1960s Documentary Film

Perceptions of the Vietnam War in the USA and in Germany

MICHAEL HOENISCH

"'It's the Revolution, girl—can't you feel it?'" With these exuberant words Frenesi greets her skeptical rescuer from a confrontational demonstration in 1960s San Francisco: a significant moment in Thomas Pynchon's fictional retrospective view of the American 1960s and 1970s.[1] Frenesi turns out to be one of the central figures of Pynchon's *Vineland* (1990), a highly contradictory representative of the upheavals of this period and also of one of its crucial aspects. She appears as the cameraperson of "24fps," a film collective that strains to record the public events initiated by the rebellious youth movements trying to shake up the establishment. Participation in these public confrontations included documenting them for a wider public, misinformed by the commercial media, and for history. The 'revolution' may not be televised on mainstream TV, but it must be documented by the participants themselves for an alternative public they hoped would emerge.[2] Pynchon's penetrating analysis of the forces whose conflict transformed the US in the 1960s and 1970s recognizes the affinity between the excitement of change and the documentary impulse. Those who saw themselves on the crest of worldwide historical change had no doubts that every moment of their struggle was relevant and needed to be documented. The experience of

1 Pynchon, *Vineland*, 117.
2 Scott-Heron, "Revolution Will Not Be Televised," 61.

"now" needed to be made permanent. To produce your own images strengthened your new identity as an activist and provided you with tools to challenge the establishment. The war in Vietnam emerged as one of the central battlegrounds of the wide-ranging social and cultural conflicts of the 1960s.

The Battle of Images

The war divided the nation and produced competing perspectives on the problems looming in its wake. Images of the war and of the protest against it were available on American TV and movie screens, and they travelled around the world. American TV networks, generally mainstream, covered the events in Vietnam more and more as both the military involvement and the struggles about its justification intensified. The US government itself intervened in the battle of images. As the conflict escalated, the Department of Defense produced documentaries that tried to legitimize the war—for example, *Why Vietnam* in 1965 expected to continue the successful World War II series *Why We Fight,* while *Screaming Eagles in Vietnam* in 1967 was intended to glamorize the arrival of the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam. This version of government propaganda completely ignored the rapid changes taking place during this period. Technical innovations in filmmaking, developed by the Direct Cinema filmmakers, and the self-confidence of the youth movements, which expected to create their own form of communication and influence the course of events, created a critical momentum that challenged TV reporting and the government. The perspectives of the TV networks, of course, had the widest reach in this battle of images, although their reception was often ambivalent. But alternative forms of documenting the war and the protest against it had a considerable and growing impact, especially among the young generation who faced conscription to fight in Vietnam. Some of these documentaries were broadcast by mainstream TV, like Peter Davis's criticism of government propaganda in his *The Selling of the Pentagon* (1971), which triggered considerable debates and put CBS under sufficient pressure to issue soon afterwards a kind of retraction, *The Rebuttal of the Selling of the Pentagon* (1971). Other documentaries received only limited support from mainstream media, like Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* (1968), but reached relevant

audiences more directly on college campuses and at protest meetings. In the context of the growing protest against the war, expressed across different perspectives, documentary film contributed to the delegitimization of American military activity in South East Asia.[3]

The end of the war was not the end of the conflicts about its meaning. In retrospect, the military perspective was summarized in 1979 by General Westmoreland, commander in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968 and Chief of Staff of the Army from 1968 to 1972. His extremely narrow-minded justification of the war follows the common cliché of the military victory at the front lost by weakness and betrayal at home—by incompetent politicians and subversives, "the vocal and emotional elements in our society who chose to resist actively national policy."[4] The thirteen-hour documentary by Peter Arnett and Michael MacLear, which was broadcast, not on the major networks, in 1982 under the title *The Ten Thousand Day War: Vietnam: 1945–1975,* claimed for itself a liberal perspective in the battle of images; as did the 1983 network response to Arnett's film, Richard Ellison's and Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A Television History.* The debate continued to address a wide audience in docudramas like Francis F. Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) or Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1987) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). One of the most challenging retrospective perspectives of the Vietnam conflict was created in Trinh T. Minh-ha's analytical and highly experimental film *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), which participated in the expansion of documentary aesthetics. The contradictions of this war still haunted Errol Morris's documentary about the life of Robert McNamara, *The Fog of War* (2003). The recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were frequently seen under the shadow of the war in Vietnam: as finally exorcizing the older defeat in South East Asia or as extending previous horrors and failures. Errol Morris's film about images of torture in Abu Ghraib, *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), and the very different documentary by Junger and Hetherington, *Restropo* (2010)*,* about one particular US Army outpost in Afghanistan, can be included in this continuing controversy.[5] *Human Terrain: War Becomes Academic* (2010) by James Der Derian, David Udris and Michael Udris investigates specific counterin-

3 Barnouw, *Documentary*, 262–88; Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film*, 314–16.
4 Westmoreland, "Vietnam in Perspective," 118.
5 Grajeda, "Winning and Losing," 1–23.

surgency methods the military had used in Vietnam and continued to develop for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the role of academic intellectuals in recent American wars.

