schoolboy made of himself swinging a golf ball retriever around like a lightsaber. Filmed at his high school, it was discovered by a classmate who uploaded it to the Internet where it went viral and was featured in various mash-ups which added special effects and sounds [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GJOVPjhXMY>]. The

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<sup>212</sup> O’Reilly 2005: 2

performance is deeply embarrassing and was never intended to be viewed by anyone apart from perhaps the boy himself; the student's family eventually filed a lawsuit against his classmates. Most of these clips essentially function in exactly the same way as home videos submitted to *America's Funniest Home Videos* in that intimate recordings genuinely not intended for an audience are viewed on the front stage and exploit the performers, as with the 'Star Wars Kid'. When submitting a clip to YouTube there is no screening and selection process or the need for legal consent from those featured, as is the case in commercial broadcasting, so the relationship between intentionality and performance is somewhat more complex. As well as featuring front and back stage performances voluntarily distributed after the fact, online media sharing platforms therefore also raise the possibility of unconscious back stage performances which are distributed against the wishes of the performer.

Also belonging to the home video mode is the video blog, in which the author, usually sitting at the computer, directly addresses the camera. Some video blogs can take the form of opinion pieces on current events, reviews or even responses to other clips or video blogs posted online. In this last case, YouTube prominently displays the responses below the original video, allowing for a form of truncated dialogue in the form of multiple individual monologues. Frequently, the video blog can take the form of a confession. This relates back to the question raised earlier whether the confession as mode of performance is solely directed at the camera or whether such confessions are in fact directed at a much wider, absent audience. Again, the difference is in the mode of performance; only in the first instance can the performance be regarded as truly private, in the latter, performances are clearly public.

The final category is that of fake amateurism, which frequently assumes the form of the home video mode. Within it, there are arguably two further subcategories. The first is the overt use of amateur practices by amateur performer to signal authenticity. A well

known example is the video blog of Chris Crocker, who came to prominence with his 'Leave Britney Alone!' video rant [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHmvkRoEowc>]. In it, Crocker, allegedly a 19-year-old living with his grandparents in rural Tennessee, tearfully rages against the overwhelmingly negative critical reaction to Britney Spears' 2007 MTV Awards performance. The video immediately went viral, has since garnered over 40 million views and made Crocker one of a handful of Internet celebrities. The reaction to Crocker's video has ranged from mockery to outright homophobia, based on the assumption, as Nick Salvato suggests,

that Crocker's emotional display is exaggerated and disproportionate to the objects and events that have ostensibly inspired it; and that Crocker's effeminacy is extreme. Of course, these assessments, both focused on Crocker's supposed excesses, are intimately intertwined ones, as Crocker is effeminized not just by his appearance, particularly his hair and makeup, but by his 'hysterical' outburst.<sup>213</sup>

The key here is that Crocker's monologue is taken to be a performance because it is so difficult to assume that it is anything but ironical – even though it has since been established that while Crocker is an assumed name, his video blog persona was not a deliberate project designed to throw the intolerance of queer discourse into relief. While the sentiment may have been genuine, the obvious intentionality of the performance makes it an unmistakable instance of a clip adopting amateur practices. Precisely these aspects were picked up on in a parody starring the television and film actor Seth Green, entitled 'Leave Chris Crocker Alone!' [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aigkDm9UoKo>]. Green accurately mimics Crocker's performance but interrupts it at various points either to reapply eyeliner or promote his own television show; Salvato is quick to point out that

whatever approval is implied by Green's affirmation of Crocker's queer style is undercut by the occasional pauses, breaks from his sobbing, in which he grows suddenly calm and steady and reapplies thick eyeliner painstakingly with a pencil. The effect of these rapid-fire transitions is not overwhelmingly to suggest that Crocker's display is inauthentic (though it has that ancillary effect, too), but rather to remind the viewer of Green's

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<sup>213</sup> Salvato 2009: 75

own professional control and skill as a performer, which cannot, it is implied, be achieved by an amateur like Crocker.<sup>214</sup>

Even Salvato's criticism of Crocker's detractors implicitly acknowledges the performativity of his delivery. When Green ends his parody by advertising his own (commercial) work, it not only serves to reinforce his professional credentials but implies by extension that the 'Leave Britney Alone!' clip is just as much a work of self-promotion.

The second subcategory of fake amateurism is fully scripted, professional content masquerading as amateur footage. In some cases these are simply viral advertisements which are filmed emulating non-professional camera work, such as the promotional material for *Cloverfield*.<sup>215</sup> While sometimes unintelligible, the intent of such productions is nonetheless fairly straightforward: to sell or promote a brand or product. However there are also examples where the model of an amateur video blog persona is taken further and becomes a fully scripted and professionally produced creation for its own sake. The video blog 'lonelygirl15' [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-goXKtd6cPo>], which made out to be the musings of a teenage girl named Bree, was in fact an elaborate project created by the film-makers Mesh Flinders, Miles Beckett and Greg Goodfried, and the actress Jessica Rose playing Bree. The video blog was intended as proof of concept and subsequently spawned an online television series entitled *lonelygirl15*, with numerous seasons and international spin-offs. Operating exactly in the same manner as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield*, these examples not only closely emulate aesthetic and visual cues in order to appropriate an aura of authenticity but also faithfully mimic the general rhetoric and performance of online direct amateur videos – and the video confession in particular.

Finally, there is one more aspect that has a fundamental effect on the reception of online amateur content: the information around the actual video, the hyperlinks, comments and metadata. Without this additional information, a video would arguably just be an

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<sup>214</sup> Salvato 2009: 78

<sup>215</sup> see Chapter 2

artefact of amateur production, but with the addition of these ephemera, it gains a textual level and becomes something else – a YouTube clip. Wolfgang Ullrich describes the fallacy of a gallery which decided to hold an exhibition of amateur found footage by simply projecting it on a white wall:

The organisers missed exactly that which defines YouTube and other platforms of Web 2.0, such as flickr or photobucket: instead of just containing photos, comics or videos, these sites above all also offer numbers, data and statistics and therefore a sociogram. [...] Every contribution is surrounded by a corona of information, which defines the environment the images and video are in.<sup>216</sup>

The appropriation – and in Seth Green’s case, parody – of amateur modes of production by professionals is only undertaken in order to absorb the perceived potential threat to viewing numbers posed by the popularity of amateur footage on YouTube, just as was the case with *America’s Funniest Home Videos* more than a decade and a half earlier. The incredible viewing figures of certain amateur viral clips, ‘Charlie Bit My Finger’ with almost 375 million views in particular, make it clear why both professionals and other amateurs alike are motivated by the desire to create the next online hit. In comparison, the most successful viral marketing ad, Old Spice’s ‘The Man Your Man Could Smell Like’, is considered a major success with over 35 million hits even though that is less than a tenth of the viewers of ‘Charlie Bit My Finger’. The potential for not just distributing amateur footage in a public space but becoming a global sensation, surpassing even professional efforts in popularity, will obviously affect the intentionality and performance and the moment of production.

Just as with home movies and home videos, the key factor for online amateur videos is not the technology itself but rather the performance given. Changes in the recording technology – from Super 8 to camcorder to webcam – are not the catalyst for changes in performance; it is only the performer’s own awareness of the future context of reception. So while amateur footage in the era of home movies was limited to representing the front

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<sup>216</sup> Ullrich 2009: 57\*

stage; and the potential for intimacy in the home video era was undermined by the fact it had to share the space of reception with commercial representations; the calculated intentionality in the performance of online personas such as Chris Crocker can stand beside the embarrassing intimacy of the 'Star Wars Kid' in the digital era. The conclusion of this historical analysis of the media landscape against which amateur film-making practices have taken place over the last fifty years is that technology is never the basis for new principles, a new function of the image, a new politics or a new artistic finality. It is not the technology itself but the performances that video can be present to, that mean that the will to art of video is intimacy. As this chapter has shown, amateur practices enable intimacy – but they are not the guarantee. The requirements for an intimate recording are simply too complex to be reduced to an easily applicable template. As the examples listed above, as well as the two films in the previous chapter, illustrate, the element that is all too readily ignored is that knowledge of how a text is received alters its production.

### **Unbelievable Monsters**

If the mode of reception so clearly influences and potentially alters the mode of production in amateur film-making practices, the question is then how contemporary 'professional' cinema can keep up. Based on the previous chapter, it has become clear that as long as professional film-makers remain faithful to emulating actual mode of production in which amateur film-making operates, it can work extremely well – and perhaps the best example of this process remains *Cloverfield*. Again, it is not the technology that enables it in particular. The cinematographers in *Cloverfield* used a combination of consumer and industry digital cameras, much of the film was recorded in studios and it features a large amount of post-production CGI and special effects – nonetheless the film seems authentic because it not only adheres to Prince's conceptual realism but also because the performances both ignore and address the presence of the camera appropriately and it never

seems implausible that an amateur would have kept recording. Even its formal playfulness, such as the inclusion of the ‘flashbacks’, works because it mimics actual amateur practices of recording over old footage.

However, as soon as professional film-makers ignore the actual mode of production of amateur filmic practices while aiming for the same mode of reception, it becomes problematic. Brian de Palma’s *Redacted* illustrates this particularly well. *Redacted* is loosely based on the Mahmudiyah gang-rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl by U.S. soldiers which took place on 12 March 2006 in Iraq. It follows a squad of American soldiers stationed at a checkpoint in Samarra leading up to the event, using a collage of audiovisual material including a soldiers’ video diary, a fake French documentary entitled ‘Barrage’, ‘embedded’ news footage from various fictive Arabic and European news broadcasters, video clips on an Jihadist website, CCTV footage from within the army base, webcam conversations and a number of clips on an online media sharing site. As Paul Arthur points out: “the American occupation speaks a different visual language from previous military conflicts and, to some extent, the authenticity we assign a given text depends on how closely it echoes the look and rhetorical conventions of what is by now a burgeoning militarized subgenre [...] a mixture of shaky-cam, foreshortened close-ups, and subjective musings by participants.”<sup>217</sup> In trying to appropriate this impression of authenticity, *Redacted* for the most part simulates the look of each of these various formats fairly accurately. In short, it is a prime example of convergence in contemporary digital cinema.

Just like the proponents of video advocacy however, de Palma clearly has political ambitions which are not compatible with the actual uses of this kind of amateur footage. With its title, tagline (“Truth is the first casualty of war”) and the multiple format/perspective approach, de Palma is offering a ‘truthful’ representation he considers

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<sup>217</sup> Arthur 2007: 52

absent from the public discourse on the occupation of Iraq. In an interview with *Cinema Scope* he stated: “the U.S. government has co-opted the Fourth Estate. It made the networks buy its spun, whitewashed version of the facts.”<sup>218</sup> Within the film this is made most explicit in the title of PFC Salazar’s (Izzy Diaz) video diary, “Tell Me No Lies,” with which the character hopes to earn himself a spot at film school. By presenting this video diary as truthful, de Palma overtly challenges the veracity of mainstream visual representations of the war. Yet this very appeal, which as Ken Provencher points out “is not just Salazar’s appeal to his camera subjects; it is also the implicit appeal of an audience to any film posing as nonfiction,”<sup>219</sup> is completely undermined by *Redacted*’s opening title card. Unlike *Cloverfield*, which uses this paratextual device in order to further the authenticity of its fiction, *Redacted* features a disclaimer which explains that it “visually documents imagined events.” By appropriating a plethora of amateur filmic practices in order to illustrate his political beliefs, de Palma offers a totality of truth; yet paradoxically he seeks to construct the ‘true facts’ of the war despite the fact that he is presenting fictional evidence. As Provencher underlines, “all we see is imagined, but *documented*. Each and every piece of footage is a lie that someone somewhere believes is authentic.”<sup>220</sup> However, as was made clear from the analysis of *Benny’s Video* in the first chapter, video can never truly offer representational totality. The video may imply authenticity, but this is not the same as offering totality. As mentioned before, it is specifically film, rather than video, that offers totality. The conventional *suture* of shot/reverse shot underlines the notion that the film camera is somehow taken to be outside of the scene, yet simultaneously able to capture all angles. Unlike film, the medium of video does not and cannot rely on the montage of various shots. De Palma arguably tries to counter this inherent fragmentation by presenting a collage of fragments in the hope that they will come together to form a consistent whole.

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<sup>218</sup> in Nelson 2008: 15

<sup>219</sup> Provencher 2008: 34

<sup>220</sup> Provencher 2008: 34

But while the video diary component, which features the kind of performative interaction with the camera viewers are familiar with from home videos and YouTube clips, arguably works – somewhat unsurprisingly as it is closest to the model of representation employed by *Cloverfield* and *The Blair Witch Project* – the majority of the other visual material in *Redacted* is deeply unconvincing. As one critic highlights, “scarcely a single frame of this stuff looks or feels plausible: a surveillance camera miraculously records crystal-clear dialogue; a female journalist accompanying a night time raid shoves her mike into the faces of troops trying to clear a potentially hostile zone.”<sup>221</sup> Similarly, *Sight & Sound* identified that “a major problem is that the myriad different parts of the film are dramatic reconstructions and Brian de Palma is simply too mannered a film-maker for these to convince.”<sup>222</sup>

Perhaps the best example of this is the emotional breakdown of SPC Lawyer McCoy (Rob Devaney) after he returns home to the United States. At a reunion party in a local bar with some of his civilian friends and his fiancée, he is asked for a war story. McCoy directly addresses the camera with which one of them is filming him and describes how he was present to the rape and murder of the Iraqi girl. Not only is the performance somewhat hammy, the fact that he is testifying to something so deeply personal in public surroundings coupled with the address to the camera rather than any of the people present makes it deeply unconvincing. The continued recording of an increasingly uncomfortable scene stands completely at odds with the recording in *Cloverfield*, for example. At no point during that film does the viewer ever question why the character is still recording. In *Redacted* however, the plausible reaction would have been to turn the camera off rather than continue filming the emotional breakdown – especially considering the camera operator is meant to be McCoy’s best friend.

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<sup>221</sup> Arthur 2007: 54

<sup>222</sup> Westwell 2008: 79

De Palma is perhaps trying to suggest a Foucauldian mode of confession here; the truth about the Iraq war ‘demanding’ to surface.<sup>223</sup> The assumption is that the video camera McCoy addresses facilitates a confession by simulating the presence of a confessor. However given the context and by having his friends present as well, it is not a private confession but a public one. This is inconsistent with not just the Foucauldian mode of confession but also the religious and psychoanalytical modes. The only mode that is applicable is thus the legal one; it echoes a courtroom confession. But, just like the video advocates, de Palma confuses the actual uses of video with the political statement he wants video to make – moreover, like the advocates, he confuses confession with witness testimony. If de Palma wanted to emulate the authenticity of the amateur confessional context – with the production of truth as his central motivation – then McCoy would address the other people present and the camera would not be on. Or, if it were on in this situation, it would be recording accidentally; for example, as *Cloverfield*’s director implied by “just slightly tipping the camera so it didn’t feel like the scene was being actively filmed.”<sup>224</sup> Alternatively, as at the end of *The Blair Witch Project*, it could be a private confession to the camera, in lieu of an actual confessor. Only in that instance would the camera be addressed directly, as McCoy does.

Ultimately, while *Redacted* aspires to present reality truthfully by simulating amateur practices, it fundamentally undermines that ambition not just by being a fiction, but by the fact its appropriation fails to take the actual uses of amateur film-making practices fully into account. Amateur video practices certainly enable intimate and authentic representations – but they are not guaranteed. What de Palma appears to have ignored at his peril is that knowledge of the space of reception fundamentally changes how a filmic document is made. To make diegetically recorded films consistent with the expectations spectators have of amateur recordings, contemporary digital cinema needs to approximate

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<sup>223</sup> see Foucault 1978: 60

<sup>224</sup> in Witmer 2008: 37

not just the visual, but the performative, textual and above all contextual modes of amateur film-making practices.

### **Practice Makes Perfect**

Moving away from a purely hermeneutic approach to a broader context-based one enabled me to examine amateur recording practices from a number of perspectives. The formal predecessors of contemporary modes of amateur film-making categorically demonstrate that intentional front stage performances to the camera were established as the norm early on in amateur filmic practices. This meant that the hypothesis that intimacy is the will to art of contemporary digital cinema had to be further qualified. While video and amateur film-making practices have the potential to capture intimate back stage performances, the appropriation of amateur recordings by corporate media interests, as well as amateur film-makers' goals of sharing their footage beyond the back stage, undermined this potential. Technology itself does not determine the will to art. As this chapter has shown, video and amateur film-making practices may enable intimate recordings – but they are not their guarantee.

Proponents of video advocacy based their ambitions not on the actual uses of video in amateur contexts, but rather on utopian ideals. These utopian ideals are echoed in some of the discourses surrounding amateur practices on the Internet, specifically by the proponents of Web 2.0. The potential for not just distributing amateur footage in a public space but becoming a major sensation, surpassing even professional efforts in popularity, as exemplified by amateur YouTube clips, once again underlines how awareness of future spaces of reception affects the mode of production in the private space.

Brian de Palma's *Redacted*, as an example of contemporary digital cinema, attempts to situate itself precisely within this context of contemporary modes of amateur film-making in an effort to present a 'truthful' representation of the Iraq conflict. In its

endeavour to appropriate the mode of reception such footage implies, *Redacted* arguably fails for a number of reasons, but mainly because – like the proponents of video advocacy – its appropriation fails to take the actual uses of amateur film-making practices fully into account. It appears that *Cloverfield*, by actively exploiting and incorporating socio-technological discourses and performance contexts of amateur film-making practices, is actually one of only a few instances of contemporary digital cinema which successfully manages to transfer the intimacy of video to contemporary digital cinema. The main claim of this thesis, that intimacy is indeed the will to art of contemporary digital cinema, is by no means invalidated by *Redacted*'s failings; instead, *Redacted* merely illustrates how difficult it is to get it right. What makes *Cloverfield*'s achievement all the more impressive is that it manages to appropriate the intimacy of amateur film-making practices while simultaneously adhering to conventions of spectacular cinema.

## Chapter 4

### *Private Viewings*

The back stage is not just an intimate space to be recorded, but also an intimate space in which the reception of contemporary digital cinema takes place. The semio-pragmatic approach of the last chapter indicates that the context of reception is therefore just as fundamental to understanding contemporary digital cinema as both the production practices and interpretations of the films themselves. While the previous chapters have already briefly explored media and formats which enable private modes of viewing such as film projectors, television sets, video players and online media sharing platforms, this chapter will primarily concentrate on the DVD. For the last twenty years or so, home media have been responsible for the bulk of the film industry's profits, easily outperforming the box office and royalties from television distribution combined.<sup>225</sup> This emphasizes the key role domestic modes of reception play in contemporary digital cinema. From the late 1980s to the late 1990s, home media took the form of videos, which could be either bought or rented for private consumption. But since its introduction in 1997, the DVD has arguably been the most common and in many ways the defining way cinema is viewed. One could even argue that though many other technological innovations are central to contemporary digital

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<sup>225</sup> see Klinger 2006: 89

cinema – high definition television sets, the Internet, the comeback of 3-D cinema – the first decade of the new millennium was above all dominated by the DVD.