The Vietnam War could be documented more easily than other wars. Before the practice of 'embedded journalism' was introduced—a lesson from that conflict—it was easy, with sufficient motivation and means, to travel to and in South Vietnam and try to publish one's information and experience: reporters for print or film media or working on their own, peace activists, participants in the war and others used these opportunities. The genesis of the book *Vietnam—Why? An American Citizen Looks at the War* (1968) demonstrates how easy it was to get access to the war zone. Its author, Flavio Bisignano, financed his journey to Vietnam with his own savings and used his experience as a former Merchant Marine to get free passage to Saigon on a merchant ship in 1967. As John Carlos Rowe describes it, Bisignano blended smoothly with the professional journalists and regularly took part in their routine activities. The credentials he acquired easily even let him participate in combat operations: "before returning to California, he obtained first-hand experience in search-and-destroy patrol, an airstrike on Vietcong jungle sanctuaries, and naval operations in the Gulf of Tonkin."[6] Like others, Bisignano tried to authenticate his report by focusing on his personal experience. Rowe's analysis of the literary and ideological concepts that structure Bisignano's narrative and other personal accounts of the Vietnam War questions the claim of eye-witness reports to a privileged, more authentic perspective. While these accounts benefited from the high status of personal experience as a criterion of truth in the 1960s and 1970s, and positioned themselves as corrective responses to the mass media narrative, they share basic ideological assumptions with the dominant media.

Documentary Film and Resistance to the War

Under pressure from government, justifications of the war and the 'normalization' of the conflict by the TV networks, the protest movement produced, on limited budgets, documentaries whose impact continued to grow

6 Rowe, "Eye-Witness," 148.

over time. The enthusiasm and moral commitment behind these documentary projects was an apparently unlimited reservoir from which all parts of the 'Movement' drew their energy. In fact, the civil rights movement for equal rights, primarily of African Americans, and the anti-war movement were closely intertwined. They shared the appeal to justice, the impatience with the status quo, the grass roots ideals and many forms of protest. Many who were apolitical but restless felt attracted to both. Michael Herr concludes his important book about the Vietnam War, *Dispatches* (1977), with a melancholic variant of this perception: "Out on the street I couldn't tell the Vietnam veterans from the rock and roll veterans. The Sixties had made so many casualties, its war and its music had run power off the same circuits for so long they didn't even have to fuse. . . . What I'd thought of as two obsessions were really only one, I don't know how to tell you how complicated that made my life."[7] Because African Americans provided a disproportionately large number of the soldiers, and victims, on the battlefields, they quickly perceived that injustice and racism at home were mirrored in South East Asia. The documentary film *No Vietnamese Ever Called Me a Nigger* (1968) announces already in its title this fusion of domestic and overseas experience and protest. During interviews along the protest march through Harlem on April 15, 1967, black bystanders and war resisters explain in various ways their understanding of how the global system works, in Vietnam and at home.

A radical perspective was represented in the documentaries which the Newsreel Collective produced about anti-war as well as civil rights protest. Starting in 1967, the Newsreel Collective assembled civil rights activists, New Left critics of 'the system' and anti-war radicals in a determined effort to develop documentary film as a weapon in the struggle for change. Newsreel filmmakers expected documentaries to function as a medium that would organize their followers and demonstrate to a wide and heterogeneous audience that they shared a common position in a global context and in history. The struggle for freedom and grassroots democracy in the streets of the US could be linked to the protest movements in other parts of the developed world and to revolutionary struggles in post-colonial countries. In this way, the various factions of the protest movement would be enabled to discover their bond of solidarity in a worldwide struggle for liberation.

7 Michael Herr, *Dispatches*, 258.

With world revolution as a subtext, local protest acquired strong legitimacy. Factional frictions would be more easily subsumed under the concept of a global movement. In this context, the conflict in Vietnam could be perceived as the front line of historical progress. Through identification with anti-colonial struggles, the consciousness of racial discrimination, developed in protests for black civil rights, could be extended to Asians. Older stigmatizing stereotypes of Asians could be reversed: the caricature images of Chinese laborers who built the railroads in parts of the US; of Philippine savages in the Spanish-American war; of Japanese killers in World War II, and of North Korean robot soldiers in the Korean War. In contrast, the Vietnamese could be perceived as model fighters for the noble cause of universal freedom. Michael Renov has analyzed this perspective of idealization in early Newsreel Collectives documentaries like *The People's War* (1969) and *Only the Beginning* (1971).[8] His arguments about ideological distortions in these early anti-war documentaries carry some weight, but neglect the historical and cultural context in which these films were produced. In addition, his psychological framework and implied ideal of ethnographic 'truth' are themselves based on unexamined ideological premises.

A more diverse representation of the Vietnam conflict is developed in Peter Davis's panorama of its impact on certain parts of American society, *Hearts and Minds* (1974). Its dramatizing construction of people and events enhanced its emotional appeal and popular success; in 1974 it received an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. But it has not been an unqualified success with all audiences and film critics. *Hearts and Minds* opens with idyllic scenes of a Vietnamese village, which might evoke Renov's criticism of idealization. But the film uses footage of Vietnam mainly to reveal the brutalities of the war. Search and destroy missions, torture, the use of Agent Orange and the effect of intensive bombing are shown and related to the suffering of the people; some of the victims are identified by their names and speak in their own voices. However, Davis's documentary casts a much wider net over the situation in the US. The range of voices he assembles includes critical intellectuals like Daniel Ellsberg and skeptical politicians like Senators William Fulbright and Robert Kennedy; advocates of the war like General Westmoreland and George Coker, the celebrated survivor of captivity in North Vietnam. But the greatest emphasis is given

8 Renov, "Imaging the Other," 255–68.

to a chorus of war critics, and especially to those young men who refused to be drafted or who turned against the war after their experience in Vietnam. Veterans against the war provide the film with a platform, where heroism and rejection of the war can be merged; where the moral criticism of the war is legitimized and the pro-war voices are marginalized. *Hearts and Minds* makes it clear that it condemns the war. However, the effort to unfold a pluralistic panorama of protest relies heavily on a Hollywood style of drama. As Richard Barsam points out, "No other film about Vietnam used so expansive a frame in its coverage, or was supported by such lavish Hollywood financing. A year after the war ended . . . official Hollywood could afford to discover its conscience and to take sides."[9] The ambivalent reactions to this important documentary are the result, one could argue, of an inherent contradiction: *Hearts and Minds* assembles strong images and verbal statements, which condemn the war; but it refuses to relate them to a coherent, more analytical perspective of this military excursion.

THE JOURNALIST AS OBSERVER/PARTICIPANT

More coherence is achieved, although at a price, by those documentary films and written texts which criticize the war on the basis of the 'superior truth' of subjective experience. The focused and factual attitude of journalists adds professionalism to this perspective of personal authenticity. David Bradbury's documentary *Front Line* (1979) about the film reporter Neil Davis constructs this perspective in characteristic ways. The rejection of the war relies mainly on a few occasional shots of Lyndon B. Johnson, as the representative of the ignorance and deceitfulness of politics, and their contrast with the main body of the film: battle scenes Davis mostly experienced himself. Davis reported on military conflicts in South East Asia for eleven years, until his death on the battlefield. His film reports were watched regularly by TV audiences in the US and worldwide. The film presents Davis in somewhat tropical scenery as he remembers his journalistic work and comments on the war scenes the film assembles, mostly recorded by him. Some footage is designated as not his own, but from archives; and some of the commentary is spoken not by him but by Richard Oxenburg. But Davis,

9 Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film*, 316.

the footage he took, and the comments he makes in the film's present tense constitute the perspective of this documentary.

Davis's concept of the truth about the Vietnam War is summarized in the title of the film. As shown in *Front Line,* Davis did his film work in combat situations alongside the South Vietnamese and Cambodian soldiers who did much of the close-up fighting. He even crossed over into liberated territory and recorded the villagers supporting the Vietcong. His insistence to work at "the real front line" is driven by a version of the journalistic ethic, which he expresses without any analysis in the demand that "the truth must be presented." His form of the truth is focused on the gory and practical details of killing and survival on the ground, and on the courage to face death. Images of helicopters, structurally important in many films about the Vietnam War, as in de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* and Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now,* have only peripheral roles in *Front Line*; in fact, the huge military machine is sidelined in favor of combat at close range. Although there are occasional brief references to the cynicism of the politicians and to the anti-war movement in the US, the focus on battle scenes is by no means used as a direct denunciation of the barbarism of war, although it could be understood like this by some audiences in specific contexts. War, for Davis, is an existential arena where individuals are tested and certain values are proven, courage most of all. In contrast to the numerous combat scenes, Davis's quiet and understated commentary and his non-ostentatious posture do much to moderate the emphasis on violence. Like the words of the protagonist in *Apocalypse Now*, which accompany the escalating brutalization of his 'mission', the scenes of Davis's spoken commentary demonstrate a contrasting world of reason and human dignity.