Once again, this is not a reading based on technological determinism: it is not the technology itself but rather how we interact with it that is important. This chapter will regard the DVD as a medium which enables particular modes of viewing in an intimate, back stage context. While there are arguably a number of viewing contexts in which the DVD operates – the academic and promotional<sup>226</sup> spring to mind most readily – the majority of DVD viewing nonetheless takes place in the domestic sphere and consequently these other contexts can safely be disregarded.

This chapter will begin by identifying how the now established conceptual divide on digital technologies and new media manifests itself specifically in the sub-category of DVD scholarship. The conceptual opposition between intertextuality and intratextuality may in fact be less incompatible than suggested by either side. The presence of a number of alternate and parallel texts on a DVD, such as alternative endings and deleted scenes, can fundamentally affect understanding and interpretations of the primary filmic text. What I term ‘extra diegetic material’ – as opposed to extra-diegetic matter – is also useful to consider in this respect, because it can extend a film’s diegetic world while simultaneously associating itself with extra-diegetic medial discourses. Crucially, this is only made possible by a filmic text’s awareness of its future reception, an idea first introduced in the previous chapter, and the notion of convergence. Finally, the rhetoric of making-of documentaries and their awareness of convergence in the domestic space mean that they ultimately function as home videos. The potential of that mode of production to facilitate back stage performances is thus transferred onto the DVD.

Taken together, all of these elements indicate that the distinguishing characteristic of the DVD is intimacy not only because it is consumed in an intimate, back stage context but

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<sup>226</sup> see Caldwell 2005 and 2008

also because its mode of address can be intimate and it offers a glimpse into the back stage spaces of film production – even when those films do not exemplify intimacy themselves. The DVD thus echoes the intersection of representational strategies of films like *Cloverfield*, where spectacle and intimacy collide, by converging multiple types of home media discourses – cinematic, televisual and amateur – within a single text. As the DVD constitutes the most common way we consume contemporary digital cinema, and films are now made with the eventual DVD release in mind, this suggests that the intimacy of the DVD feeds back into the will to art of contemporary digital cinema itself.

### The Critical Divide

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the conceptual opposition surrounding digital technologies and new media essentially comes down to two extremes: techno-essentialist and technophilic interpretations of the effect of new technologies. This is reflected in the critical reactions to video (in chapters one and three), to the intersection between realism and spectacle (in chapter two) and to the role of the online amateur (in chapter three). Unsurprisingly, this is also the case within the somewhat narrower academic field of DVD studies. What is perhaps unusual is just how much both positions echo the responses identified by Deleuze in his ‘Letter to Serge Daney: Optimism, Pessimism and Travel’.

To recapitulate, Deleuze observes how pessimism can arise based on the fact that cinema is increasingly faced with challenges stemming from the development of new audiovisual technologies. As Jo Smith notes, “cinema now circulates within an episteme based upon surveillance and control, with television (particularly game shows and news) functioning as the most virulent machine of social engineering.”<sup>227</sup> This not just limited to television of course; within this category Deleuze also includes other media, formats and

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<sup>227</sup> Smith 2008: 130

artefacts such as pop videos, special effects in cinema and amateur footage. The notion that the artistic potential of cinema is stifled by the control exerted by hegemonic forces is clearly echoed in negative readings of the DVD. It is argued for example that while the marketing rhetoric of distributors – which often extends to the phrasing on the DVD case itself – stresses the supposed agency the format offers the viewer, the actual options given are so limited that, if anything, ownership and even interpretation of the filmic text is even more firmly under the control of film producers, studios and distributors.

On the other hand Deleuze also observes how cinema, through awareness of precisely these modes of surveillance and control, has the potential to develop a form of resistance against them. This, he argues, is a cause for optimism as cinema has the ability to overcome the challenges posed by new media by using these forms to break the hegemony of banality they supposedly enable. This optimism is echoed in positive readings of the DVD. Thus for example, some critics argue that while the studios and distributors may determine what to make available on DVD, the alternative readings enabled by the inclusion of alternate or deleted scenes fundamentally make the DVD a medium of interrogation and recovery. The scenes cut from the theatrical release of a film which are present on the DVD either as part of an alternate version of the film or individually via a separate menu not only generate new and divergent readings of the text but also, on a more conceptual level, actively question the hegemony of interpretation and the cultural or even political censorship which may have affected the film's theatrical release.

Perhaps the most influential and frequently cited work in the field of DVD studies is Brooke and Westerfelhaus' 2002 article on the deliberate discouragement of homoerotic readings of *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) through the director's audio commentary on the film's DVD. They suggest the blurring of primary text and ancillary materials on the DVD is perhaps the most significant aspect of the medium; consequently the bonus material – in their case study the director's audio commentary – becomes inseparably intertwined

with the primary filmic text, allowing for only one authoritative interpretation. As they argue, this illustrates

how DVD-extra text can function rhetorically in attempting to shape viewer interpretation. Individuals involved in the film's production are presented in the extra text as having privileged insights regarding a film's meaning and, as such, they are used to articulate a 'proper' (i.e. sanctioned) interpretation.<sup>228</sup>

Their conclusions obviously place them firmly in the pessimist camp. Brookey and Westerfelhaus also extend their critique to the alleged viewer agency implied by the interactivity of the medium. In their line of reasoning, the interactivity of digital media is an elaborate "fantasy"<sup>229</sup> perpetuated by film-makers, studios and distributors. They contend that:

such interactivity is perceived as providing the viewer choice about and control over media consumption. [...] These choices, however, have been carefully selected by those involved in making and marketing the product, and may include material that points to a preferred interpretation of the film. These limited 'choices', and the way they are strategically arranged for access, can serve to circumvent alternative interpretation.<sup>230</sup>

Brookey and Westerfelhaus' highly influential essay, appearing relatively early in the history of DVD scholarship, has of course coloured the tone of many subsequent studies. For example, Jo Smith's reading of DVD making-of documentaries is even more bleak in its outlook; as she argues: "the making-of phenomenon turns the conditions of a commodity's production into an 'ever-newer and more abstract commodity' in order to mine consumer desire and attention [...] the time it takes to view a making-of or director commentary, is time spent giving attention to the conditions of capitalist production."<sup>231</sup> John Caldwell also presents a two-pronged critique of the medium. On the one hand, he argues that the increased popularity and market share of DVDs has resulted in a loss of quality in filmic production; inheriting the 'direct-to-video' production scheme of the video

<sup>228</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002: 23

<sup>229</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002: 25

<sup>230</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002: 25

<sup>231</sup> Smith 2008: 143-144

era means that many more low-grade, poorly-made films can reach an audience because they circumvent traditional arbiters of 'good taste'. As he argues:

DVDs now aim marketing directly at the viewer/buyer, not at an intermediate cultural handler who stands in for and negotiates or processes marketing information for the viewer. Of far greater consequence than technical change has been the gradual elimination of key cultural middlemen from the traditional equation: the editors, reviewers and journalists in the trade and popular press.<sup>232</sup>

Echoing Brookey and Westerfelhaus' secondary critique, Caldwell also argues that the belief that the interactivity of digital media enables user agency is a fallacy:

What no cyber visionary seems to address, however, is that while the old studios and networks may have lost control in the face of a vast, new 'digital democracy', the same studios and networks have figured out ways to create digital and new media content that can be 'managed' on (their own) more traditional terms.<sup>233</sup>

The rhetoric used here by Caldwell is very evocative of the language used by Andrew Keen in his disparagement of Web 2.0 advocates – and as such, is marked by a deep distrust. All these critics present negative arguments, but there are also scholars who identify problems with these approaches and their conclusions.

One of the most frequently criticized aspects of Brookey and Westerfelhaus' assertions is that they base their conclusions for the medium of DVD as a whole on a single case study: their analysis of the first edition of the *Fight Club* DVD.<sup>234</sup> Moreover, as Catherine Grant points out, their focus is completely limited to narrative interpretation, ignoring the possibility for any other types of interpretations or generations of meaning:

auteurist 'communication' or 'expression' is always (or almost always) subordinated to *filmic narration*, the telling of a particular story-meaning in a particular film. But [...] the telling of a particular story-meaning in a particular film in order to communicate a privileged reading of the film is only one of a number of concerns, and often one of the least important, of those participating in the production.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Caldwell 2008: 161

<sup>233</sup> Caldwell 2008: 161

<sup>234</sup> Hight 2005: 9

<sup>235</sup> Grant 2008: 105

Such assertions on the authority of directorial readings thus directly echo David Bordwell's claims that "directors' statements of intent guide comprehension of the film."<sup>236</sup> However, by privileging filmic narrative at the expense of all other aspects of cinema, Brookey and Westerfelhaus inherit the limitations inherent to such neo-formalist approaches to film scholarship. Similarly, Caldwell's ironic tone when discussing the illusions of 'cyber visionaries' runs the danger of turning an impartial formal analysis into little more than a polemic.

The other conceptual extreme is also well represented. For example, Brian Hu argues that the bonus materials present on DVDs not only enable but champion alternate and even subversive readings:

Bonus materials such as the deleted scene reveal more than the profit-maximizing inclinations of distributors' home entertainment divisions. Rather, deleted scenes challenge cinema's inclination to render objects, characters, and voices invisible. [...] DVD is a medium of interrogation, questioning the hegemony of film's linearity of time, and a technology of recovery, making visible what is (often justifiably, often nefariously) excluded from the film text.<sup>237</sup>

When deleted scenes are kept separate from the primary filmic text on a DVD, Hu argues that the act of viewing them makes the omission of particular readings more apparent. The separation is crucial because it allows for the filmic text to remain intact while simultaneously recovering "the obtuse meanings within the excluded footage which may be irrelevant to the aesthetic or argumentative motivations of the film-maker."<sup>238</sup> While not quite messianically technophilic, Hu – like his conceptual peers – runs the danger of romanticizing technology. Though his analysis may have some weaknesses, Hu's argument is nonetheless interesting because it is one of the few which emphasizes that reading contemporary digital cinema is inherently linked to the mode of reception. Unlike many other scholars, Hu actively highlights the fact there is more than one layer of meaning to

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<sup>236</sup> Bordwell 1985: 211

<sup>237</sup> Hu 2006: 499

<sup>238</sup> Hu 2006: 502

any cinematic text and that those enabled by the bonus materials on a DVD are not necessarily in competition with or at the expense of others.

### **A Reel Loss**

Before going on to examine various types of DVD bonus materials, it might be prudent to establish what differentiates the DVD from video. After all, the DVD is the direct home media successor of the video format. Both are digital but while video stored images on magnetic tape, the DVD is a plastic disc only readable by laser. This further illustrates the shift from the tangible to the ephemeral in the transition from traditional analogue to contemporary digital cinema. A traditional filmic recording is created by light falling through a lens and hitting a negative, causing a photochemical reaction. The image is directly transcribed in the film reel and therefore has a concrete existence in reality. A digital recording on the other hand converts the light into binary code and has no physical existence. Video arguably formed an intersection between traditional analogue and contemporary digital formats. So while the magnetic video tape carried with it the echoes and associations of a film reel – however tenuously – this is no longer the case with the DVD. Now the presence of moving images within it is completely abstract.

Prior to the introduction of the DVD, what could be described as ‘viewing time’ – as opposed to cinematic time or the diegetic time within the filmic world – also had a physicality. That is to say viewing time was inherently linked to a physical object, whether the video tape or the film reel. Both had a physical length (in feet or metres) and a temporal length (in minutes). One could pause the film, rewind it or speed it up; but to control the temporality, whether at home or in the cinema, the physical object of the reel had to be manipulated. The DVD on the other hand has no such concrete connection between the physical object and time

This is compounded by the DVD's multi-track nature. A film reel or video tape can only hold one audiovisual track, of a specific length. This of course includes the main feature and various paratexts, such as the distributors' and production companies' logos and perhaps legal disclaimers. It can also include extra-texts, such as trailers and short featurettes. However, these can only be accessed in a linear fashion. Subtitling and audio are similarly fixed. A film reel comes in one language and is either subtitled or not. On a DVD however, each one of these separate elements has its own 'track' and the order of these tracks is mutable. Some, like the anti-piracy and legal warnings, are fixed and often unskippable. Trailers also sometimes automatically play at the start. The rest can either be accessed simultaneously (such as the primary text and commentaries or subtitles); switched between at the exclusion of one another (as for example with various language tracks); or engaged with independently of the main feature (the trailers, featurettes and making-of documentaries). Control over and interaction with these tracks is offered via the menu.

Many DVD scholars tend to privilege one type of DVD bonus materials over all others in their analyses. This approach assumes that DVD viewing is unified – that everyone reads a DVD in the same way. The reality is that the multi-track nature means that every viewer of a DVD will have their own way of viewing the text. Some watch all the extras; others prefer to watch only the main feature. Viewers may prioritize recreating a cinematic experience, by darkening the room and not talking (not to mention investing in technological paraphernalia such as surround sound and large HD screens or even projectors); others leave the lights on and converse over the film – or even engage in other activities while watching the DVD. The context of reception can also vary depending on both the physical space – the room the viewing takes place in – and the screen space – whether the film is viewed on a portable DVD player, a TV screen (which is shared with broadcast television, home videos and video games) or even a computer screen (which the film has to share with a vast number of other processes). So while a negative view of the

transition to the DVD format laments home media's loss of physicality, the optimist stance celebrates instead the potential for textual complexity the DVD's multi-layered nature enables.

### **Intratext versus Database**

The conceptual divide between the two critical positions on the DVD is further echoed in two remarkably antagonistic interpretations of the medium itself: the negative position stresses the DVD's textual unity because this model underlines the disenfranchisement of the viewer; while the other position regards the DVD as something the viewer actively has to navigate, thereby giving the viewer agency. The question is whether either interpretation in this predominant dichotomy is actually constructive.

In their essay, Brookey and Westerfelhaus chart the shift to an increasing integration of additional materials within to the home viewing mode. They argue that texts such as print articles about the production process or interviews with the director, cast or crew, once physically external, now form an integral part of DVD material:

Primary and secondary texts are usually physically distinct from one another and are often read at different times, creating an intertextual relationship that is marked by both temporal and spatial distance. However, by including such distinct but interrelated texts in a self-contained package, the DVD turns this intertextual relationship into an intratextual relationship. Thus, the DVD is perhaps the ultimate example of media-industry synergy, in which the promotion of a media product is collapsed into the product itself.<sup>239</sup>

Brookey and Westerfelhaus's suggestion that the line between primary and secondary texts – in this case the main feature and the bonus materials – has become porous may seem convincing at first. Indeed, as James Bennett and Tom Brown point out: “as well as affording a useful vocabulary for understanding the relationship between primary texts and ancillary materials on DVDs, [...] their notion of the DVD ‘intratext’ suggests a textual form more susceptible to discussions of coherent meaning than is often associated with the

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<sup>239</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002: 23

more commonly heard ‘intertext’.”<sup>240</sup> It seems obvious that a DVD operates as a unified text when one only focuses on how making-of documentaries and audio commentaries relate to the primary filmic text. Even the DVD menu can reinforce this notion; as Craig Hight points out: “Increasingly standard for DVD interfaces, at least on special editions, are animated menus that closely follow the production design of the film and often employ a musical motif from the film’s score.”<sup>241</sup> This is certainly true of the extended *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001-2003) DVD box set or the six-part *Star Wars* DVD collection. Both feature the kind of animated menus Hight describes, visually evoking not just particular scenes but even abstract and non-diegetic production design elements such as the distinctive Tolkien and *Star Wars* fonts in the DVD menus.

The English language Drakes Avenue Pictures DVD edition of *De fem benspænd* (Jørgen Leth/Lars von Trier, 2003) is also a case in point. In the film itself, Lars von Trier challenges Jørgen Leth to remake his 1967 short film, *Det perfekte menneske*, five times; each time with a different set of cinematic, moral and personal obstructions. Just the primary text of *De fem benspænd* itself is already deeply intertextual, combining the documentary of the production process and of von Trier’s and Leth’s meetings with short excerpts from *Det perfekte menneske*, as well as each of the five remakes, within its structure. Each one of its constituent parts could theoretically stand alone as an independent text, but they also form part of the complete text of *De fem benspænd*. Paisley Livingston identifies this process of quotation of filmic works within a film as ‘nesting’, which she defines as requiring that “the matrix work *display* at least part of the artistic structure of a nested work. One way to couch this condition is to say that the artistic structure of the nested work, or at least part of that structure, must be depicted by or ‘observable-in’ the nesting or matrix work.”<sup>242</sup> The process of nesting is not as straightforward as it appears.

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<sup>240</sup> Bennett and Brown 2008: 8

<sup>241</sup> Hight 2005: 9

<sup>242</sup> Livingston 2008: 58

For example, while the majority of segments from *Det perfekte menneske* are direct, full-screen excerpts, right at the beginning of *De fem benskænd*, Leth and von Trier watch *Det perfekte menneske* together. Before the film cuts to show footage from *Det perfekte menneske*, it is shown on the television screen in von Trier's production office. The transition is completely fluid, sticking to the continuity of *Det perfekte menneske*. Nonetheless, while there is a difference between the two kinds of textual quotation – one is part of the filmic text, the other is 'nested' within the diegetic world of the film – this blurring between the various uses of quotation strongly supports the idea of a single unified text. The relationship of its constituent parts, while intertextual, is therefore also inherently *intratextual* in line with Brookey and Westerfelhaus's suggestion.

This particular DVD edition of *De fem benskænd*, aimed at the UK market, contains the film in Danish with English subtitles, a trailer and the 13-minute original short film *Det perfekte menneske*. While a number of excerpts from the short film are shown within *De fem benskænd*, they are not shown in sequence, nor do they encompass the entire film. But as the original film, which serves as the inspiration for the five remakes and constitutes part of the primary text itself, is presented in its entirety as part of the bonus materials on the DVD, it is reasonable to claim that the DVD as a whole represents a single, unified, *intratextual* text. There is no separate making-of or director's commentary, because crucially, the film itself contains both. Not only do the documentarist sections of *De fem benskænd* present the entire production process – from the pitch and pre-production work, over the actual filming process, to post-production, initial screening and even analysis – but the various instances of von Trier talking directly at the camera of course in some way also serve as his directorial commentary. Just the theatrical release of *De fem benskænd* itself already exhibits most of the *intratextual* traits associated with the DVD format. As Livingston observes, the positioning of the overall film and the works of Leth

has the function of constituting a favourable context for both the making and reception of Leth's cinematic art. Although Leth's avant-garde or

experimental films have long been admired by *cognoscenti*, the context that *The Five Obstructions* establishes allows a wider audience to appreciate the skill with which Leth and his collaborators successfully respond to von Trier's challenges.<sup>243</sup>

While the cinematic output of Leth and von Trier does not really operate within a mainstream, narrative driven commercial framework, the process Livingston describes nonetheless echoes what Barbara Klinger, in her studies on reception during the 1980s, has termed "a commodified version of auteurism"<sup>244</sup> – albeit in the context of avant-garde or experimental cinema. Klinger identified that "the industry that creates these commercial epiphenomena is not primarily concerned with producing coherent interpretations of a film. Rather, the goal of promotion is to produce multiple avenues of access to the text that will make the film resonate as extensively as possible in the social sphere in order to maximize its audience."<sup>245</sup> Catherine Grant has gone on to observe how this notion of a commercial construction of auteurism now forms a major part of DVD culture.<sup>246</sup> This of course echoes in part Brookey and Westerfelhaus's notion that the privileging of the director in DVD bonus materials can influence the viewer's experience, appreciation and interpretation of them. However, while this particular example may support Brookey and Westerfelhaus's analysis, the pre-existing complexity of its primary filmic text perhaps make it a rare case rather than the norm.

Arguably, the real problem is the limited, narratological scope of Brookey and Westerfelhaus's claim. Beyond making-of documentaries and audio commentaries, there are of course many other types of bonus material contained within a DVD – some of which are not necessarily even connected to the main text at all. It is therefore questionable whether the gathering of a number of disparate texts within a single physical medium is enough to make it a single, unified text. As Grant points out, because their focus is completely limited to narrative interpretation, Brookey and Westerfelhaus disregard those

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<sup>243</sup> Livingston 2008: 74

<sup>244</sup> Klinger 1989: 12

<sup>245</sup> Klinger 1989: 10

<sup>246</sup> see Grant 2008: 105-112

aspects which do not fall under narratological considerations. When we begin to read a book for example, we can choose to skip the title page, the table of contents, the dedication and even the preface – in fact, many people do ignore these paratexts. However in many cases when viewing a DVD, the paratextual entities such as trailers or anti-piracy infomercials are simply impossible to skip. The viewer's often involuntary absorption of these elements, which may be irrelevant to the narrative itself, are nonetheless part of a DVD's reception and affect the reading of the text as a whole. Subtitling and other language tracks also have a considerable effect on generation of meaning. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to do justice to the discourses surrounding the translation, dubbing and subtitling of films; suffice it to say that the translation of films can and often does change the actual script for a variety of cultural, political or even artistic reasons and the dubbing of films brings with it a whole raft of intertextual associations and nuances. Assuming that changing the language and thus the cultural context of a filmic text will not at all affect its 'unified' status seems careless at best.

Hight's work on special edition DVDs is useful here because he introduces an alternative concept to Brookey and Westerfelhaus's intratext. Based in part on computational concepts from Lev Manovich's work on new media, Hight proposes that reading the DVD as a database, accessed through an interface, can complement the intratextual model and help overcome some of its limitations:

We are not so much viewers of a digital text as *users*, navigating our way through menus and following the pathways they provide. These menus collectively make up the *interface* for a DVD. What we choose to play from the menus, the real content of a disc, are parts of a *database* of multimedia computer files.<sup>247</sup>

The UK DVD edition of *Moon* (Duncan Jones, 2009) serves as a counterpoint to the *De fem benspænd* DVD. It too features among its bonus materials a short film, *Whistle* (2002), by the director. But unlike *Det perfekte menneske*, the short film here has no connection to the

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<sup>247</sup> Hight 2005: 9 [original emphasis]

main feature. It is just one of a multitude of bonus materials, including two separate audio commentaries, two making-of documentaries, two recordings of Q&A sessions at festivals, a theatrical trailer for *Moon* and a number of trailers for other films owned by *Moon*'s distributor Sony. Even the argument that the inclusion of *Whistle* is a way of constructing an auteur status for Duncan Jones seems tenuous as *Moon* is only his first feature and *Whistle* his final film school project. Rather than standing in an intratextual relationship to the primary text, *Whistle*'s connection to it is purely intertextual – it is merely an earlier film by the same director and vaguely in the same genre. There is even less of a textual link between the primary text and the selection of trailers on the DVD; the only thing they have in common is that they have the same distributor in the UK. One of the trailers is not even for any particular film but for Sony's proprietary successor format to the DVD, the Blu-Ray disc. While superficially it may seem that the *Moon* and *De fem benspænd* DVDs have something in common – the inclusion of a short film by the director of the feature – they are in fact vastly different. Whether or not we regard the various bonus materials as “multimedia computer files”<sup>248</sup> and the DVD a database, as Manovich and Hight do, the fact is that while there may be individual cases where the DVD constitutes a unified text, the majority of texts on DVDs are simply too disparate for that to be the case universally. The DVD of *Moon* certainly seems to suggest that perhaps the idea of an amalgamation of linked texts, rather than a single unified text, is more appropriate.

However, claiming this assertion is valid for the entire format is equally problematic. In his *The Language of New Media*, Manovich argues that material contained within a database is fundamentally opposed to narrative structures: “As a cultural form, the database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore,

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<sup>248</sup> Manovich 2001: 215

database and narrative are natural enemies.”<sup>249</sup> The idea of considering the DVD format fundamentally incompatible with narrative simply seems unjustified considering the vast majority of DVDs feature narrative-driven cinema.

For one thing, there are a number of DVD distributors – Disney Home Entertainment chief among them – that actively move to deemphasize the navigational multi-track nature underlying the format. While Disney actively promotes the many additional materials on its highly polished DVD editions, it is simultaneously rolling out a ‘Fast Play’ option on all its current releases. This default setting – somewhat ironically entitled ‘fast’ – plays a long succession of trailers for upcoming theatrical releases, DVDs and other Disney merchandise, and then plays the main feature; totally bypassing the menu interface and all other bonus materials – which remain accessible via the remote control. In many ways this setting recreates the video mode of viewing, giving the illusion of only a single linear track. This deemphasizing of interactivity is based on the assumption that all viewers prefer to watch just the feature. As Peter Dean observes, this is also echoed in the way that the rental of DVDs is typically managed – whether by brick and mortar companies such as Blockbuster, net-based operators like LoveFilm or Netflix, or public institutions such as libraries. DVD rental is generally based on discs and not titles:

In the interests of efficiency, the rental company dispenses with the original DVD packaging and distributes individual discs in generic packaging. This means that titles that contain both a feature disc and a bonus extras disc must be rented as two items. This inevitably encourages the consumer to only rent the feature disc and reinforces the notion that mainstream consumers, when given the choice, are prepared to sacrifice additional material for cheaper, easier access to the main feature.<sup>250</sup>

Moreover, to maximise their market, DVD distribution companies offer a wide range of editions at varying price points; regular and ‘special’ DVD editions may boast a wide assortment of additional materials, while entry-level ‘vanilla’ editions may only include the

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<sup>249</sup> Manovich 2001: 225

<sup>250</sup> Dean 2007: 122

feature film.<sup>251</sup> When the only interactive option given is playing and pausing the film, the claim that navigation of complex pathways underlies the format hardly seems accurate. Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, many special and collectors' editions – the *Lord of the Rings* extended edition in particular – structure their interfaces and material in such a way as to ground it firmly in the narrative world, thus unifying it. The menus not only have the look and feel of Tolkien's own texts, but also of Bilbo Baggin's (Ian Holm) manuscript in the diegesis of the films. Supposedly to prevent the viewer being overwhelmed by choice, the 'play all' feature is a common option for bonus materials; as Hight points out: "there are clearly potential pathways through a DVD's materials that are analogous to the construction of a single text."<sup>252</sup> Presenting a predetermined order of texts, the 'play all' feature "creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items."<sup>253</sup> In Manovich's own terms, a narrative. All of these factors defy the assertion that the DVD can only be regarded as a database viewers navigate their way through. The strong grounding in narrative that forms the majority of contemporary digital cinema – which obviously makes up the bulk of DVD material – is simply at odds with Manovich's interpretation of the database as inherently opposed to narrative.

However, Hight himself does not suggest that the two concepts – unified intratext and intertextual database – are strictly dichotomous but rather that they can co-exist and complement each other: "as users, we 'interact' with DVDs but only to a limited extent, and certainly not in the sense of creating a new experience each time we engage with the text [...] In this sense, such partial pathways through large amounts of content suggest a *fragmented* pattern of users' engagement with the interpretive frames."<sup>254</sup> Instead of either being unified text or database, DVDs fall somewhere along the spectrum between these two extremes. There are some cases, like the DVD of *De fem benspænd*, for which Brookey and

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<sup>251</sup> see Skopal 2007: 186

<sup>252</sup> Hight 2005: 11

<sup>253</sup> Manovich 2001: 225

<sup>254</sup> Hight 2005: 10 [original emphasis]

Westerfelhaus's notion of the intratext is thoroughly appropriate. However, in others the material is so disparate, or structured in a way that challenges the textual unity, that the mode of interaction with it is best described through the analogy of the database. The two concepts are flexible and porous, and any particular DVD can even exhibit a hybrid status. As suggested in the introduction, conceptual absolutes or extremes are simply not universally applicable; in fact they can be unhelpful and even analytically crippling.

### **Extra Diegetic Material**

Generally, most analyses of DVD bonus materials tend to focus solely on directors' commentaries, making-of documentaries and alternate or deleted scenes. However, there is also a much rarer textual artefact: that bonus material which operates solely on the level of the primary text itself and extends the filmic world beyond the narrative frame. The two-disc special DVD edition of *The Dark Knight* includes – as well as the usual bonus materials including a variety of making-of documentaries, concept art, production stills and trailers – six episodes of a current affairs programme entitled *Gotham Tonight*. Strongly resembling the type of anchor-driven shows prevalent on US news channels such as CNN, MSNBC or Fox News, *Gotham Tonight* is hosted by the curiously non-partisan Mike Engel (Anthony Michael Hall) and features current affairs, editorials and interviews – complete with rolling news updates, split-screen interviews and flashy computer-generated title effects. The programme plays a small role within the narrative of *The Dark Knight* itself; at a number of points, *Gotham Tonight* is nested, to use Livingston's term, within the diegesis of the film. The first time it appears is when the news breaks that the Joker (Heath Ledger) has killed a Batman impersonator and demands that the 'real' Batman (Christian Bale) disclose his identity. The second time *Gotham Tonight* features is when Coleman Reese (Joshua Harto) is about to reveal who Batman is in an interview with phone-in questions, which the Joker uses to hold the city to ransom. The six episodes on the DVD however

form entirely new material which was not part of the theatrical release. Nor do they constitute part of an extended cut of the film in the way that deleted scenes may do. Chronologically, they take place before the events of the film proper and serve to impart additional narrative information, such as details surrounding the election of Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart), a major character in the film.

More than most other bonus materials, they exhibit an underlying awareness of how DVDs are viewed. They are neither television nor a part of the primary cinematic text but a hybrid, referencing both. They are of course strongly tied to the film's diegesis, adding depth to the narrative world and filling out characters which may only appear briefly in the film. A number of major and minor figures from *The Dark Knight* appear in character, crossing over and reinforcing to some extent Brooke and Westerfelhaus's idea of textual unity between the primary and secondary texts on a DVD. As the focus of individual episodes includes the role of Batman in law enforcement or the career of Lieutenant Gordon (Gary Oldman), their fictionality is clearly signposted throughout.

By echoing both the visuals and rhetoric of American news shows, they also purport to be television – part of our extra-diegetic reality. Indeed, one episode is devoted to covering the candidates and issues of the 2008 US elections – albeit within the entirely fictional city of Gotham. The associations with American news shows are reinforced above all else by the tone of *Gotham Tonight*; this idea of 'tone' includes not just the visuals and set, or Anthony Michael Hall's rhetoric and mode of address but also the idea of a commercial news corporation's ideological narrative. The use of interviews with clearly biased 'experts' and public figures stands out in particular in this regard; while the characters from *The Dark Knight* who appear on the show – including district attorney Harvey Dent, police commissioner Loeb (Colin McFarlane), the mobster Sal Maroni (Eric Roberts) and of course Engel himself – are easily recognizable from the primary text, other interviewees are entirely new characters and are played by unknown actors. 'Experts' and

obscure interviewees on actual news programmes are often just as anonymous as those on *Gotham Tonight*. This potentially results in what could be described as micro-instability in the fictionality of *Gotham Tonight*. This is confounded by the nature of real American current affairs programmes, such as *The O'Reilly Factor* on Fox News. The political agenda of such programmes clearly constructs a particular ideologically motivated narrative and their hosts are just as much performing a role as these actors are. These fictional vignettes aim to emulate a format in order to imply authenticity; yet that format itself – while claiming absolute transparency and veracity – is generally regarded as deeply compromised in its truthfulness.

The final episode of *Gotham Tonight*, entitled 'Gotham's White Knight', adds another layer of televisual referencing. Ignoring the actual dialogue and narrative context, the sequence is essentially just an interview. Aaron Eckhart, a famous star sitting in the guest's chair, interviewed by a host in suit and tie behind an imposing desk with a stylised skyline of a city at night as a backdrop. As much as it is emulating current affairs programmes, the set-up is also deeply reminiscent of late-night talk shows such as *Late Night with David Letterman*. Supposedly entertainment, these shows are to all intents and purposes little more than vehicles for promotion: a number of famous guests appear to publicize their particular product or project. With the sound muted, the final episode of *Gotham Tonight* could therefore just as well be an interview on such a late-night talk show, interspersed with production stills and short clips taken from *The Dark Knight*.

So, *Gotham Tonight* is ostensibly television, yet it was never broadcast. It is part of the diegetic world of the film, yet it neither appeared in the theatrical release of the film nor as a deleted scene or part of an extended cut. Moreover, as an extra-text on the DVD, it is most likely going to be watched on a TV screen in the domestic sphere – the very same TV screen which potentially also shows the same kind of news and entertainment programmes it mimics. It is both intratextual and intertextual, and even intermedial. The inclusion of the

episodes of *Gotham Tonight* on the DVD of *The Dark Knight* therefore implies an awareness of their context of reception. It suggests that the creators of the material were fully aware that the DVD shares the space – both the screen space of the TV and the domestic space of the living room – with a host of other filmic texts. Avoiding the mistakes made by de Palma with *Redacted*, as discussed in the previous chapter, the creators did not ignore the point that an awareness of future reception inevitably affects how a filmic text is produced.

Another example of this type of bonus material is found on the DVD of *The Blair Witch Project*. It includes the 44-minute mock-documentary *Curse of the Blair Witch*, which was screened in the US on the SciFi channel a few days before *The Blair Witch Project* was released. Made from left-over footage from the main film, *Curse of the Blair Witch* originally only served as promotional material designed to entice interest in the film in a specifically targeted niche audience.<sup>255</sup> Appropriating the tropes and conventions of television documentaries, *Curse of the Blair Witch* details the origins of the historical myth of the Blair Witch – a back-story entirely fabricated – strange and supernatural events in the town of Burkittsville attributed to the witch over the centuries, as well as expository material on the protagonists of *The Blair Witch Project* and their disappearance. Using actors playing the parts of anthropologists, historians and Wiccan practitioners as well as family, friends and teachers of the film students and local police officers involved in the search, *Curse of the Blair Witch* operates using the same concept of constructed authenticity as *The Blair Witch Project*. As a filmic document it is remarkable in that it reflects the film-makers' original plan for *The Blair Witch Project*; Myrick and Sanchez were initially planning to use the staged interviews and fake historical sources as part of the film, before coming to the conclusion that the 'found footage' scenario by itself was more

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<sup>255</sup> see Chapter 2

effective.<sup>256</sup> At this point, there was clearly enough left-over footage to create *Curse of the Blair Witch* as a distinct but closely interconnected filmic text.

Neither it nor *The Blair Witch Project* contain any obvious cues as to the fictional nature of the events depicted. As Margrit Schreier observes in her study of the perception of the reality status of *The Blair Witch Project*,

while most discussants correctly identify it as fiction, almost 40 percent are at least temporarily uncertain as to the product type. To substantiate their perceptions of or their doubts concerning the film's ontic status, both recipients that consider it to be fiction and recipients who are uncertain frequently refer to information gathered from other media.<sup>257</sup>

Yet if these other media, and *Curse of the Blair Witch* in particular, maintain the illusion of veracity, then the confusion of viewers – even enthusiasts who are prepared to consume additional materials – is understandable. *Curse of the Blair Witch* is thus another example of how the notion of the DVD ‘intratext’ suggests a carefully orchestrated textual relationship more amenable to generations of coherent meaning. In this case, the additional materials intentionally serve to consolidate the constructed authenticity of the primary text. Of course, it is hardly surprising in this case considering both texts were essentially put together from the same source material.

It is clear how *Curse of the Blair Witch* was initially intended to function as a promotional tool when it was released on television to coincide with the theatrical release of *The Blair Witch Project*. Just like *Gotham Tonight*, *Curse of the Blair Witch* emulates televisual styles and tropes; although in this case, those of sensationalist TV documentaries rather than news programmes. Inadvertently however, it also prefigures the common-place style of DVD bonus materials – even though that may not have been the intention of the film-makers at the time. Precisely because *Curse of the Blair Witch* is mainly constructed of material excised from *The Blair Witch Project*, it could also be considered a collection of deleted scenes, merely edited together to form a coherent text. There are two ways this

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<sup>256</sup> see Roscoe 2000: 4

<sup>257</sup> Schreier 2004: 305

suggestion can be interpreted: not only can the material in *Curse of the Blair Witch* be considered ‘deleted scenes’ from the actual theatrical release of *The Blair Witch Project*, but also scenes deleted from the students’ documentary within the diegesis of *The Blair Witch Project*. Simultaneously, much like *De fem benspænd*, another documentary following the production process of a film, the arc of this supporting documentary also follows the structure of a conventional DVD making-of. This impression is especially compelling considering there is no separate making-of documentary on the DVD. However, unlike *De fem benspænd*, *Curse of the Blair Witch* operates entirely on the level of the film – perpetuating the fiction and extending the narrative world. As both *Gotham Tonight* and *Curse of the Blair Witch* demonstrate, this type of DVD material is both an intertext and an intratext.