Courage, however, is not the only value emphasized in *Front Line*. Davis emphasizes the close comradeship he experiences by sharing the life of the foot soldiers. Reversing the negative racial stereotype of 'Asians,' Davis appreciates their humane qualities, although they remain invisible as individuals. The comradeship with the 'Asians' is contrasted implicitly with the distant cynicism of politicians in the US. In the course of the film a perspective is developed, which is common in war narratives: the contrast between the corruption of civilian life and the pure, existential experience of combat. An ideal of masculinity, softened by Davis as commentator, and a certain mystique of war emerge as essential parts of this perspective of the reporter as participant. When Davis keeps coming back to the phrase "death

Fig. 1: North Vietnamese tank at the gate of the presidential palace.

Screenshot from *Front Line* (David Bradbury, 1980).

is a lady," which he picks up from 'Asian' soldiers, a rare reference is introduced to a world outside male comradeship. Davis's own death in battle, referred to by the narrator, personalized the presence of death as a theme of the film. The female connotation implies a certain attractiveness, even seductiveness of dying in combat. The pure existential battle experience involves a pull towards dissolution of the self up to the point of death.

The reporter's perspective is vitalized by the awareness that the scenes he documents and distributes through the media may have some influence on various audiences and, in some instances, may become part of history. The nude young girl running away from bombardments, the execution of a prisoner on the street in front of the camera—both scenes included in *Front Line*—have become icons of the Vietnam War.

The final scenes, which document the conquest of Saigon by the Vietcong, show Davis at his best. Over images of hasty retreat, Davis remembers how he stayed behind to record the end (fig. 1). His cool and modest attitude, the implied awareness of the historical moment, and his sharp eye for the significant image, merge in a convincing demonstration of the re-

porter's perspective. Bradbury's film leaves on the periphery what other Vietnam documentaries try to focus on: the complex political situation in the US and in Vietnam as well as the cultural and historical dimensions of this conflict. However, within its circumscribed perspective, *Front Line*, while not free of contradictions, represents a significant effort to penetrate the "fog of war" that surrounded this US military excursion from the beginning, and to focus on the price of war: human life.

Documentary Film and Intellectual Intervention

Emile de Antonio's perspective on the Vietnam War differs radically from those documentaries which try to achieve authenticity through personal experience. *In the Year of the Pig* (1968), his Vietnam film, constructs a certain type of historical narrative based on philosophical principles. De Antonio did not visit Vietnam but invested considerable research in documenting the conflicting positions which, in his view, drive the historical process, and to develop his thesis about the nature of this conflict. De Antonio always opposed the dominant media, although he had some success within their networks; rather, he appealed to the critical public sphere which developed during the protest movement of this period. His documentaries were intended to provide 'the Movement' with a radical critique of the establishment. Beyond this immediate concern, *In the Year of the Pig* is an endeavor of enlightenment about the historical processes that obstruct or enable the struggle against oppression, in Vietnam as well as in the US. De Antonio's fusion of intellectual analysis and radical criticism of the status quo into a new form of documentary montage made his film effective in the context of protest and placed him in a prominent position in the history of American documentary film.

Emile de Antonio did not start out as a filmmaker; but the various resources he brought to it, including his competence as an art and cultural critic, led him easily to the genre of documentary. As the son of a wealthy Italian-American medical doctor—he named his production company, Turin, after the birthplace of his father—he acquired early on the social skills and contacts he relied on in his film work. At the same time he was drawn to radical groups as a student at Harvard in the late 1930s, and he learned to

deal with different ways of life during his job as a longshoreman and in the army during World War II. After a period of studying and teaching philosophy, he drifted into the bohemian art scene of Greenwich Village, where he lived among young and upcoming artists like John Cage, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and others. After viewing the film *Pull My Daisy* (1959), a representation of the Beat scene that included Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, de Antonio became convinced that film, in its anti-Hollywood form, was a medium in which he wanted to be involved. He turned himself into the distributor of *Pull My Daisy;* he got involved with the New American Cinema Group and the Film-Makers' Cooperative, where Jonas Mekas was active; and he eventually procured footage of the Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954, from which he produced, in a long process of experimentation, his first documentary film. *Point of Order* (1963) was a first step in the direction of a new form of documentary film, and it established de Antonio's position among filmmakers, as well as among left-liberal and radical critics of the witch-hunting methods of McCarthyism. With his film *In the Year of the Pig*, de Antonio intervened in one of the central issues of the protest movement and explored a wide range of new documentary methods.