The finding that awareness of reception affects production even holds true when the DVD bonus material is not created explicitly for the DVD but rather appropriated by it much later. Even though *Curse of the Blair Witch* was not created with its eventual inclusion on the DVD in mind, its makers’ nuanced awareness of its *initial* space of reception – as a TV programme to be viewed in the domestic space – seems to be enough to transfer this effect over to the reception of the DVD text, viewed within the same context. Material produced with an awareness of the context and space of reception, such as *Gotham Tonight*, certainly knowingly plays with its own hybridity. What is remarkable is that *Curse of the Blair Witch* exhibits the same playfulness and apparent awareness, even though the circumstances of its production are vastly different.

The associations between the potential for intimacy and modes of production outlined in previous chapters are still valid, although they may operate slightly differently in the production of DVD bonus materials. While a film may attempt to situate itself within a context of contemporary modes of amateur film-making in order to appropriate the intimacy such footage implies, it was shown that, like *Redacted*, it can either fail because it

does not take actual amateur film-making practices – or their reception – fully into account or, like *Cloverfield*, succeed because it does. Similarly, the hybridity of DVD material which extends the narrative world is not based on a blurring of televisual and cinematic production practices – in the way that *Redacted* wrongly assumes – but rather the convergence of the actual space of reception: the TV screen in the family home. Unlike an intertextual relationship which “is marked by both temporal and spatial distance,”<sup>258</sup> the intertextuality of these DVD extra texts are therefore defined by their spatial proximity to other media texts on a single screen.

By playing to the format’s strengths through an awareness of its reception, the makers of DVD bonus materials can thus bridge the gap between the intertext and the intratext. With its hybrid status, the DVD thus allows for multiple ways of reading it. Some viewers may prefer to watch a unified text. Others are ‘users’, navigating through the database to watch all the extras. In this context, Thomas Elsaesser has suggested the concept of the ‘DVD-enabled’ film, which he defines as

a film that requires or repays multiple viewings; that rewards the attentive viewer with special or hidden clues; that is constructed as a spiral or loop; that benefits from back-stories (bonuses) or para-textual information; that can sustain a-chronological perusal or even thrives on it. All these conditions chart the type of textual organization which responds to the conditions of distribution, reception, consumption, cinephilia, connoisseurship, and spectatorship appropriate for the multi-platform film, which can seduce a theater-going public with its special effects and spectacle values, engage the volatile fan-communities on the Internet by becoming a sort of ‘node’ for the exchange of information and the trade in trivia and esoterica in social networking situations, as well as ‘work’ as a DVD and possibly even as a game.<sup>259</sup>

Not every film on DVD is necessarily ‘enabled’ but Elsaesser’s definition nonetheless aptly seems to encompass how ‘extra diegetic material’ can operate. Apart from giving the viewer further expository information on the characters and setting of the feature film, the *Gotham Tonight* vignettes and *Curse of the Blair Witch* extend or deepen the understanding of the diegetic world while not affecting the unity of the primary text in any major way.

<sup>258</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002:

<sup>259</sup> Elsaesser 2009: 38

Arguably, it is therefore less the film which is ‘enabled’ – though that may certainly be the case in specific instances – but rather the DVD itself. The fundamental flexibility of the DVD means that viewers who choose not to view this bonus material are not disadvantaged in their reading of the primary text; while equally, viewers with extra knowledge gained from multiple viewings or bonus material do not necessarily have a ‘better’ or privileged understanding. As Brian Hu observes of deleted scenes, “We can interpret and appreciate what was deemed unnecessary without the text being amended; rather, because of the organization of the DVD, our contact with the deleted scene depends on our active pursuit of it.”<sup>260</sup> The same thing is obviously true of these DVD bonus materials which extend the diegetic world.

### Alternate Readings

This idea closely relates to another aspect of Hu’s overall argument. Hu’s concept is opposed to Brookey and Westerfelhaus’s conclusion that DVD bonus materials primarily privilege particular interpretations. In their analysis, they state that “the extra text can be employed to discourage and discount some interpretations while encouraging others. In the case of the *Fight Club* DVD, the running commentaries included in the extra text serve to delegitimize a homoerotic interpretation of the film.”<sup>261</sup> While this may be true of audio commentaries, deleted scenes or alternate takes of a scene are also key components of DVD bonus materials. Hu gives a number of examples of cinematic erasure, partly relocating Brookey and Westerfelhaus’s identification of dominant cultural normativity from a sexual to a racial context. More specifically, he observes how the DVD of *Dazed and Confused* (Richard Linklater, 1993) contains a deleted scene in which the appearance of two Asian schoolgirls prompts a discussion about the Vietnam War among the protagonists. Hu suggests that this politicizes an otherwise largely apolitical film and that its omission in the

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<sup>260</sup> Hu 2006: 501

<sup>261</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002: 39

theatrical release illustrates “how the film skirts issues that break the film’s nationalistic, nostalgic outlook.”<sup>262</sup> As Hu states:

‘Excess’ seems a useful way to describe this ‘non-formulable’ portion of cinema, especially in relation to the deleted scene. The word denotes what is unnecessary and thus unwanted, yet it also connotes (via the concept of camp) a subversion of the dominant, structuring culture itself. Deleted scenes on DVDs recover that excess and allow for a subversive reading through what dominant culture has deemed unsuitable.<sup>263</sup>

Once again, both of these positions can in fact co-exist side by side. It is entirely possible that an audio commentary on a DVD can suggest one interpretative reading while the inclusion of deleted or alternative scenes offers another. While the former may form a closely intratextual link with the primary text, the latter can remain distinct: “rather than simply being an appendix tacked on to the main text, the deleted scene is held next to the main text side by side like separate files on a disc instead of clips following each other.”<sup>264</sup> Here the database analogy is evoked yet again.

Even disregarding these political or representational consequences, the inclusion of these scenes can simply change the narrative. The alternative ending to *Training Day* (Antoine Fuqua, 2001), a police drama about a day in the life of the LAPD narcotics officer Jake Hoyt (Ethan Hawke), is a case in point. In both versions, Hoyt’s corrupt superior, Detective Alonzo Harris (Denzel Washington), is murdered by the Russian mobsters he owed money to and the film ends with Hoyt returning home to his wife and daughter. While remaining ambiguous, the theatrical version strongly suggests that Hoyt pockets the illegally obtained drug money he confiscated from Harris earlier – thereby finally giving in to the moral corruption he has been confronted with and resisted throughout the narrative. However, while the alternative ending included on the DVD uses exactly the same footage, it adds a short sequence before Hoyt enters his house. The trio of corrupt high-ranking officials known as ‘The Three Wise Men’ (Tom Berenger, Harris Yulin and Raymond J.

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<sup>262</sup> Hu 2006: 504

<sup>263</sup> Hu 2006: 502

<sup>264</sup> Hu 2006: 501

Barry), who had earlier sanctioned Harris' illegal actions, demand the money from Hoyt and he informs them that he has checked it into police evidence. This alternative ending thus unequivocally exonerates Hoyt. The short dialogue – fewer than ten lines – is enough to reverse completely the viewer's understanding of Hoyt's character. A viewer who has watched this version is therefore likely to interpret the ending of the theatrical version differently – assuming that Hoyt checked the money into evidence regardless of whether it is specifically shown or not.

As well as individual instances of divergence, DVDs can contain whole alternate versions of the primary text. In these instances, the narrative implications are less obvious but they nonetheless undermine the notion of films as fixed texts. Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1991) was rereleased in 2010 as the second of Disney's 'Diamond Editions', which consist of a collection of Blu-ray and DVD discs. Apart from the usual commentaries, making-of documentaries, deleted scenes and interactive games all aimed at their primary demographic, it also includes three complete versions of the film. These consist of the original 1991 theatrical version; an extended version from 2002, in which a new sequence was inserted into the film's second act and the original version's negative was used to make a new, digitally re-mastered high resolution IMAX print; and the incomplete 'work-in-progress' version, screened at the 1991 New York Film Festival, which substitutes animated storyboards for those sections which had not been finished. Apart from the inclusion of an additional song, the narrative in each of the three versions is practically identical – in fact, all three use exactly the same voice soundtrack. What is striking however, is how visually distinct the three versions are. Parts of the 'work-in-progress' version are simply pencilled sketches, sometimes not even animated, and there is a noticeable difference in sharpness and colour between the other two versions. When viewed in succession, rather than causing narrative instability, the three versions chart the film's visual evolution while maintaining narrative cohesion. Along with

Disney, George Lucas is well-known for repeatedly reworking his films. After their initial theatrical release in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the *Star Wars* trilogy was digitally remastered and re-released to cinemas in 1997, to mark their twentieth anniversary. In 2004, they were reworked again for their release on DVD and yet again for the Blu-ray edition in 2011. Starting in 2012, all six films are to be released in cinemas again – this time in 3D. While perhaps only avid fans may be able to chart the subtle changes made to the films with the inclusion of new scenes or alterations of existing ones, even the casual observer can track how the films have visually evolved over the years. With each successive iteration the special effects and image resolution are noticeably improved. Like the *Beauty and the Beast* ‘Diamond Edition’, some DVD editions of the *Star Wars* films even contain complete versions of earlier iterations. These examples may not have narrative implications, but nonetheless emphasize development over textual stasis.

A third and relatively unique example of a type of alternate text is on the DVD of *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000). The film follows Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), a man with anterograde amnesia which renders his brain unable to store new memories and only retain long-term memories. *Memento* presents a single continuous story in two distinct, alternating narrative arcs – one told in chronological order, showing Leonard conversing with an anonymous phone caller in a motel room, depicted in monochrome; while Leonard’s search for his wife’s killer is shown in colour sequences that are presented in reverse chronological order. This reverse order echoes Leonard’s psychological condition; the viewer is just as confused as Leonard because like him, they have no memory of events that have preceded the present scene. A hidden feature on the DVD allows for the playback of the film in chronological order, combining the two parts into a single cohesive narrative. Most examinations of *Memento* deal with its disjointing of story and plot; in formalist terms, a deconstruction of the relationship between *syuzhet* and *fabula*. What is more interesting however is that that aspect which makes *Memento* so unusual within an

otherwise conventional cinematic form is completely lost in the chronological version on the DVD. Unlike the alternate ending of *Training Day*, the alternate version does not result in a re-evaluation of the narrative points or the main characters. There is total interpretational cohesion between the two versions of *Memento*; it is after all the same footage, only in a different order. The only consequence is a change in the actual process of the generation of meaning. Some might argue that deciphering the complex narrative technique constitutes the main pleasure of what Thomas Elsaesser calls ‘mind-game’ films like *Memento*. As he observes, this type of film must maintain a basic consistency between its representational method and the narrative circumstances; thus for example, “they enact the very condition their hero suffers from, in the structure of the film itself, as in *Memento*, where the film, as it were, wipes out its own memory, by being told in short segments that precede each other, rather than follow each other.”<sup>265</sup> By severing the link between the representational technique and the narrative conditions, the *Memento* DVD’s alternate version effectively negates its status as ‘mind-game’ film. It becomes just another neo-noir detective film – the only twist is that the detective has amnesia. Instead of narrative or visual, the difference between the alternate and primary texts in this case is procedural.

The capacity of DVDs to store multiple versions of the same primary text alongside other bonus materials therefore strongly conflicts with the idea that DVDs present only a single unified and fixed text. The primary reason for their inclusion is precisely their differences from the primary text. However, one should not conclude from this that the database model is universally applicable – it is important to allow for variations in the mode of reception. Some viewers choose to extend their viewing experience by watching all versions of a text while others simply do not. The mere presence of the alternate text on the DVD is not enough to have an effect on the primary text. Much like the paratextual elements of a book – the title page, dedication, preface and so on – a reader may be aware

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<sup>265</sup> Elsaesser 2009: 20

of their existence but unless they are actually taken in, the primary text remains integral. As Hu puts it: “deleted scenes on a DVD allow the main text (and the film-maker’s rhythm and argument), to remain intact while recovering the obtuse meanings within the excluded footage which may be irrelevant to the aesthetic or argumentative motivations of the film-maker. Barthes’ concept of ‘third meaning’ is especially useful here because it allows for meanings created by the spectator outside of the motivations of the film-maker.”<sup>266</sup> Additional texts of any kind will affect the reading of the primary text, whether they form a stable or intratextual relationship with it or stand separate within a database, allowing for intertextual generations of meaning. Deleted and alternate scenes will doubtlessly have a much closer relationship with the primary text, potentially even subverting it, but only if they are actually viewed. However, just like the conceptual opposites – intratext or database – there is no mode of reception which is absolute.

### **Making-Sense-Of the Making-Of**

Making-of documentaries are the final major element of DVD bonus materials. There is no doubt that the format is critically much maligned. For example, Hight argues:

In the guise of presenting a production narrative, such texts in fact serve as extended trailers, with their release timed to coincide with that of the feature film they document. They offer the obligatory praise from core cast and crew for their colleagues, a celebration of the technical achievements and innovations of the film, and enough teaser clips from the film itself to build anticipation for its release.<sup>267</sup>

Similarly, Paul Arthur suggests that it is generally accepted that “almost by definition, the making-of (MO, for short) is devoid of independent artistic virtues [...] The very embodiment of corporate, instrumental values, the MO is putatively exempt not only from questions of visual style but also from those of authorship, politics, or aesthetic ideology.”<sup>268</sup> This bias is unhelpful; no extra-text is without relevance. Even their dismissal

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<sup>266</sup> Hu 2006: 502

<sup>267</sup> Hight 2005: 7

<sup>268</sup> Arthur 2004: 39

as little more than corporate propaganda acknowledges that at the very least they allow an insight into the motivations and priorities of producers and studios. A particular production narrative can even suggest specific interpretive frameworks while discouraging others.

Of course, the origin of the making-of format far predates its current resurgence as part of DVD bonus material. In fact, its lineage extends to the very beginning of film history, from the early years of the twentieth century onwards. By the 1930s, most major Hollywood studios had their own series of behind-the-scenes shorts, to feed audience interest in the mechanics of production and of course, to promote upcoming releases and stars.<sup>269</sup> While insights into the production process had always played a major part in trade and popular magazines, in the 1950s both Disney and Warner Brothers made the format trans-medial by introducing behind-the-scenes documentaries to television.<sup>270</sup> Nicola Evans has identified how making-of documentaries underwent drastic rhetorical changes during a brief period in the late 1970s and 1980s. No longer comfortable with showing how films were made, these making-of documentaries seemed to suggest that the ‘magic’ of cinema would somehow be undone by too much knowledge of the process. This was doubtlessly connected to the growing success of big-budget films like *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*, *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977), which were heavily reliant on spectacular special effects.

The reluctance of the *Superman* documentary to reveal too many secrets is consistent with the perceived need to distinguish the superior attractions of film from television, to make sure that audiences would understand that the essential magic was still to be found in purchasing a ticket to *Superman II*. But this is partly my point – that in the 1970s it was clear that the magic lay in the experience of what was on screen, not behind it.<sup>271</sup>

The opposite is arguably the case today. Contemporary making-of documentaries have become ubiquitous with a film’s release on DVD. Some of the more famous recent making-of documentaries include *Hearts of Darkness: A Film-maker’s Apocalypse* (Fax Bahr/

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<sup>269</sup> see Arthur 2004: 39

<sup>270</sup> Evans 2010: 589

<sup>271</sup> Evans 2010: 589

George Hickenlooper 1991) and *Lost in La Mancha* (Keith Fulton/Louis Pepe, 2002), perhaps suggesting an interest in the format may be correlated to the latent resurgence of auteurist ideology. Crucially, expectations about how much a making-of will reveal have fundamentally changed since the 1970s. In the current environment, more behind-the-scenes access is clearly regarded as ‘better’. The *Lord of the Rings* extended edition DVD set stands out in this regard for featuring longer running times for its making-of documentary material than for the feature films (even though the films themselves are close to four hours each). The inclusion of a making-of is also a critical part of how well the DVD performs on the market – a consideration ignored at the distributor’s peril, considering the fact that home media are responsible for the bulk of a film’s profits.

While there are a number of approaches and considerations relevant to an analysis of making-of documentaries,<sup>272</sup> my interest is primarily their relation to amateur video practices. I therefore take Pavel Skopal’s suggestion that the DVD can function “as a place which offers the memories of the film-making process shared by the actors and other crew members; [...] as a tool for preserving those memories”<sup>273</sup> as a significant impulse. It strongly ties the making-of to the home movie mode, discussed in the last chapter. When watched by the people involved in the production of the feature film, the audience of the making-of solely consists of the subject(s) of the documentary itself. This reflects Roger Odin claim that: “reading a home movie does not summon the documentarist mode of reading but the *private one*. [...] Home movie images function less as representations than as *index* inviting the family to *return to a past already lived*.”<sup>274</sup> In this purely hypothetical situation – when only people involved in a film’s production watch its making-of – it simply functions as a memory aid, an animated photograph. Odin’s observation, that “home movies seem boring for those outside the family because outsiders lack the contextual

<sup>272</sup> see Hight 2005 and Evans 2010 in particular

<sup>273</sup> Skopal 2007: 190

<sup>274</sup> Odin 2008: 259-260 [original emphasis]

frame that positions the disjointed images,”<sup>275</sup> certainly resonates with those aspects of making-of documentaries which are incredibly self-congratulatory and dull. The idea of collective experience is particularly prevalent in spectacular contemporary franchises. On a purely practical level, whether with the *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* or *Chronicles of Narnia* franchises, the cast and crew are committed to filming and creating these films over a long period of time. The films’ investment in spectacle means that it can take months or even years to create the costumes, sets and props and train the actors in sword-fighting or horse-riding. Often, such films are shot in either remote areas or closed studio surroundings. There is therefore a tendency in making-of documentaries to stress the parallels between the narrative of the film – which, conforming to genre archetypes, tends to be some kind of quest or journey – and the production process. With the family-oriented series such as *Harry Potter* or *Chronicles of Narnia*, the interviewees therefore stress the idea of the cast and crew as “family” and the *Lord of the Rings* extras emphasize how the process of making the films was an “epic journey.”