In the Year of the Pig is the result of intensive research in libraries and film archives in many countries and of an equally intensive editing process. Taking a determined stand in heated debates about the on-going war in Vietnam, the film received mostly favorable reviews, became a commercial success, quickly turned into an attraction of anti-war protest, and increased de Antonio's status as an innovative documentary filmmaker. In 1970 it received an Oscar nomination as the best documentary feature. Its success was achieved in spite of the considerable demands it makes on the attention and intellectual resources of most audiences.

The opening sequence, which functions as a prologue, confronts the viewer with a highly abbreviated summary of de Antonio's method. Immediately, it calls attention to the artificiality of filmic construction. These images are isolated from their contexts and not connected by some kind of narrative or causative line, but separated by black spaces. There is no commentary to assist the viewer—something de Antonio always rejected as authoritarian. Neither is there the impression of a 'found story' represented 'objectively' as in Direct Cinema—an approach de Antonio often ridiculed. Still, these images are highly charged and challenge the viewer to decipher

them and understand their relationship to each other. Some were already iconic images in circulation, as the one of the Buddhist monk on fire; their context is shown only later in the film. Others are superficially self-explanatory, as that of the American soldier on whose helmet the anti-war slogan is reversed: "make war not love." In the context of the film as a whole, this slogan condenses the destructiveness of the war in one image. Some of these images remain incomprehensible without external information, confronting the viewer with the limits of his understanding. The second of these images shows this inscription on an unidentified background: "As soon as I heard of American independence my heart was enlisted. 1776." Underneath appears the handwritten name "Joseph Angel." De Antonio has spoken about this image on various occasions. The inscription appears below the statue of Lafayette in Union Square in Manhattan, where de Antonio had a studio at the time. In Lafayette's engagement for American freedom and independence, de Antonio saw a historical parallel to his own engagement for the independence of another colonial country. In the name "Angel" he recognized a Puerto Rican graffito and a reference to the struggles for Puerto Rican independence.[10] Although the prologue positions the viewer in a state of incomplete understanding, its isolated images indicate a sketchy, abstract pattern of contrasts: past vs. present, US vs. Vietnam, critics of the war vs. its representatives, civilians vs. the military (fig. 2 and fig. 3). One unifying element is the sound underlying the prologue. At first barely noticeable or comprehensible, it rises to a crescendo of helicopter noise, which de Antonio had carefully composed for a hyper-realistic effect, the sound of an escalating war. The artificiality of documentary constructions is not demonstrated for its own sake but to raise the awareness of the audience of their position: in an unstable situation of not-knowing, of very limited knowledge and of guess-work, viewers are challenged to work out coherence and meaning through their own efforts. In a more accessible way than in the prologue, de Antonio, then, makes the viewer a collaborator, guided by the filmmaker, in the construction of the whole film.

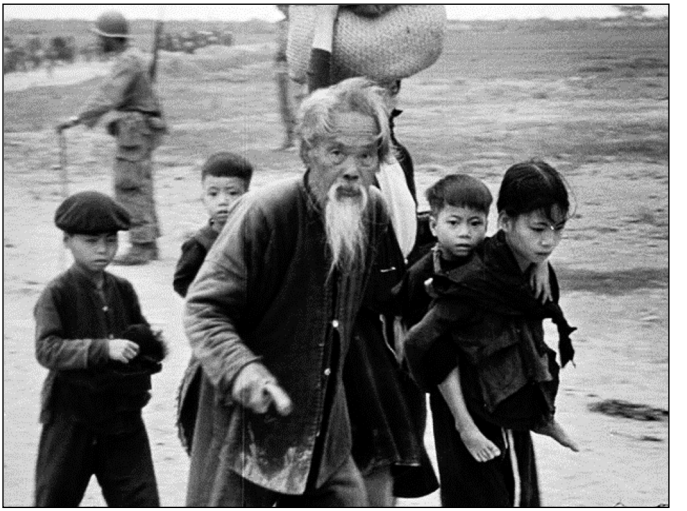
10 Amman et al., "Ein schriftliches Interview mit Emile de Antonio," 377–78.

Fig. 2: Screenshot from the prologue of In the Year of the Pig *(Emile de Antonio, 1968).*

The film begins with footage of the colonial past of Vietnam. The alternating montage of marching troops and a coffee house scene demonstrates the combination of military power and everyday rule in Vietnam under French occupation. The 'natives' who pull the foreigners in rickshaws are turned away with an arrogant gesture, and the 'masters' relax in the café among themselves. Native subservience, the montage indicates, is enforced by the troops of the occupiers. These opening scenes demonstrate de Antonio's thesis that colonialism was at the root of the conflict; they also introduce the viewer to de Antonio's basic premise: "History is the theme of all my films."[11] In the *Year of the Pig* follows the Vietnam conflict from these early beginnings to the escalation of American military activity, including the bombing of North Vietnam, after the Tonkin Bay incident of 1964 and further to the controversial election of Thieu in 1967; in fact, the montage towards the end predicts the defeat of the US years later. However, *In the Year of the Pig* is not constructed as a straightforward linear historical narrative but in a complex pattern of conflictual images and voices. In contrast to other documentaries about Vietnam, like *Front Line* or even *Hearts and*

11 de Antonio, "Theme of All My Films," 21.

Fig. 3: Another screenshot from the prologue of In the Year of the Pig *(Emile de Antonio, 1968).*



Minds, *In the Year of the Pig* uses a wide range of pro- and anti-war figures and images to develop a long-range and dialectical historical perspective of this conflict. As some of the isolated images of the prologue indicate, and some of the speakers later emphasize, de Antonio's concept of history is based on the premise of liberation through conflict, from colonial rule and from oppression worldwide. From de Antonio's perspective, the American colonies in the past were part of the same movement of history towards liberty as the people of Vietnam, and their supporters in the US, in the present.

To put this concept of history on the screen, de Antonio developed a documentary method which he has called collage. Others have used the term mosaic. Bill Nichols, one of his best interpreters, points to "the strategy of contention."[12] For this purpose, *In the Year of the Pig* includes interviews with more than 50 individuals, footage from various archives and excerpts from American TV, American government films and other sources, the result of intensive research. From this material de Antonio constructs a complex pattern, in which many voices and images are in conflict with each other and no one can claim to represent the whole truth, but which ultimate-

12 Nichols, "Voice of Documentary," 57.

ly represents a meaningful concept. Within this pattern, various villains, heroes and in-between attitudes are represented. However, some figures stand out as particularly trustworthy: the "real authorities," as de Antonio called them.[13] Among them, Philip Devillers, Jean Lacouteur and others, but particularly Paul Mus and Daniel Berrigan, carry considerable weight throughout the film.

The "real authorities" do not appeal to the viewer by positions of power or status. In fact, Philip Devillers is identified only by his name, Paul Mus by his name, place and profession: "professor of Buddhism, Yale." Instead, their appeal is based on their intimate knowledge of the facts, their precise understanding of historical and cultural developments, and on their belief in the open mind of the viewer. When they explain details of Ho Chi Minh's life and of the history of Vietnam, they dissolve the clichés propagated by the mainstream media and unfold the historical dimension usually excluded. In contrast to the ignorant and brutal utterances of, for example, Generals Curtis LeMay and Mark Clark, they represent an informed and humane attitude. Gradually, the real authorities attract the viewer into a sphere of moral conviction and of reliance on what de Antonio clearly expected to be the most potent power in the conflicts of history: the ultimate power of reason.

While *In the Year of the Pig* positions the "real authorities" in contrast to the cynicism of politicians and generals, it also demonstrates the fragility of their appeal in relation to the brutal and dumb practice of war. Several sequences in the middle of the film contrast the futility of the 'search and destroy' missions of the US Army with the hollow phrases of Hubert Humphrey and General Westmoreland that are inserted; and they demonstrate the limits of the voices of reason, which tend to be drowned in the noise of war. Here, the still images in the prologue of the soldier almost completely covered by ammunition belts and of the soldier whose helmet carries the slogan "make war not love" are expanded in sequences of direct brutality. The helicopter sound of the prologue is merged here with images of combat scenes. While close-up fighting scenes were used in *Front Line* to demonstrate a specific journalistic ethos, *In the Year of the Pig* selects battle footage that confronts the viewer with the dehumanizing effect of war. The victims are mainly terrorized civilians. American soldiers are

13 de Antonio, "Radical Scavenging," 12.

shown as infected by the brutality of war when they look at the destruction of rice supplies and of forests simply as jobs to be done, or even enjoyed; or when, in one famous scene, the veneer of decorum is ripped away and commander George S. Patton, with a sudden weird smile on his face, praises his soldiers as "a bloody good bunch of killers." Two figures are placed in specific positions within the contest of images. One is Ho Chi Minh. Early in the film the story of his life is told by Jean Lacouture, and some of his philosophy is explained by Professor Mus. A scene with Ho and Mus's historical explanation of Vietnamese survival strength appears at the end. Mus's description of Ho Chi Minh emphasizes the blending of Marxist and Confucian thinking. When Mus, not yet identified, first introduces Ho, his voice is heard over images of Vietnamese landscapes. At this point, one might suspect the idealization of Vietnam which Renov criticizes in documentaries by the Newsreel Collective. However, in the context of Mus's explanation, Ho Chi Minh is made to represent the survival of Vietnam, at all times based on simple village life, ties to ancestors and growing food—the continuity of cultural and material life. De Antonio adds an anticolonial and patriotic perspective when he inserts the comparison of Ho Chi Minh with George Washington in the words of Republican Senator Thruston B. Morton: "The thing that I think we felt right is that Ho Chi Minh, communist or no, is considered by the people of Vietnam, and I'm speaking now of the millions in South Vietnam, as a George Washington of his country."