The fact that they sound and feel like home videos is supported by the domestic context we watch them in and because we watch them on the same screen we watch our own. But form alone is not enough to cement the association, as *Redacted* has made clear. Once again, it has to be the awareness of the context of reception that shapes the context of production. The performance and address of the narrators and interviewees of making-of documentaries is vital in establishing an intimate rapport with a future audience: “they invite us into the closed and artificial world of the production [...] With the audio commentaries, for example, it is as if we have been invited into the homes of the cast and crew to view the film with them, listening as they tell stories of their production experience with the sound of the film turned down.”<sup>276</sup> In this context, Goffman’s theatrical analogy is once again relevant. Drawing on Goffman’s model, Evans observes that “getting to go

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<sup>275</sup> Odin 2008: 259-260 [original emphasis]

<sup>276</sup> Hight 2005: 12

behind the scenes is often a sign that one has been fully accepted as a member of a group, privy to the inner sanctum.”<sup>277</sup> The making-of as home video seems to imply that the viewer is therefore present to relaxed back stage interactions and honest opinions rather than self-conscious performances; actors that usually have to play a role are allowed to let their guard down in this context. The mode of address is crucial, because it can:

reframe the experiential horizon and put the viewer into a new position – like a commentary ‘home video’ projection, where the participants of the shooting process comment on the screened events in the circle of ‘family members’. Similarly, as in the case of real ‘home video’, the DVD extras present events which bear significance just for the participants and the community members who share the memory of these events – and the viewer is situated in the position of a community member, he or she is addressed as one of the participants in a collective screening.<sup>278</sup>

Of course, like the amateur recording practices of *Cloverfield*, this intimacy is entirely constructed and based on an acute awareness of the mode of reception of this particular type of text. Evans points out:

We need another category here, something we might call the ‘pseudo backstage’, the artful presentation of information that because it appears to come from behind the scenes, because it appears uncalculated, has in the eyes of the audience the invaluable attributes of honesty and sincerity. [...] behind-the-scenes documentaries are pseudo backstages, performances of an idea of the backstage. Designed to interest the audience, ‘making of’ documentaries rarely record the tedium of waiting for lights to be set up, the multiple takes, rehearsals and mistakes – unless such mistakes can be transformed into an amusing gag or narratively bound up into a tale of impressive obstacles overcome.<sup>279</sup>

Within my adaptation of Goffman’s model, the ‘pseudo back stage’ would then be a performance which appears to be relaxed and within the back stage – but is actually a very subtle form of front stage impression management. Just like *Gotham Tonight* and *Curse of the Blair Witch* echo television programming, making-of documentaries echo home videos. Both of these types of texts are able to do so because they not only share the space of reception with other media – but they are aware of that fact. Associations with *Cloverfield* are no coincidence in this context. As Skopal observes: “Hollywood cinema markets

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<sup>277</sup> Evans 2010: 594

<sup>278</sup> Skopal 2007: 191

<sup>279</sup> Evans 2010: 595

movies on DVD in a double mode: the DVD simultaneously simulates theatrical spectacularity (through the reproduction quality of image and sound) and the intimacy and ‘imperfection’ of television and home video.”<sup>280</sup> Like the dual representational strategies of *Cloverfield*, making-of documentaries thus allow DVDs to reconcile spectacle and intimacy. DVDs can embody intimacy because they are simultaneously consumed in an intimate, back stage context and their mode of address is intimate in itself.

### **Saving Private Viewings**

The critical gulf between techno-essentialism and technophilia rears its head even within the relatively small scholarly field of DVD studies. While both sides present some compelling arguments and useful approaches to particular aspects of the DVD format, insisting on one conceptual position over the other is as problematic in this context as it was in earlier chapters. The opposition even finds its echo in the competing interpretations of the DVD format; those who prefer narrative readings see it as a unified intratext, while those who stress the interactivity of the format find its apotheosis in the database. Examining how a number of DVDs actually operate established that both models are valid but neither is universally applicable.

Some DVDs, for example the UK *De fem benspænd* edition, actively encourage textual and interpretive cohesion. The unrelated bonus materials of the *Moon* DVD on the other hand invite the looser associative model of the database. The presence of deleted scenes, alternative takes or even alternate versions of the entire film allows for an interpretational reconsideration of the primary text, but does not necessarily dictate it. Despite the presence of bonus materials, the primary text can remain intact because the mode of reception is unique to each viewer. Some viewers may watch all the bonus material offered; others prefer to watch only the primary text. Some want to recreate the

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<sup>280</sup> Skopal 2007: 194

experience of the cinema at home; others enjoy the control only the home viewing mode can offer. The error would be to assume, as some critics do, that there is only one way to read a DVD. Above all, this chapter has underlined the hybridity of the DVD format.

Bonus material such as *Gotham Tonight* and *Curse of the Blair Witch*, which extend the diegetic world while simultaneously associating themselves with extra-diegetic medial discourses, reflect the liminal nature of the DVD particularly well. They also illustrate that an awareness of the context of reception is not just crucial for film-makers aiming to construct intimate representations but also for the creators of DVD bonus materials. Media convergence in the domestic sphere thus allows DVD making-of documentaries to act as home videos. This is reinforced by their behind-the-scenes rhetoric and back stage performances.

Based on its fundamental self-reflexivity and the inimitable capacity to reflect the domestic sphere, it was established in the first chapter that video has the unique potential to capture intimacy in a way unachievable in traditional analogue cinema. The Deleuzian will to art of video was thus established as the intimacy-image. In chapter two, that intimacy was seen to be even compatible with the spectacle of contemporary digital cinema, a mode of representation traditionally regarded as fundamentally opposed to authenticity and realism – as long as film-makers adopted amateur film-making practices. The conclusion of the third chapter was that video and amateur practices alone are not a guarantee of intimacy, but their use must be based on an awareness of the context of reception. The most common way we now consume contemporary digital cinema is via home media, first and foremost the DVD. Both in the context of its reception and the behind-the-scenes rhetoric and back stage performances its bonus materials enable, this chapter has shown that intimacy is also the defining characteristic of the DVD – even when its primary text does not embody the intimacy-image itself.

## Chapter 5

### *Convergence*

At its most basic, Deleuze's assertion was that digital cinema's will to art must be one not based on action or speech, the aspects underpinning the movement-image and the time-image, but rather on something entirely new:

The new automatism is worthless in itself if it is not put to the service of a powerful, obscure, condensed will to art [...]. An original will to art has already been defined by us in the change affecting the intelligible content of cinema itself: the substitution of the time-image for the movement-image. So that electronic images will have to be based on still another will to art.<sup>281</sup>

In the opening chapter of this thesis I posited that the artistic potential of video – its will to art in Deleuze's terms – is its ability to capture and represent intimacy. The most exceptional aspect of video is that by virtue of its mobility and unobtrusiveness it can be present to the most intimate familial and sexual back stage spaces denied to analogue film. If Deleuze's movement-image and time-image were based on movement and time respectively, the video image above all is based on space – both as a physical location and a metaphysical state. Because both the physical spaces (the domestic sphere) and the metaphysical spaces (the 'back stage') video is uniquely positioned to capture are intimate,

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<sup>281</sup> Deleuze 2005: 255

I argued that the will to art of video lies in the intimacy-image. However, this assertion only really holds true within the narrower medium of video.

The question that arose from my claim was whether this new function of the video image allows for a wider sublimation of the intimate within contemporary digital cinema – a fusion where the particular will to art of video, i.e. intimacy, has become synonymous with that of contemporary digital cinema in general. The most explicit way film-makers can address this question in narrative form is by including diegetically recorded video footage within their films. This diegetically recorded footage can either function as a constituent part of a larger filmic text or as the entire primary filmic text. Using a hermeneutic approach in the first two chapters, I examined how films from the 1980s onwards have used diegetically recorded video footage to reflect – and reflect on – intimacy. I went on to explore how some films, using amateur film-making practices and ‘found footage’ as part of the representational mode, even manage to overcome the traditional conceptual divide between spectacle and realism, allowing for intimacy alongside visual excess.

However, how diegetically recorded footage is created and how we interact with it stands within a much wider social and medial context. Based on a study of amateur film-making practices from 8mm home movies to YouTube informed by the semio-pragmatics of Roger Odin, I therefore suggested that an awareness of the context of reception affects the production of any filmic text. This is especially the case with the DVD, which is usually consumed within the intimacy of the domestic sphere. A key finding was that intimacy in contemporary digital cinema is founded not only on the representational potential of digital video but more importantly on film-makers’ awareness of how we interact with a variety of audiovisual media at both the moment of creation and reception.

As has become apparent across all four of the previous chapters, it is increasingly difficult to separate the various elements of contemporary digital cinema. This idea of convergence lies at the heart of this final chapter and indeed, the thesis as a whole. The

culmination of my argument is that through the process of convergence, the intimacy-image of video has therefore become that of contemporary digital cinema in general. Convergence in contemporary digital cinema can be traced across two parallel developments, the convergence of the camera and the convergence of the screen. This process manifests itself above all in one particular canonical example of contemporary digital cinema, Michael Haneke's *Caché*. All the discourses explored in previous chapters intersect in *Caché*; as a case study, it brings together all the elements of contemporary digital cinema discussed thus far. As this thesis began with an analysis of one of Haneke's films, it is therefore fitting to conclude it with another one. However, considering the thematic focus of this thesis, my aim is not to throw light on Haneke's film-making style or the ethics of representation, as has been done extensively by others, but rather to demonstrate with a single film how convergence allows us to link the intimacy of video, diegetically recorded footage, amateur film-making practices and home media to contemporary cinema in general.

Convergence means that the definition of digital cinema posited in the introduction to this thesis can even be expanded further: digital cinema includes *everything* that has been discussed thus far. From the traditional 35mm feature film which may include segments recorded on digital video to the summer blockbuster recorded with a digital camera directly onto a hard drive; from a film's official Internet homepage with trailers and other extra-textual material to the ARG that plays out across fan-sites and forums; from original amateur footage on television or uploaded to media sharing sites to remixes and mash-ups of existing films; from the original public screening in a cinema to the private viewings on DVD; text, extra-text and context – all of these discourses converge in the term digital cinema.

Thanks to this convergence, the new principle, the new function of the image, the new politics, the new artistic finality of contemporary digital cinema is inherently characterized by the intimacy-image. The first period of cinema was characterized by

montage and had as its will to art the movement-image. A new cinema was born after the Second World War, founded not on movement but what Deleuze terms the time-image. After its 'death' at the hands of television, cinema is now in its third era. My claim is that the will to art of this period is neither the movement-image nor the time-image, but rather the intimacy-image unique to contemporary digital cinema.

### The End of Media

The notion of convergence can be defined in two distinct ways. On the one hand, from a technological standpoint, convergence is the literal coming together, the integration, of previously discrete technologies or software. Examples of this are manifold, and are by no means limited to new media or digital technologies. Ithiel de Sola Pool is generally credited with coining the term convergence in his book, *Technologies of Freedom*:

A process called the 'convergence of modes' is blurring the lines between media, even between point-to-point communications, such as the post, telephone and telegraph, and mass communications, such as the press, radio, and television. A single physical means – be it wires, cables or airwaves – may carry services that in the past were provided in separate ways. Conversely, a service that was provided in the past by any one medium – be it broadcasting, the press, or telephony – can now be provided in several different physical ways. So the one-to-one relationship that used to exist between a medium and its use is eroding.<sup>282</sup>

In his *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Kittler similarly predicted the impact technological convergence would have across a variety of media. What is astounding is how much his predictions – made over twenty-five years ago – are an accurate portrait of our contemporary media landscape and consumption habits:

People will be hooked to an information channel that can be used for any medium – for the first time in history, or for its end. Once movies and music, phone calls and texts reach households via optical fiber cables, the formerly distinct media of television, radio, telephone, and mail converge [...] once optical fiber networks turn formerly distinct data flows into a standardized series of digitized numbers, any medium can be translated into any other. With numbers, everything goes. Modulation, transformation, synchronization; delay, storage, transposition; scrambling, scanning,

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<sup>282</sup> De Sola Pool 1983: 23

mapping – a total media link on a digital base will erase the very concept of medium.<sup>283</sup>

This strictly technological process of convergence is immediately recognisable in today's television receiver that can also pick up radio stations or the integration of Internet access in mobile phones. The mobile phone is often hailed as the pinnacle of current convergence technologies. No longer a single-function device capable only of making telephone calls, it now functions as a tool which simultaneously offers web access, email, still photography, video recording, music and video playback, GPS location and navigation and hand-held gaming.

On the other hand, convergence can also be regarded as a primarily social phenomenon. The term 'convergence culture', proposed by Henry Jenkins, reflects how it is not only the process of technological convergence which affects media, but more importantly how we interact with those media:

By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and *the migratory behavior of media audiences* who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.<sup>284</sup>

This of course echoes Roger Odin's semio-pragmatic approach, which argues for the determining role of the context of reception in the construction of meaning.<sup>285</sup> For Jenkins it thus is not the media themselves, but rather how people interact with them which is the real phenomenon at the heart of convergence.

These definitions are not necessarily in opposition and continuously inform each other. My aim is to track convergence across two parallel movements from the introduction of video technologies in the 1980s to the present day. This analysis will take us back across ground covered in earlier chapters of this thesis. Returning to topics covered in chapters one and two, the first of these two movements can be summarized simply as the gradual merging of the diegetic/amateur camera and the cinematic camera. The second,

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<sup>283</sup> Kittler 1999: 1-2

<sup>284</sup> Jenkins 2006: 2 [emphasis added]

<sup>285</sup> Odin 2008: 255

corresponding to chapters three and four, is how the cinematic screen and the private screen – whether the television or computer screen – have also merged into one.

### Convergence of the Camera

As is well established, the inclusion of amateur footage and diegetic cameras in narrative cinema can be traced as far back as *Peeping Tom*, but I chose to focus on Atom Egoyan's *Family Viewing* and Michael Haneke's *Benny's Video* in the opening chapter. Reflecting both film-makers' and growing consumer interest in video, these films coincide neatly with the proliferation of Kittler's and de Sola Pool's predictions of media convergence. Egoyan initially experimented with video in his 1984 film *Next of Kin*, but *Family Viewing* arguably remains the culmination of his interest in formal experimentation with the diegetic camera and the video image. A few scenes in his more recent *Adoration* (2008) also feature the protagonist Simon (Devon Bostick) briefly using a mobile phone to record his grandfather and his webcam to communicate with friends on the Internet, but the role of the diegetic camera is not at all examined narratively. It is simply a reflection of how digital recording technologies have now come to be a part of everyday social habits, replacing the letter writing of the eighteenth century.

Not so in *Family Viewing*; here the video camera and its accompanying video tapes are obviously still relatively alien artefacts within the domestic sphere and thus act as narrative focal points. Initially, they enable Stan's ritualized erasure of Van's mother and his past; later the power shift in the family is reflected in Van's taking ownership of the tapes away from Stan. Crucially, by losing the tapes, Stan also loses control over the diegetic camera – subsequently, the only diegetic cameras left are surveillance cameras, both in the hotel where Van hides Armen, those operated by the private investigator and in

the final scene in the homeless shelter. In effect, from that point onwards Van is no longer relegated to a passive role and becomes the ‘director’ of his own destiny.<sup>286</sup>

On a secondary level, Egoyan himself has emphasized the link between his interest in familial generations and the ‘generations’ of audiovisual recording technologies.<sup>287</sup> Just as there are three generations within *Family Viewing*’s characters – Armen, Stan and Sandra, Van and Aline – so too are there three generations of cameras and their respective recording formats – 16mm film, television and video. To some extent, the links between the characters and formats are made fairly explicit: the overarching narrative, which is essentially those scenes featuring Armen – Van visiting her in the care home, her transfer first to Aline’s flat, then the hotel and finally the homeless shelter – are all shot in film. The eldest generation, which for Egoyan as a member of the Armenian diaspora is crucially also the one from the ‘old world’, is thus firmly associated with film. Stan’s sphere of influence, on the other hand, is defined by television; both in its constant diegetic presence and as an aesthetic referent. All the scenes in Stan’s flat were shot in a television studio on two TV cameras and edited live – as though intended for immediate television broadcast.<sup>288</sup> Starkly different to both the vibrant and high-contrast film sequences and the low resolution and fuzziness of the video recordings, the scenes in the flat are noticeably “bled of colour, everything seems to happen on a stage set without depth or shadow, redolent of sitcom décor.”<sup>289</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in the scene in which Sandra returns to the flat to find Van watching a sit-com. As the television’s laugh track gradually begins to react to their lines, the cinematic and the televisual seem to merge. The middle-aged generation, represented by Stan and Sandra, is thus linked to television. Meanwhile, video technology is clearly the format used to represent Van’s memories of the family idyll and his lost Armenian national identity. This potential for salvaging memory and identity is what

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<sup>286</sup> see Romney 2003: 44

<sup>287</sup> see Wilson 2009: 26 and Romney 2003: 43

<sup>288</sup> Romney 2003: 42

<sup>289</sup> Romney 2003: 48

ultimately motivates both Van and Aline throughout the film and thereby ties the youngest of the three generations to video.

Along with this link between characters and formats, *Family Viewing* offers an interesting conceptual position on media. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Egoyan does not seem to regard video with inherent suspicion, while conceding there may be unhealthy or abusive uses of video.<sup>290</sup> Stan recording his sexual encounters not only forces his current partner Sandra into submission, but, in simultaneously erasing old footage, by extension also violates the memory of Van's mother. The diegetic video camera may allow Stan to perform his sadism to a camera in lieu of an actual audience, but because he is never seen reviewing the footage he records, he never makes full use of the potential of video. In *Family Viewing*, Egoyan is less interested in lamenting the negative aspects and applications of video technology,<sup>291</sup> and thereby manages to sidestep techno-essentialist conclusions,<sup>292</sup> but rather considers the actual uses of the video camera and its unique potential to capture intimacy and serve as an extension of characters' subjectivity and identity. What emerges is that Egoyan regards the video format primarily as dynamic, involving both the person who records a video and its eventual viewer. In semio-pragmatic terms, Egoyan acknowledges that in video reception is just as important as production. Television on the other hand, according to Egoyan, demands a passive viewer. Romney points out that Egoyan's Canadian directorial contemporary, David Cronenberg, also frequently typifies television as deeply dangerous, soul-sapping, narcotic or anaesthetic, especially in his *Videodrome* (1983).<sup>293</sup> In *Family Viewing*, just as in Haneke's *Benny's Video* and *Caché*, the family's TV is always on in the background, demanding attention and by implication, passivity.

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<sup>290</sup> Romney 2003: 54

<sup>291</sup> see Wilson 2009: 26

<sup>292</sup> del Rio 2007: 29

<sup>293</sup> Romney 2003: 48

But of course there is a third element to this troika, namely film. While the TV and video sequences in *Family Viewing* are visually more striking, scenes shot on film nonetheless still take up the majority of the total running time. This reliance on film perhaps suggests a reluctance on Egoyan's part to fully commit to video at this point in its developmental history. The video camera may be dynamic and the televisual camera may impose passivity, but Egoyan nonetheless chooses the cinematic camera to carry the narrative weight of the film.

The video camera and its diegetic footage are used sparingly in *Family Viewing*; and it is precisely their rare usage and juxtaposition against the predominant film and televisual discourse that give them such impact. The unique potential of the video camera to be present to the intimacy of back stage spaces is emphasized when shown alongside the inability of the analogue film camera to do the same, and the coldness of the simulacrum of familial intimacy offered by television. We can thus establish how the gradual merging of the diegetic/amateur camera and the cinematic camera begins around this point in the 1980s. The convergence of the camera begins when the two forms are simultaneously present, but remain distinct, for the first time within a single film.