The other person who is placed in a special position is Daniel Berrigan, priest and peace activist. Berrigan is shown speaking to the camera, with a calm and reasonable voice, about his experience in North Vietnam during a period of intensified American attacks: "There is nothing that has not been attacked." His conclusion about this massive military intervention is, first of all, that it is a failure: "the war is not working." The people of North Vietnam continue their lives facing the world's biggest machine of destruction. While Paul Mus focuses on the specific conditions in Vietnam, Berrigan draws general conclusions. The concentration of power, he argues, operates outside the real world of humans, which is continually produced by being imagined. In a world trying to humanize, the destructiveness of power is failing because it is anachronistic like "the dinosaur." In Berrigan's philosophical view, not only US military intervention is failing but a long

historical period as a whole: "it means the end of the giant, it means the last days of superman."

De Antonio felt close enough to Berrigan's philosophical views to make a documentary with the Berrigan brothers and the Plowshare Eight about their peace activities, released in 1982 under the title *In the King of Prussia*. In de Antonio's wider perspective, the Vietnam War was a horrible but transitory period in a long-term and global historical process. *In the Year of the Pig* does not include scenes of the rising tide of protest in the US—and de Antonio had to defend this approach against some critics—because the film aims at a deeper and more permanent form of protest and criticism that looks beyond the military disaster in Vietnam. He confronts the commercial media, Hollywood in particular, and the commercialization of life in general. In a variation of Plato's cave image, de Antonio agrees with Plato that we do not see the real world but only its shadows, but with a difference: "the shadow on the wall is the dollar sign."[14] Like Berrigan, de Antonio acts on the assumption that the real world has to be first imagined and then produced, which he attempts in the complex aesthetic structure of his documentaries. Therefore, he moves against the dominant media, often by using against them what they discard, an approach he has called "radical scavenging." His documentary project is conceived as a continuous uphill battle against the immorality and deceit of various factions of the establishment. It is based on a tough struggle against the weight of the power elite and frequently achieves its aesthetic aim: the appearance of ease and effortless elegance dealing with gravity, which he associates with ballet dancing: "And as I've made each film, it's become almost a balletic motion, in that I could feel the resistance of the Establishment against what I was doing."[15] For de Antonio, the history of the Vietnam War is not something that can be found and then revealed to the viewer, but a process of conflict that has to be created in the filmmaker's mind and then constructed in the form of a documentary film. Although the final product is polemical, he describes his working method in terms of poetry: "The individual frames, the pieces of the film are like words in a poem: they're just like all the words lying in the dictionary. It's how they're put together and used

14 de Antonio, "Emile de Antonio Interviews Himself," 302.
15 de Antonio, "Radical Scavenging," 3–4.

which is finally what matters."[16] There is a strong impulse of utopian expectation in de Antonio's films. While they were produced, and used, as interventions in the current protest movement, their polemical perspective relies on an implicit view of a better world.

The Vietnam War in Retrospect: A Lesson?

The clash of American perspectives on the Vietnam War did not, of course, end with military action or in the immediate post-war period. An interesting retrospective view of this crucial issue of 1960s and 1970s protest movements came out in late 2003, Errol Morris's documentary *The Fog of War*. It is based on Morris's 20 hours of interviews with Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense under President John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson from 1961 to 1968—his late deliberations about his long life. Although the *Fog of War* reaches from McNamara's youth to the present tense of the film, the period of seven years as manager of the Vietnam War is its center.

Errol Morris has developed a specific documentary style ever since he broke with Direct Cinema conventions in the late 1970s with his *Gates of Heaven* (1978) and with his very successful documentary intervention in a murder case with *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). Like these earlier films, *The Fog of War* is based on Morris' sharp perception of how individuals and social contexts interact and on his skillful interview technique. It also resembles them in its approach of drawing attention to its method. Morris explicates the interview situation, for example, when McNamara comments on it at the beginning, or when Morris' voice is heard asking questions or making comments. Tracing his life, not always chronologically, the film makes use of McNamara's reflections and soul searching to develop an elegantly designed structure of a prologue, 11 "lessons," and an epilogue. In McNamara's memories and Morris's visual comments on them, the film reflects and problematizes various significant aspects of American society in the twentieth century. In spite of the pedagogical connotation of the term 'lesson', these sections do not present anything like teaching material. Within an almost philosophical conceptual frame, they unfold the ambiguities and complexities of the situations McNamara tried to control.