This process continues and intensifies in the early 1990s with *Benny's Video*. A few years after *Family Viewing*, Haneke allows the video camera even more narrative responsibility. Here, a much larger portion of the film is composed of footage recorded diegetically and arguably all of key scenes are captured by a video camera – even if not initially presented through its lens. The family trip to the pig farm, the murder of the girl, the parents' plan to cover up the crime and the subsequent holiday in Egypt all have something in common beyond the fact that they are recorded by Benny on his video camera: they are glimpses of the intimate back stage of a family obsessed with surfaces – both in the sense of the superficial public impression they wish to impart and the *mise en scène* manifestation of that obsession in their expansive, coldly clinical kitchen and dining

room surfaces. The film even opens with the video footage of the pig slaughter; until Benny records the murder of the girl, this is the single most important visual artefact for him and can be seen as the stimulus for most of Benny's later behaviour. Unlike the splatter films Benny rents, the rolling news footage of neo-Nazi atrocities in Germany or Serbian war crimes in Croatia, or even the surveillance feed of the street outside his window, the only footage Benny seems to pay active attention to and even reviews repeatedly is the pig video.

I am not at all convinced by Matthias Frey's suggestion that "because of his inability to distinguish between the real and the mediated or the actual and the virtual, it is not possible for Benny to realize the consequences of his actions."<sup>294</sup> I believe the reason the video of the pig's death, and subsequently the girl's, have such auratic importance for Benny from the very outset is because just like the spectator, he very much *can* distinguish between them and the other types of footage. To an external spectator, the sequences shot on film look totally different to those shot by Benny on the diegetic camera; the difference is clearly signposted throughout the film in terms of visual quality. But for Benny the difference is not visual but ontological. He simply cannot find the connection to reality inherent to his video recordings in the films or television shows he watches, and so he constantly records reality with his video camera. Benny knows that it is the only mediation he can claim fullest ownership over – because he is the one controlling the camera. The ownership of the gaze is therefore fundamentally connected to ownership of the diegetic camera; just like in *Family Viewing*, where ownership of the gaze is primarily based on the ownership of the video tapes. Frey suggests elsewhere that:

*Benny's Video* had its main character levelling all niveaux of actual and virtual to the same level of unreality – a move that is intended to make these various levels all the more distinct and discrete to the viewer [...] modes of viewing that the spectator [can] differentiate and that Benny somehow could not.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Frey 2002: 7

<sup>295</sup> Frey 2006: 33-34

However, in the juxtaposition of television, film and diegetically recorded video on the same screen, it is only the television programming and the rental films which appear unreal – not video. Frey clearly misinterprets the interplay of different formats in order to make a moral judgement: the spectator is superior to Benny because they can distinguish between the real and the mediated. In fact, Benny relies on the diegetic video camera's inherent bond to reality – nowhere is this more apparent than in the finale, when he uses the clandestine recording of his parents as irrefutable evidence to implicate them in the cover-up of the murder.

Unlike Frey and a number of even more outspokenly techno-essentialist critics want to admit, Benny is fully aware of the paradox that in a contemporary mode of viewing, a video recording is taken to be more authentic, and crucially, more intimate a representation of reality than an analogue filmic one. Consequently, even more so than Egoyan, Haneke is prepared to afford the diegetic video camera more narrative responsibility, and its footage makes up a much larger portion of the film. In *Benny's Video*, the overlap between the diegetic/amateur camera, operated by one of the characters, and the cinematic camera, controlled by the film-maker, is much greater than before but the separation between the two nonetheless remains.

The trend towards merging the two cameras into one picked up momentum in the 1990s. Going to see *The Blair Witch Project* in 1999, what viewers saw on the cinema screen was footage wholly recorded within the diegesis. Considering the film was a commercial success, this would have been the first time many mainstream audiences were confronted with this type of convergent cinema, where the cinematic camera and the diegetic camera are one and the same. Nonetheless, perhaps to ease the transition and offer more than just a single perspective for the duration of the film, *The Blair Witch Project* featured not one but two diegetic cameras. The two are visually distinct; the 16mm footage, intended as a documentary to be submitted as a final project in film school, is in black and

white, grainy and framed much more professionally and steadily while the video footage is in colour, clearly digital and shot much more haphazardly. Crucially however, there is no non-diegetic camera under the control of an external director – both cameras are diegetic. The juxtaposition of the two formats echoes the associations made in *Benny's Video*; while the 16mm footage feels overly formal and staged in comparison, the immediacy and intimacy of the video footage suggests a raw authenticity:

the style looks rather amateurish, which for us as viewers tends to signify authenticity and heightens the feeling that we are seeing the world as it is. [...] The aesthetics of the camcorder look, the shaky frame, the movement in and out of focus, the inability to keep the subjects within the frame and the camcorder's portability are most often associated with intimacy and authenticity.<sup>296</sup>

Only in the video segments do we witness the characters' inner emotions – their expectations for the documentary, frustrations at being lost and finally their sheer terror – and witness their back stage habits – going the toilet or arguing with each other. The 16mm camera is primarily used for interviews with locals and establishing shots of the setting, intended for the documentary the group are making. Like in *Benny's Video* it is only the diegetic video camera that guarantees an unmediated connection to reality, the film footage feels staged. Displaying a nuanced understanding of how video is received, the film-makers recognized that video footage is “what viewers have come to believe reality looks like, the visual aesthetics that are almost automatically embraced by audiences as representative of non-fiction film-making. [...] Technical imperfections are understood to be part of the form, and part of what reality on film looks like.”<sup>297</sup> After Orson Welles' 1938 *The War of the Worlds* radio adaptation, *The Blair Witch Project* was the first contemporary media experiment which was widely documented in causing recipients difficulties in distinguishing between elements of fact and fiction.<sup>298</sup> Refuting Frey's claims, the

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<sup>296</sup> Roscoe 2000: 5

<sup>297</sup> Rhodes 2002: 56-57

<sup>298</sup> see Schreier 2004: 305

convergence of the cinematic and diegetic cameras meant even media-savvy viewers did not know how to evaluate the reality status of *The Blair Witch Project*.

But if *The Blair Witch Project* was the first instance of mainstream narrative cinema to feature a fully converged camera in the late 1990s, the format truly came into its own in the first decade of the new millennium. As the quality of digital recording technologies kept improving, cameras used in both the biggest Hollywood productions – notably George Lucas' and James Cameron's – and the smallest independent efforts became digital. Meanwhile, consumer-grade digital video cameras progressed at a similar rate. This made the qualitative differences between amateur footage and professional film even less distinct. As a result, films such as *Cloverfield*, *[REC]*, *Diary of the Dead*, *Quarantine*, *Paranormal Activity*, *The Last Exorcism* and *Trolljegeren* could be confident in not only dropping analogue film formats altogether, but also the multiple perspectives of earlier experiments. Perhaps the weakest point in *The Blair Witch Project*'s production myth is how and by whom the found footage, supposedly shot over three days, was edited together into a coherent 77 minute feature film, splicing footage together from two different cameras with overlapping soundtracks. These later films featured a single camera, whose footage looked as crisp and high-definition as in any blockbuster. Their narratives progressed linearly and any jumps in time were simply when the diegetic camera was not recording. This strict chronological progression and the single perspective meant that there could be no overt editing – further underlining the implied authenticity of the 'found footage'.

In effect, in all of these films there is only one camera: the diegetic camera. The *suture* of the shot/reverse shot convention in traditional cinema suggested the cinematic camera always had to remain outside of the scene to be able to simultaneously capture all angles. In *Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video* this mode was still the dominant method of representation, although perhaps for the first time it had to share a considerable amount of the representational function with diegetic cameras – certainly far more so than in the odd

point-of-view shot rendered from the perspective of a camera in earlier examples such as *Peeping Tom*. Through a gradual process of convergence over two decades, the cinematic and diegetic cameras have become fully integrated; in de Sola Pool's terms, the lines between them have become blurred. In a film such as *Cloverfield*, the single diegetic camera means that *it* is the cinematic camera – there is no other way to see the film but from this overtly diegetic perspective. This converged camera, although no longer able to offer the totality of *suture*, instead celebrates its subjectivity and inherently fragmented mode of representation. As this new cinematic camera is so firmly rooted within the diegesis of the film, it also revels in its mobility. Not in the traditional sense, with majestic crane or elegant tracking shots, but rather in its mobility within the microcosm of intimacy.

### Convergence of the Screen

The camera-based element of convergence constitutes only half of the wider sublimation of the intimacy-image in contemporary digital cinema. Over the same period of time as the convergence of the camera, a parallel process of convergence took place in the screen. Echoing the camera's development, the cinematic screen and the private screen merged into one. This convergence of the screen is founded on two simultaneous developments: the growing importance of the small screen on the big screen; and the increasing relegation of the big, cinematic screen to smaller, more personal screens.

Diegetic screens have been a major part of cinema since its inception. As early as 1901, *The Countryman and the Cinematograph* (Robert W. Paul, 1901) offered an ironic look at the supposed reaction to *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat* (Louis Lumière, 1895). In it, a caricature of a country bumpkin reacts to a number of scenes projected onto a screen behind him as though they are real – for example running away at the sight of a train pulling into a station. The prevalence of self-reflexivity in cinema is thus evident from its very beginning. Forty years on, one scene in the Nazi propaganda musical *Die Große Liebe*

(Rolf Hansen, 1942) illustrates cinema's continued engagement with the relationship between diegetic reality and its representation on diegetic screens. We see a spectacular mid-air dogfight and assume it is the Luftwaffe pilot Paul (Viktor Staal) on duty at the front. There is absolutely nothing to distinguish it from the opening sequence of the film set in North Africa. However, the camera pulls back and it becomes clear that it is in fact a weekly newsreel watched by Hanna (Zarah Leander) in a cinema. This process of quotation of filmic works on a screen within the diegesis of a film is exactly what Livingston terms nesting.<sup>299</sup>

This nesting of screens becomes even more widespread in the second half of the twentieth century with the increased prominence of what was then perceived as a grave threat to cinema: the television. It was no longer only the big screen that was nested within the cinematic frame but also the much smaller television screen. Like the telephone before it – and indeed the letter in theatre – the diegetic television screen became an easy way of communicating vital narrative information very quickly within a scene. Thus, without changing the setting, the television screen enabled the transfer of extraneous information across time or space – without the need to resort to a flashback, a cut or having the characters actually travel to the location. Within the last twenty years or so, the computer screen and even the mobile phone have become a natural extension of this development, allowing characters easy access to information or other characters that are physically not present.

While this nesting of small screens was established as a useful device for delivering narrative exposition, context or motivation efficiently, it was generally relegated to this incidental supporting role. A crucial component of video is that it can be reviewed instantly – either on a television screen, a computer or the small screen on the camera itself. Just as the growing consumer interest in video technology in the 1980s spurred the use of diegetic

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<sup>299</sup> Livingston 2008: 58

cameras, the screens on which that diegetic footage was watched became increasingly important. In Egoyan's *Family Viewing* (and even more so in Cronenberg's *Videodrome*), the moral critique of the overbearing presence of television is not based on the omnipresence of the screens themselves – after all the very same screens offer the redemptive potential of intimate video recordings – but rather the anaesthetizing and corrupting corporate content which is broadcast onto them.

In *Benny's Video*, the entire scene of the girl's murder is shown via the live video feed on the screen on his desk. For a few minutes, all that is visible within the cinematic frame is the action taking place on a smaller, diegetic screen. Mirroring convergence of the diegetic and cinematic camera, Benny's private screen converges with the cinematic screen. The same effect appears at moments in *Paranormal Activity*. The film follows a young couple, Katie (Katie Featherston) and Micah (Micah Sloat), who appear to have a supernatural presence in their home and so decide use a video camera to capture the entity haunting them. At one point Micah films himself examining the surveillance footage, recorded the night before, on his computer. While the rest of the film, solely composed of diegetic footage, is presented directly on the cinematic screen, these sequences are first nested on Micah's computer screens. As Micah minutely scrutinizes his diegetic recordings on his diegetic screens, the big and small screens converge. Perhaps the most extreme integration of the small screen on the big screen presents itself in the superhero comedy, *Hancock* (Peter Berg, 2008). To make a point about Hancock's (Will Smith) unruly behaviour, the PR manager Ray Embrey (Jason Bateman) uses YouTube videos of the superhero's deeds. The YouTube clips, which usually only take up a fraction of a computer screen, now fill up the entire cinematic frame, complete with YouTube watermark. By placing this image usually associated with the private mode of reception within a cinematic context, the two distinct screens again converge into one.

The other development contributing to screen convergence is the increasing relegation of the big, cinematic screen to smaller, more personal screens. Ever since theatrical films have been broadcast over television, the cinematic image was no longer exclusive to the big screen. The small screen began to have an impact on what kind of films were made for the big screen. Hollywood producers feared the loss in box office revenue as audiences preferred to watch either content made for television or wait for the eventual television broadcast of films, which resulted in the increased production of epic and spectacular blockbusters during the late 1970s. The claim was that the small screen simply could not do justice to the big screen spectacle.<sup>300</sup> However, with technological advancements, those domestic screens became larger and of better quality. With the introduction of video in the 1980s, ‘piracy’ became a major factor as home audiences could now record films in order to watch them at more convenient time – and crucially, skip the advertising breaks which were the main source of revenue for commercial broadcasters and by extension the rights owners of the films. The film industry once again feared the loss in box office revenue the new medium potentially posed. This culminated in Universal’s 1984 lawsuit against Sony,<sup>301</sup> in which the United States Supreme Court ultimately ruled that the recording of live television for purposes of ‘time-shifting’ did not constitute copyright infringement, but is fair use. The logical progression of that decision was that films were made commercially available to rent or buy on home media: first video, then in the late 1990s and the 2000s, DVD and Blu-ray, and more recently even via on-demand streaming or downloading services available online. Ironically, instead of bankrupting the film industry, home media became increasingly important to its revenue – from the early 1990s onwards, even outperforming the box office and royalties from television distribution combined.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> see Chapter 4

<sup>301</sup> Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios, Inc., 464 U.S. 417 (1984)

<sup>302</sup> see Klinger 2006: 89

As widescreen and high-definition screens coupled with large capacity digital storage media (hard-drives, DVDs or Blu-rays) increasingly become the norm, the transfer of the cinematic image to a small screen was even made possible with no discernible loss of quality. Because the films are stored in electronic formats, the devices which host these screens have become interchangeable. Whereas a film could originally only be seen on cinema screens and then later on television screens, screens that can show films can now be found on computers, laptops and tablets, embedded in car seats or on planes, and even in the palm of your hand on mobile phones and hand-held gaming devices. As Jenkins points out: “new media technologies enabled the same content to flow through many different channels and assume many different forms at the point of reception,”<sup>303</sup> and crucially this has enabled the consumer to choose where to watch a film. Just as the small screen played an increasingly important role in big screen content, content made for the cinematic screen was increasingly demoted to a personal screen; to an intimate context completely detached from the public space of the cinema.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, this process of convergence has not been resisted but rather embraced by film-makers. The fact that films will most likely be watched not in cramped and uncomfortable cinema seats but at home, with the option of pausing them at any time to take breaks, means that DVD releases can be much longer than theatrical releases and are planned accordingly. As Hight observes about the *Lord of the Rings* special extended edition DVDs:

Jackson consistently suggests that the production of the DVD versions of the *LOTR* trilogy was the natural extension of the production of the theatrically released films themselves [...] In fact, Jackson obviously had the DVD versions of the films in mind during their initial production. At times in the location footage of the *LOTR* [making-of] he suggests that if a just-completed shot was not able to make the theatrical cut, it might still appear on the DVD. In some sense, the extended cuts of the films are intended to be the ‘real’ or definitive versions of narratives that could not be fully realized within the time constraints of a theatrical release.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Jenkins 2006: 11

<sup>304</sup> Hight 2005: 6

This demonstrates again that knowledge of the future reception on fully convergent screens clearly impacts the actual production of a film itself. But beyond allowing a longer runtime, there is also the suggestion that in some cases the small screen is where the film was intended to be seen in the first place. Thus for example *Cloverfield*'s producer J.J. Abrams claimed: "the thing about this movie – probably more than any I think – is that it is better on DVD than in the theatre, [...] because the movie is like a videotape. It lives on your TV. In many ways, it is supposed to be viewed on a (TV) monitor."<sup>305</sup> *Cloverfield*'s visceral intimacy and inherent authenticity stems from the combination of visual, performative and para-textual cues suggesting amateur film-making practices and was created with a precise awareness of how that type of content is created, disseminated and received. Abrams suggests that the intimacy of his film, already notable for featuring a diegetic camera fully converged with the cinematic camera, can only be heightened by being watched on a convergent screen – where the cinematic and the personal screens merge.

These two developments, the growing significance and influence of small screens within the big screen and the relegation of the cinematic screen to personal screens, combine to form the convergence of the screen. That convergence, in conjunction with the convergence of the camera, in turn forms the foundation for convergence in contemporary digital cinema. The films discussed in the previous chapters – some of which reappear here – are all testament to the fact that convergence is an integral part of contemporary digital cinema. Convergence through digital technology is simultaneously the symptom and the catalyst for all of the films discussed thus far. It is this process of convergence that enables the intimacy-image of video to apply to cinema in general.

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<sup>305</sup> in Tourtellotte 2008

### Haneke's Hidden Hints

Haneke, arguably more so than any other contemporary director, tracks the process of technological convergence in cinema throughout its development from the 1980s until the present day. As Hediger suggests, “we can trace Haneke’s thinking on cinema by studying how his take on video has evolved over time.”<sup>306</sup> Beginning with *Benny’s Video*, Haneke returns repeatedly to video in order to allegorize the cycle of representation in and interaction with filmic media. In *Benny’s Video*, Haneke’s somewhat techno-essentialist view of new media<sup>307</sup> seems to suggest Benny’s amorality stems directly from his overexposure to video technology; an overexposure Haneke subsequently subjects the audience to by converging the cinematic and the diegetic cameras and screens during key moments in the narrative. Later, in *Funny Games* and its remake *Funny Games US* (Michael Haneke, 2007), his suggestion is that these technologies have become all-pervading. As a result, control over the technology manifests itself in power over the narrative. One of the intruders, Paul (Arno Frisch/Michael Pitt), repeatedly addresses the audience directly, implying an exclusive awareness that the cinematic camera is present and addressable in the diegetic world. In the original Austrian version Paul is played by Arno Frisch, a few years older than in his portrayal of Benny in *Benny’s Video* – intertextually suggesting to viewers familiar with Haneke that Paul’s psychotic behaviour is perhaps the logical escalation of Benny’s moral degeneracy. Later, in what is perhaps the best known scene of the film, after Anne (Susanne Lothar/Naomi Watts) manages to shoot Peter (Frank Giering/Brady Corbet) with the shotgun she snatches off him, Paul uses the remote for the family’s television (nested in the background and, like in most of Haneke’s films, constantly on) to rewind the film itself. As Oliver Speck argues:

The shocking element that Haneke introduces here is not the breaking of the fourth wall, which is not that unusual [...] nor does Haneke show a soundstage in order to point to the extra-diegetic reality [...] instead

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<sup>306</sup> Hediger 2010: 92

<sup>307</sup> see Hediger 2010: 104 and Chapter 1

Haneke's jarring move in *Funny Games* is to give one of the characters authorial powers, effectively creating a short-circuit between the level of the diegetic character, the level of the narrator, that is the camera controlled by the implied author, and thus the extra-diegetic reality.<sup>308</sup>

For 'short-circuit' here, read convergence. During that instant, a diegetic character becomes the extra-diegetic director and editor, merging the two realities into one and subjecting cinematic film to the laws of video technology. There is thus a progression of Haneke's media critique in his films, personified in Arno Frisch's characters. Yet perhaps the most complex of Haneke's filmic treatments of new media comes in *Caché*. While the rewind function and its retroactive consequences for authorial and even representational control appeared only once in *Funny Games*, this instability is practically the status quo in *Caché*.

On the surface, *Caché* appears to be a straightforward contemporary European thriller: Georges (Daniel Auteuil) and Anne Laurent (Juliette Binoche) – yet another one of Haneke's troubled bourgeois couples, inevitably called a local variation on George and Anne, with a TV no one pays attention to always running in the background – live at the portentous intersection of the Rue des Iris and the Rue Brillat-Savarin in Paris with their surly teenage son Pierrot (Lester Makedonsky). Both are well-educated, middle-class professionals; Georges is a literary critic with his own television show and Anne works in publishing. The film opens with them viewing a surveillance video of the front of their house – a single long static shot – which was posted to them anonymously. Later more videos, accompanied by crude drawings of human figures, blood and a rooster, begin arriving both at their home and at Georges' office. As well as their house, they include footage of the farm he grew up on and a nondescript block of flats in one of Paris's poorer *banlieues*. In keeping with narrative conventions established in surveillance thrillers such as *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) and *Enemy of the State* (Tony Scott, 1998) – both films incidentally featuring characters portrayed by Gene Hackman – Georges is determined to find out who is responsible for the videos. The videos and drawings seem to

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<sup>308</sup> Speck 2010: 31

implicate the Franco-Algerian Majid (Maurice Bénichou), who was adopted as a child by Georges' parents after his own were killed during the Paris massacre of 1961. Georges' disturbing intermittent dreams act as flashbacks to that time. For the first time in decades, Georges is faced with the guilt of having had Majid sent away under false pretences. His graphic nightmares of a blood-spattered, ten year old Majid beheading a rooster echo the slaughter of the pig in *Benny's Video*. When he confronts Majid in his flat, Majid denies having anything to do with the videos and during a later visit commits suicide by slashing his throat in front of Georges. In the final shot of the film, a mirror image of the opening shot in its uneasy longevity and static framing, Pierrot and Majid's son (Walid Afkir) can be seen talking to each other outside Pierrot's school. It is never established with any certainty who is responsible for the videos.

Yet *Caché* is more than just another disposable thriller; its tensions run much deeper. Even though it was only released in 2005, *Caché*'s immediate accession to the canon of cinema remains undisputed. It has become one of the most discussed and most written about films within film studies; with analyses covering a wide range of issues including spectatorship, surveillance, ethics and postcolonial relations,<sup>309</sup> to name but a few. Against this plethora of existing interpretations my aim here is not to throw further light on Haneke's status as auteur, the recurring themes in his work or his relationship with the audience, as has been done extensively by others, but rather just to point out how the use of convergence in *Caché* can help illustrate how the intimacy-image is fundamental to all of contemporary digital cinema. The film is unusual in that unlike the other films discussed in the previous two sections, it simultaneously manages to combine both convergence of the camera and the screen within a single film – rather than just one or the other. *Caché* therefore conclusively establishes that in a post-analogue historic moment, thanks to convergent cameras and screens, the will to art of contemporary digital cinema is intimacy.

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<sup>309</sup> see Sorfa 2006, Levin 2010, Wheatley 2009 and Celik 2010 respectively

The viewer is confronted with the film's medial instability from the very start. The long opening shot with the opening credits superimposed upon it could be mistaken at first for a still image. Only the soundtrack of birds chirping and then after about a minute, a pedestrian crossing the frame from left to right, establish that it is a moving image. The second adjustment occurs when two voices speak over the footage; the subsequent distortion as the tape is fast-forwarded and rewind confirms that it is in fact footage being viewed within the diegesis of a film. As Thomas Levin remarks, "one could say that what we see in the first scene of *Caché* is somebody discovering by watching the fact that they are being watched. The narrative deployment of surveillant video-tape in cinema seems to have an elective affinity for such metaleptic indexicality."<sup>310</sup> The film then cuts to the Laurents' living room where the image we have just seen is reframed and nested – to use Livingston's term – within their TV set. Even just this opening sequence demonstrates how *Caché* simultaneously converges the cinematic and the diegetic camera and the cinematic and the diegetic, personal screen. What we assume to be cinematic is soon reframed as diegetic. Unlike the clear visual differentiation between formats in *Benny's Video* or *Family Viewing*, the various representational planes here look identical – the framing narrative, Georges' TV show and the videos themselves are shot with the same high-quality digital video. Frey thus notes that:

because of the consistency in medium it is always, initially at least, impossible to differentiate between the various perspectival *niveaus*, whether TV, home video surveillance tape, or Haneke's film *Caché* itself. Thus, in this film, destabilization of the spectator is in fact created by the consistency of medium.<sup>311</sup>

The various planes converge into one, throwing the status of every new subsequent image into doubt. With five videos featured throughout the film, the start of every scene has the viewer questioning whether it is potentially part of the framing narrative or one of the tapes, immediately looking for cues to confirm one or the other. In addition to the visual identity

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<sup>310</sup> Levin 2010: 76-77

<sup>311</sup> Frey 2006: 34

across the representational modes, Haneke never makes it easy for the viewer by adding paratextual signifiers such as the timestamps in *Cloverfield*. Only the distortion as a tape is sped up or rewound offers definitive closure. Both the cinematic and diegetic cameras *and* screens are thus fully converged throughout *Caché*.

However, Haneke further complicates matters throughout the film by constantly undermining the notion that the ‘diegetic camera’ recording the videos is even present in the diegesis. By the end of the film, neither Georges nor the spectator can say with any certainty who is responsible for the videos. This has led to much confusion and indignation, and many critics – scholarly or otherwise – do little but propose a particular interpretation. There are several plausible alternatives grounded in the narrative, but each is ultimately flawed. The primary candidate appears to be Majid; he is the only other person to know first-hand about the events in his and Georges’ childhood and the videos seem to stop after his suicide – although the final scene outside Pierrot’s school has all the hallmarks of the previous videos and could conceivably constitute a sixth video. But how the video reached Georges after Majid’s death is inconsistent with this reading. Majid’s son, who is never named, is also a potential candidate; he could have found out about the childhood trauma from his father and has uncontested access to Majid’s flat, the setting for the fifth and final video. His denial however seems genuine. Another option is that it is a collaborative effort between the two. Pierrot’s open hostility towards his parents, the fact that he hands one of the postcards with a drawing on it to Georges himself and the potential associations with Haneke’s original teenage videographer Benny could all be read as suspicious. However, the video leading to the farm and Majid’s flat are shot from within a car, so he would need an accomplice with a license. The final scene, in which Pierrot and Majid’s son meet, suggests the possibility that the two of them were working together – although the fact that their meeting is potentially being recorded could point to someone else entirely.

There are even two somewhat esoteric suggestions; firstly that, in the manner of the hallucinatory, schizophrenic characters in *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997) or *Videodrome*, Georges himself is either imagining the videos or making them himself and simultaneously repressing that fact. In this reading, the videos are seen as a form of video confession, first mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis; Georges is subconsciously attempting to attain forgiveness or catharsis by confronting himself via the videos with his own complicity in Majid's banishment. According to Neil Pages, *Caché* thus splits "the figure of Georges into both judge and executioner and has played the action in the 'courtroom' of his psyche (just as Georges served as both the subject and the object of the video camera)."<sup>312</sup> The truth of what these confessional videos are saying comes not from an external authority, such as an omniscient narrator or director, or even from the technology itself, but instead from the bond between the author and subject of the confessional video. They thus satisfy Foucault's definition of confession as "a discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement."<sup>313</sup> The second alternative is that the extra-diegetic director – i.e. Haneke himself – is somehow sending them from our extra-diegetic reality to Georges. This reading sees Haneke trying to 'educate' Georges by confronting him with the reality of what his childhood betrayal did to Majid; the videos show their common origins, the farmhouse, and then directly contrast where the two have ended up in life, in a *banlieue* and the distinctly bourgeois setting of the Rue Brillat-Savarin. As Todd Herzog argues:

These five videotapes work successively to lead the stubborn and resistant Georges Laurent to a position in which he understands the message of the tapes: he needs to view his actions from a perspective outside his carefully filtered memories. He needs to view his actions from the perspective of Michael Haneke's camera.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Pages 2010: 7

<sup>313</sup> see Foucault 1978: 61

<sup>314</sup> Herzog 2010: 31

But in their insistence to find a single ‘right’ explanation for the videos, all of these readings ignore the hint Haneke offers in the Laurents’ opening dialogue during the very first sequence:

|          |                                            |
|----------|--------------------------------------------|
| GEORGES: | How come I didn’t see him? It’s a mystery. |
| ANNE:    | Maybe the camera was in a car.             |
| GEORGES: | It doesn’t look filmed through a window.   |
| ANNE:    | Or someplace on that house?                |
| GEORGES: | I don’t know what to say.                  |

From the outset, it thus becomes clear that the videos’ origin is conceived as an unsolvable mystery. Moreover, the perspective from which their house – about a metre above a row of cars – and the confrontation in Majid’s flat is filmed makes it clear that a diegetic camera, however small or concealed, could not have possibly been hidden from the characters’ view. At more than one point, walking along the aptly-named Rue des Iris,<sup>315</sup> Georges looks directly at the camera. In a repeat viewing of the film it also becomes obvious, in the reverse shot to the one later shown in the video, that there is no camera hidden – as insinuated by the film’s title – amongst the shelves of Majid’s flat. Contrary to what the spectator, and indeed the characters of *Caché*, are led to expect based on narrative conventions suggested by Haneke’s commitment to realism, there simply is no diegetic camera. As Catherine Wheatley points out: “the vast majority of the taped scenes are shot from ‘impossible’ angles [...] the search for explanation on a narrative level becomes meaningless.”<sup>316</sup> Ironically, Haneke seems fully aware of an audience’s frustration at not being able to determine definitively between what is ‘real’ and what is fictitious. Haneke’s other major hint at the impossibility of closure thus comes during the dinner party, when one of the guests tells a spooky story that turns out to be a joke. Just like many spectators responding to *Caché*, his audience is taken in by the ‘true’ story and even though it is immediately established as a joke, they still want to know: “Come on, is it true or not?”

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<sup>315</sup> see Herzog 2010: 31

<sup>316</sup> Wheatley 2009: 162-163

But just because there actually may be no diegetic camera does not mean that the camera is not convergent – quite the opposite. The suggestion that it is the extra-diegetic director Haneke sending the videos to Georges is admittedly somewhat tenuous. Herzog's defence of this interpretation, for example, remains deeply unconvincing and hinges on a fleeting and most likely unintentional by-product of filming on location in Paris at night:

The presence of the film crew is, in fact, subtly acknowledged within the film itself. In a nighttime scene outside the Laurents' house [...] a car's headlights clearly show an enormous shadow cast on the building by the camera filming the scene. Given the extreme care with which Haneke produces his films, this is unlikely to have been a gaffe.<sup>317</sup>

However when one takes Haneke out of the equation as an active party and regards it simply as a question of convergence, it can lead to some valuable insights. Haneke is not the one who sends Georges the videos from an extra-diegetic space; it is rather the extra-diegetic (cinematic) camera itself intruding into the diegetic space – thereby briefly becoming a diegetic camera. This has its precedent in *Funny Games* when Paul directly addresses the cinematic camera, and it too briefly becomes diegetic. The convergence of the camera in *Caché* is therefore not just an inside-out movement – i.e. diegetic to cinematic – as in the previous examples, but rather outside-in – i.e. the cinematic camera becomes diegetic. The videos are simply a concrete, diegetic manifestation of this process of convergence.

This liminal state of convergence is not entirely without theoretical precedent. Deleuze frequently refers to Maurice Blanchot, who proposed the idea of an 'outside' that is not external and an 'inside' that is not internal ("*le dehors non extérieur*" and "*le dedans non intérieur*").<sup>318</sup> While Blanchot, and subsequently Deleuze and Guattari, use this construct to consider planes of thought within a wider philosophical discourse,<sup>319</sup> there is no reason why it could not also be applied to Haneke's camera – especially considering

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<sup>317</sup> Herzog 2010: 30

<sup>318</sup> see Speck 2010: 38

<sup>319</sup> see Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 59

Haneke's self-expressed affinity with Deleuze and Baudrillard in interviews.<sup>320</sup> *Caché*'s convergence of the camera can perhaps be therefore best expressed echoing Blanchot's terms: a diegetic camera that is not in the diegesis or a cinematic camera that is not extra-diegetic.

As noted earlier, what makes *Caché* so striking however is that it simultaneously features convergent cameras *and* screens. Predominantly, the convergence of the screen is handled conventionally: a news report about Iraq, fully taking over the cinematic frame, is reframed moments later and nested within the diegesis, on the television screen in the Laurents' home. The initial video is presented first on the cinematic screen, before being retroactively repositioned within the Laurents' television screen. However, what is more remarkable is when that convention is subverted. At one point, we watch Georges' literary talk show; the assumption is that, like the news footage earlier, this televisual image in the cinematic frame is meant to give us further expository information about Georges or set the narrative within a wider frame of associations with contemporary geo-political events. Instead, just like during the opening sequence, Georges' voice is heard over the footage commenting on it. The footage is fast-forwarded and rewound, again echoing the opening sequence, as Georges and his editor prepare the show for broadcast. Footage definitively shot on a diegetic camera – an earlier scene is set in the television studio where Georges' show is recorded – is then shown not only on the diegetic editing suites' screens but crucially, first on the cinematic screen. Perhaps even more so than the videos, the interplay between the televisual and cinematic levels in *Caché* stresses the convergent nature of the film. During that initial scene on the set of Georges' show, the camera is clearly the televisual camera: Georges speaks to it directly, addressing his viewers to announce the scheduling of the next programme and is then instructed via intercom by the show's director to stay seated as the credits roll. A production assistant comes to Georges' side to

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<sup>320</sup> see Frey 2006: 35

inform him that he is needed on the telephone and as he leaves the set, the same camera pans round the studio in an arc to capture him on the phone to Anne surrounded by the *mise en abyme* of his set, lighting rigs, studios technicians and other cameras. What was just firmly established as the televisual camera has now seamlessly become the cinematic camera – after all, why would the diegetic cameraman continue to film after the diegetic director has called “cut”? Crucially, this cinematic camera – which records in high-definition video, just like the television and surveillance cameras – is present to the literal back stage of Georges’ television persona. This moment, so short and easily overlooked on the first viewing, is perhaps the most powerful scene in the entire film in terms of convergence. Through convergence, the viewer is offered the intimacy of the back stage despite the fact that at that point the camera is not a diegetic video camera but an external cinematic one.

Another result of the instability as the various representational planes converge is that the characters can cross between them. Thus, for example, Oliver Speck observes:

When we see Georges and Anne interact in front of a wall of books in their living room, they frame a television on which news are playing. Georges in front of a wall of fake books on the set of his show echoes the impression of the first shot. The difference is that Georges now fully enters the space of the television becoming an accessory in somebody’s living room, just as he himself had reduced the news about a war to background noise.<sup>321</sup>

It is thus that Georges, never having seen him since the day he was taken away, is made present to Majid; during their confrontation Majid admits watching Georges’ television appearances: “I tuned into your show by chance, a few years ago [...] I wasn’t sure, I just had a nasty feeling in my gut. Weird isn’t it? I felt nauseous and I didn’t know why. When your name came up I began to understand.” Through the all-pervading convergence of *Caché*, the presence of Georges on Majid’s televisual screen encroaches on Majid’s personal space in the same way as the converged cinematic/diegetic camera later intrudes on his privacy, recording his back stage breakdown into tears after Georges has left. In fact,

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<sup>321</sup> Speck 2010: 39

because the two are so inherently intertwined in *Caché*, the two infringements of Majid's intimacy are arguably one and the same. As Pages points out: "Whereas Georges easily forgot Majid only to 'rediscover' him in the images of the videos, images that show not Majid but Georges, Majid retains his tormenting memories of Georges also because these penetrate *his* domestic sphere through the technology of the television."<sup>322</sup>

In *Caché*, Haneke takes the premise of this thesis as a given and demonstrates that through convergence the potential to capture and create intimate representations, previously limited to video, is now available to all of cinema. Where *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing* stressed the relative merits and problems of different formats by making them visually discrete from one another, the visual consistency of all representational modes in *Caché* – cinematic, televisual, videotaped – reflects the bleeding effect of convergence. Thus, the intimate can be recorded by a cinematic camera which is paradoxically not extra-diegetic; the cinematic camera is at any point potentially synonymous with a televisual or a video camera; and the small screen media of television or video can be reframed in the cinematic screen just as the cinematic frame becomes delegated and nested within the diegesis of the film.

### The Converged Will to Art

As an example of contemporary digital cinema, *Caché* stands out because it manages to contain almost all aspects discussed in this thesis within a single film: the intimacy of video, diegetically recorded footage, amateur film-making practices, the intimacy of their context of reception and the process of convergence. It is situated in a wider ongoing discourse about how digital recording technologies and contemporary digital cinema both affect and reflect our changing social habits. Above all, *Caché* is a manifestation of

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<sup>322</sup> Pages 2010: 11

convergence itself: all modes of representation, whether cinematic, televisual or diegetically recorded, are on the same plane.

In this thesis, I have tried to explore the origins of convergence in the evolution of amateur film-making practices from the home movies of the 1960s over the spread of video during the 1980s to the user generated content uploaded to the Internet today. I began by examining the first major uses of video in cinema during the 1980s, in the pioneering films of two auteurs: Atom Egoyan and Michael Haneke. Egoyan's interest in this area peaked quickly during the 1980s, while Haneke has continued to track the process of media convergence throughout his film-making career. These films already exhibited a willingness to reflect our changing relationship to new audiovisual media within their narratives, while simultaneously experimenting with convergence in their formal structure and modes of representation.

I posited that the unique capability of video is the potential to capture and represent intimacy in a way inaccessible to traditional film. By juxtaposing video and film, *Family Viewing*, *Benny's Video* and *The Blair Witch Project* showed that apart from looking different, the crucial difference between video and film lay in what was represented. Despite their diverse backgrounds, what they all have in common is that video is inherently codified as intimate by virtue of its context of production. This intimacy can alternatively be read via Goffman's socio-performative model, in terms of the private back stage space individuals in a close group can collaborate and prepare for a front stage public performance, with fewer pressures than in the public space; or via Herzfeld's anthropological model, those aspects of an individual or shared identity which are a cause for external embarrassment but provide insiders with a notion of common sociality. By building on the inherent link between intimacy and the medium of video, the occasional deployment of video in cinema aimed to carry that association over. Through convergence,

there was no longer a clear distinction between ‘cinema’ and ‘video’, and so the will to art of video has become synonymous with that of contemporary digital cinema in general.

Unlike other scholars, I did not base my approach to contemporary digital cinema on technological determinism. A crucial observation, made during the analysis of Brian de Palma’s *Redacted* in the third chapter of this thesis, is that simply using the technology and expecting it to imply intimacy or authenticity is not enough. Context is key. Only if the technology is used in conjunction with an active awareness of both the amateur mode of production and how the awareness of reception filters back to that mode of production, can an otherwise professionally or commercially produced film be regarded as fully convergent and therefore co-opt the will to art of video. As was mentioned, television screens have been converging with the cinematic for quite some time now; either in a small to big screen movement, nested within the frame, in order to convey expository, contextual or other narrative information in a quick and condensed format, or in the reverse of that movement, big to small screen, where cinematic films are watched alongside television programming and home movies. Crucially, amateur recordings and the televisual became converged from the moment video took over as the preferred format for amateur film-makers. No longer screened onto a separate screen by a special projector, as home movies had been since the 1960s, home videos could only be watched on the television screen. While the expansion of home videos doubtlessly affected films and television; television’s appropriation of amateur footage, with *America’s Funniest Home Videos* as the most prominent example, also had a massive effect on amateur home video practices. Intimate interactions, once spontaneous and back stage, became self conscious and deliberate once a camera was present. Convergence thus operates in a network of associations: video influences the televisual, the televisual influences amateur video, amateur video influences the cinematic, the cinematic influences the televisual, the televisual influences the cinematic and the cinematic influences amateur video.

The failure of films like *Redacted* is that they do not fully acknowledge this framework of convergence. The performance of those in front of the camera becomes altered simply by the awareness of the convergent context of reception that the diegetic camera introduces. People do not just pretend that the diegetic camera is not there, or alternatively, address the camera directly ignoring the fact that others are present, while they have an emotional breakdown – as McCoy does in *Redacted*. Such a performance is out of context and therefore unbelievable. This necessity of plausibility is also crucial for the justification for the diegetic cameraman's continued recording, as first discussed in the second chapter. *The Blair Witch Project* is perhaps a straw man in this regard; while the continued filming under terrifying circumstances was regarded as unrealistic in 1999, in our post-9/11, technologically convergent, media-saturated existence it has become not just accepted but practically expected of eyewitnesses.

Throughout this thesis, I have also repeatedly returned to *Cloverfield*. The film is really only innovative in one respect, but arguably more so than any of its peers using subjectively recorded, diegetic footage: it exhibits an unmatched awareness of all elements of contemporary amateur film-making practices and their reception in convergent spaces. Its creators' testimony in various interviews demonstrates that, more so than most other film-makers using the same format, they took great effort to understand and acknowledge how both the mode of production:

[The solution] came down to just slightly tipping the camera so it didn't feel like the scene was being actively filmed,<sup>323</sup>

and the mode of reception:

the movie is like a videotape. It lives on your TV. In many ways, it is supposed to be viewed on a (TV) monitor,<sup>324</sup>

operate in amateur film-making practices. This suggests that, like Haneke, they are fully aware of the role convergence plays in contemporary digital cinema. *Cloverfield* builds on

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<sup>323</sup> in Witmer 2008: 37

<sup>324</sup> in Tourtellotte 2008

*The Blair Witch Project*'s successful implementation of a diegetic camera but the continued convergence of digital media in the nine years since *The Blair Witch Project*'s release means that *Cloverfield* is able to allude to that convergence even more so than its predecessor.

While *Cloverfield* manages to reconcile the will to art of video even with the conventions of spectacular digital cinema through its appropriation of amateur film-making practices, the convergence of *Caché* confirms that that will to art is applicable to all of contemporary digital cinema. Technological and cultural convergence merge in these films: not only do they use convergent technologies, but the technologies are used in a convergent way. This process is even reflected in the way we most commonly consume contemporary digital cinema: the DVD frames contemporary digital cinema firmly on a convergent screen. Together, all these elements demonstrate that through convergence, there is no longer a clear distinction between 'cinema' and 'video'. These two discourses have merged into one, taking with them association previously thought to be mutually exclusive. As a result of convergence, even home videos can be epic and spectacular and, perhaps more importantly, cinema is now defined by the intimacy-image just as much as video was shown to be.

### **Making the Cinematic Intimate and the Intimate Cinematic**

The theoretical discourse surrounding contemporary digital cinema is marked by extreme conceptual opposites. One is primarily optimist, and enthusiastically romanticizes the representational, aesthetic and above all social effects digital technologies can offer contemporary digital cinema. Often however, this approach ignores their actual uses in favour of idealized or utopian views of their potential. The other conceptual position distrusts the effects of digital technologies. Most commonly, digital cinema is studied using an ontological approach. There is no denying that the photographic indexicality of

traditional analogue cinema is lost in digital images and this helps explain why negative positions on contemporary digital cinema are so often framed by a rhetoric of loss and pessimism. Media theorists see the social effects of digital technologies also as primarily negative and therefore dangerous. Based on the techno-essentialist discourses of Friedrich Kittler and others, they argue that digital technologies impoverish human potential and subvert moral responsibility. This conceptual extreme prefers to read the violence and visual excess that contemporary digital cinema so frequently exhibits as evidence that the digitization of cinema has resulted in its 'death'.

Rather than lamenting this death, I choose to see it as part of the continuity of cinema. Giles Deleuze suggests an interpretation of film history in which cinema indeed suffers repeated deaths, but each death enables cinema to be reborn in a new form and reposition itself with a new will to art. The first of these deaths allowed cinema to shift the representational function of its image from movement to time. The televisual and video image in turn heralded the death of time-image cinema. Naturally that death should be bemoaned if it is in vain. But Deleuze suggests that is only meaningless if it is not the impetus for a new will to art.<sup>325</sup> The aim of this thesis was primarily to establish whether such a will to art exists for contemporary digital cinema; whether there is a new function of the image that contemporary digital cinema can be put to the service of. My proposition was that this will to art is intimacy.

Limiting the scope of my investigation to video in a particular historical moment, the 1980s and early 1990s, I noted that its primary uses appeared to have taken place in the domestic sphere. This suggested that representing intimacy – defined as a back stage providing insiders with a space where they can be themselves without having to perform predetermined social roles – could be a unique capability of video. The use of video in two films in particular, *Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video*, showed that contemporary film-

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<sup>325</sup> see Deleuze 2007: 255

makers were already exploring the social, representational and aesthetic possibilities of the medium. Their focus on the domestic space and back stage interactions – whether familial or sexual – suggested that the guiding principle of video, its will to art, was indeed intimacy. However, this finding was limited to video itself. The question whether intimacy was the will to art of contemporary digital cinema in general remained open.

The major role digital effects and visual spectacle play in contemporary digital cinema would certainly seem to suggest that its will to art is primarily spectacle. However, as Hansen points out, “despite their apparent close correlation with the digital image, none of these effects [...] is specific to it. Rather, these effects cumulatively represent the achievements of the more radical products of time-image cinema.”<sup>326</sup> If the techno-essentialists are to be proven wrong, contemporary digital cinema needs a unique function of the image. But how can intimacy possibly be reconciled with a cinema of spectacle? The solution lies in the combination of a number of elements – formal, visual, rhetorical, performative, textual and even paratextual. In short, by appropriating amateur film-making practices spectacular films can propagate a notion of authenticity and thereby enable intimate representations. The ‘found footage’ format of *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield*, both fully digitized reflections of contemporary epistolary practices, allow the intimacy-image of video to apply to all of contemporary digital cinema.

Expanding on the hermeneutic methodology of the first two chapters, I examined the history of amateur film-making practices in a wider media context. This suggested a predicament with the findings of the second chapter. Both the home movie and the home video mode reveal on close inspection that deliberate front stage performances were established as the norm early on in amateur film-making practices. Sharing the space of reception with commercial representations impacted the intentionality of performances, even in an intimate context. This means that the hypothesis that intimacy is the will to art of

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<sup>326</sup> Hansen 2002: 52

contemporary digital cinema has to be further qualified. Only when film-makers acknowledge that awareness of the reception of a recording changes its context of production, can they successfully transfer amateur video's intimacy to a professional cinematic representation. Both *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* are nuanced enough to do so, while *Redacted* fails to take this into account.

DVD bonus material illustrate that this finding does not just apply to film-makers wishing to construct intimate representations but also to the creators of DVDs. The most common way contemporary digital cinema is consumed today is via the DVD in the back stage space of the home. A combination of rhetorical and performative elements with the very intimate context of reception allows these bonus materials – behind-the-scenes making-of documentaries especially – to take the form of both television content and home videos. Through convergence contemporary digital cinema shares the private screen with television and, crucially, video. This means that the predominant way we view it – on DVD – is defined above all by the intimate context of reception. The DVD enables an intimate relationship to contemporary digital cinema even when its primary text does not embody the intimacy-image at all.

However, one aspect above all others allows for the claim made at the outset of this thesis to come full circle. Convergence – in relation to contemporary digital cinema, specifically the convergence of cameras and of screens – reduces all modes of representation, whether cinematic, televisual or diegetically recorded, to the same plane. This allows for a liminal state in which aesthetic impulses and contextual associations can be transferred between modes. As a result the will to art of video and that of contemporary digital cinema are the same. The intimacy-image, enabled by video technology, amateur practices, awareness of reception and the most common way of consuming cinema and even compatible with a cinema of spectacle – in short, all the elements of contemporary digital cinema I focus on in this thesis – has become the guiding principle, the main

function of the image, the new politics, the artistic potential, the *will to art* of contemporary digital cinema. Thus, I have argued, only in contemporary digital cinema can the cinematic become intimate and the intimate cinematic.

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## Filmography

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*102 Minutes That Changed America* (Dir: Nicole Rittenmeyer/Seth Skundrick, Siskel/Jacobs Productions/History Channel, 2008)

*Adoration* (Dir: Atom Egoyan, Serendipity Point Films/Ego Film Arts, 2008)

*Apollo 18* (Dir: Gonzalo Lopez-Gallego, Dimension Films, 2011)

*L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat* (Dir: Louis Lumière, Lumière, 1895)

*Avatar* (Dir: James Cameron, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2009)

*Batman and Robin* (Dir: Joel Schumacher, Warner Bros., 1997)

*Batman Begins* (Dir: Christopher Nolan, Warner Bros., 2005)

*Beauty and the Beast* (Dir: Gary Trousdale/Kirk Wise, Walt Disney Pictures, 1991)

*Benny's Video* (Dir: Michael Haneke, Wega Film, 1992)

*The Blair Witch Project* (Dir: Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, Haxan Films, 1999)

*The Bourne Identity* (Dir: Doug Liman, Universal Pictures, 2002)

*Caché* (Dir: Michael Haneke, Wega Film, 2005)

*Cannibal Holocaust* (Dir: Ruggero Deodato, United Artists, 1979)

*Casino Royale* (Dir: Martin Campbell, Eon Productions/Columbia Pictures, 2006)

*C'est arrivé près de chez vous* (Dir: Rémy Belvaux/André Bonzel/Benoît Poelvoorde, Les Artistes Anonymes 1992)

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Dir: Steven Spielberg, Columbia Pictures, 1977)

*Cloverfield* (Dir: Matt Reeves, Bad Robot/Paramount Pictures, 2008)

*The Conversation* (Dir: Francis Ford Coppola, 1974)

*The Countryman and the Cinematograph* (Dir: Robert W. Paul, Paul's Animatograph Works, 1901)

*The Dark Knight* (Dir: Christopher Nolan, Warner Bros., 2008)

*David Holzman's Diary* (Dir: Jim McBride, New Yorker Films, 1967)

*Dazed and Confused* (Dir: Richard Linklater, Alphaville Films, 1993)

*Diary of the Dead* (Dir: George Romero, Artfire Films, 2007)

*Enemy of the State* (Dir: Tony Scott, Touchstone Pictures, 1998)

*Die Große Liebe* (Dir: Rolf Hansen, UFA, 1942)

*Family Viewing* (Dir: Atom Egoyan, Ego Film Arts/Ontario Arts Council, 1987)

*De fem benspænd* (Dir: Jørgen Leth/Lars von Trier, Zentropa Real, 2003)

*Forrest Gump* (Dir: Robert Zemeckis, Paramount Pictures, 1994)

- Funny Games* (Dir: Michael Haneke, Wega Film/ORF, 1997)
- Funny Games US* (Dir: Michael Haneke, Celluloid Dreams/Tartan Films, 2007)
- Gladiator* (Dir: Ridley Scott, Dreamworks/Universal Pictures, 2000)
- Godzilla* (Dir: Roland Emmerich, Centropolis Film/Columbia Tristar, 1998)
- Hancock* (Dir: Peter Berg, Columbia Pictures, 2008)
- Hearts of Darkness: A Film-maker's Apocalypse* (Dir: Fax Bahr/George Hickenlooper, American Zoetrope, 1991)
- Hi, Mom!* (Dir: Brian De Palma, Sigma III Corp., 1970)
- Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (Dir: Alain Resnais, Argos Films, 1959)
- Jurassic Park* (Dir: Steven Spielberg, DreamWorks/Universal Pictures, 1993)
- The King's Speech* (Dir: Tom Hooper, Momentum Pictures, 2011)
- Kon Tiki* (Dir: Thor Heyerdahl, Artfilm/RKO Radio Pictures, 1950)
- Krapp's Last Tape* (Dir: Atom Egoyan, Blue Angels Films/Bórd Scannán na hÉireann/RTÉ, 2001)
- Lady in the Lake* (Dir: Robert Montgomery, MGM, 1947)
- The Last Exorcism* (Dir: Daniel Stamm, StudioCanal, 2010)
- The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* (Dir: Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema, 2001-2003)
- Lost Highway* (Dir: David Lynch, October Films, 1997)
- Lost in La Mancha* (Dir: Keith Fulton/Louis Pepe, Quixote Films, 2002)
- Memento* (Dir: Christopher Nolan, Newmarket, 2000)
- Next of Kin* (Dir: Atom Egoyan, Ego Film Arts, 1984)
- Night of the Living Dead* (Dir: George Romero, Continental, 1968)
- Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Dir: Joel & Ethan Coen, Working Title Films, 2000)
- Paranormal Activity* (Dir: Oren Peli, Blumhouse Productions/Paramount Pictures, 2007)
- Peeping Tom* (Dir: Michael Powell, Anglo Amalgamated Film, 1960)
- Det perfekte menneske* (Dir: Jørgen Leth, Laterna Film, 1967)
- Quarantine* (Dir: John Erick Dowdle, Screen Gems, 2008)
- [REC]* (Dir: Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, Filmax, 2007)
- Redacted* (Dir: Brian de Palma, Magnolia Pictures, 2007)
- Saving Private Ryan* (Dir: Steven Spielberg, Amblin Entertainment/DreamWorks/Paramount, 1998)
- sex, lies, and videotape* (Dir: Steven Soderbergh, Miramax, 1989)
- Der Siebente Kontinent* (Dir: Michael Haneke, Wega Film, 1989)
- Spider-Man* (Dir: Sam Raimi, Columbia Pictures, 2002)
- Star Wars: Episodes I – VI* (Dir: George Lucas/Irvin Kershner/Richard Marquand, LucasFilm/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1977-2005)
- Starship Troopers* (Dir: Paul Verhoeven, TriStar Pictures/Touchstone Pictures, 1997)
- Super 8* (Dir: J.J. Abrams, Paramount Pictures, 2011)
- Superman* (Dir: Richard Donner, Warner Bros., 1978)
- Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Dir: James Cameron, TriStar, 1991)
- Tesis* (Dir: Alejandro Amenábar, Las Producciones del Escorpión/Sogepaq, 1995)

*Trolljegeren* (Dir: André Øvredal, Filmkameratene A/S, 2010)

*Der Untergang* (Dir: Oliver Hirschbiegel, Constatin Film, 2004)

*The Untouchables* (Dir: Brian de Palma, Paramount Pictures, 1987)

*Videodrome* (Dir: David Cronenberg, Canadian Film Development Corporation, 1983)

*Where No Vultures Fly* (Dir: Harry Watt, Ealing Studios/Universal Pictures, 1951)

*Whistle* (Dir: Duncan Jones, Short Film Bureau, 2002)

*Zabriskie Point* (Dir: Michaelangelo Antonioni, MGM, 1970)

## YouTubeography

Charlie Bit My Finger, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_OBlgSz8sSM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OBlgSz8sSM) [accessed 01/10/11]

David After Dentist, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txqiwrbyGrs> [accessed 01/10/11]

Disney Movie Trailers YouTube Channel, <http://www.youtube.com/user/DisneyMovieTrailers> [accessed 01/10/11]

Hitler Gets Banned from Xbox Live, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfkDxF2kn1I> [accessed 01/10/11]

Leave Britney Alone!, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHmvkRoEowc> [accessed 01/10/11]

Leave Chris Crocker Alone!, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiqkDm9UoKo> [accessed 01/10/11]

Old Spice: The Man Your Man Could Smell Like, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owGykVbfgUE> [accessed 01/10/11]

Old Spice: @Gillette, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqoc6wTNotI> [accessed 01/10/11]

Saddam Hussein's Execution, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4M6Lgb2eCmw> [accessed 01/10/11]

Star Wars Kid, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPPj6viIBmU> [accessed 01/10/11]

Star Wars Kid: Drunken Jedi, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GJOVPjhXMY> [accessed 01/10/11]

The Official Cloverfield Trailer, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvNkGm8mxiM> [accessed 01/10/11]

## Ludography

*Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days* (Dir: Karsten Lund/Kim Krogh, IO Interactive/Eidos, 2010)