16 Westerbeck, "Some Out-Takes," 140–43.

Under the title "Belief and seeing are both often wrong," lesson 7 starts with the problem of attacks on American warships in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964. President Johnson, who had his own doubts about whether these attacks had actually taken place, used them to get extended war powers from Congress and to begin bombing North Vietnam. De Antonio had been guided by his distrust of the establishment and his trust in the statements of American seamen to present this incident as pretense for a wider war. Morris focuses on McNamara's uncertainties at the time and his decision, in a situation of conflicting information, to trust the top military; only in retrospect can he accept the fact that in reality no attack had occurred. Morris comments on this situation by including voice recordings from that time that discuss whether any attacks took place: while Admiral Sharp expresses doubt, he is overruled by General Burchinal, who insists that the attack was a fact. In retrospect McNamara refers to the "mind set" at the time to explain his mistake, and Morris shows falling domino pieces over a map of Vietnam to explicate McNamara's reference to the domino theory. Morris's clever montage methods let the audience get a glimpse behind the veil of power. Unlike de Antonio's polemical stance, Morris's approach of correlating relevant, often contradictory, facts resembles rather the work of a detective, which he knew through personal experience. When McNamara speaks at the time of a "battle for the hearts and minds," the film comments on it with images of bombings. When President Johnson says in a recorded conversation that "we're losing," Morris follows up with a public speech in which McNamara claims that "we" have stopped losing the war.

Morris does not always comment on McNamara's actions at the time but leaves much to the audience. When McNamara, in retrospect, expresses his belief that the war was the result of misunderstandings, something he tried to address in a post-war visit to Vietnam, the film gives him space to develop his questionable arguments: that the US were wrongly perceived by the Vietnamese as new colonialists, and that the Vietnamese could have achieved everything they did without the high cost of war. In fact, Morris is more interested in documenting McNamara's contradictory perceptions, not in denouncing them. He views McNamara with respect and a sharp awareness of his ultimately tortured life. Philipp Glass's indeterminate music enhances the atmosphere of ambivalence that Morris achieves. The epilogue shows McNamara driving his car without a declared destination and commenting that he is "damned." By merging McNamara's life with its social

and political contexts through highly intelligent montage, Morris's perspective lets McNamara emerge as a complex representative of one section of the American power elite at the time of the Vietnam War: its hubris as much as its honest self-doubts and its moral failure in a period of crisis.

Perceptions of the Vietnam War in Cold War Contexts

Public controversy about the Vietnam War in the US was, of course, not insulated from global conflicts between the two dominant political systems in the 1960s. The war emerged as a test of the legitimacy of US policy and American values in many parts of the world, and as a catalyst of documentary interventions in the struggle for people's 'hearts and minds'. As a focus of Cold War conflicts, Berlin offered very different opportunities for documentary filmmakers in the East and in the West. Documentaries produced only a few miles apart developed perspectives of the Vietnam War that shared a critical impetus. But the documentaries by the team 'Heynowski & Scheumann' in East Berlin and the young German filmmaker Harun Farocki in West Berlin differed radically in their methods and the targets of their criticism.

Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann were attracted to postwar Berlin and pursued their journalistic careers on this difficult terrain with great skill and success. The German film industry, concentrated in Berlin, had been destroyed even more thoroughly than most other industries in the course of the war. But film was considered by the Allies an important medium to reach, and possibly re-educate, the traumatized population. The Soviet Military Administration (SMA) initiated film screenings soon after they moved into Berlin, and film production began in the Soviet sector not much later. In 1946, SMA also founded the East German film company DEFA, which changed its legal status several times and produced a large number of fiction and documentary films until the end of the German Democratic Republic. DEFA stock is now available through the DEFA Foundation distributor TOBIAS in Berlin-Adlershof and through the DEFA Film Library of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Heynowski and Scheumann began to work with DEFA in 1965. After their great success *The Laughing Man* (1965) about a German mercenary soldier, they held a

privileged position within DEFA. After 1969 they ran their own separate studio, "H & S," where they enjoyed excellent working conditions in many ways: technical equipment and support, financing, distribution and leeway to develop their documentary aesthetics, as long as they did not cross certain political red lines—which they eventually did. Their documentaries, more than 70 over 25 years, focused on three major areas: survivals of fascism in Germany, the struggles in Chile under Allende and Pinochet, and the war in Vietnam and Cambodia.[17]

Among the Vietnam documentaries of Studio "H & S," *Pilots in Pyjamas* (1968, 311 min.) stands out because of the size of the project. The film is based on many hours of surprisingly detailed interviews that Heynowski and Scheumann conducted with captured American pilots in Hanoi. *Am Wassergraben* (1978, 15:18 min.) uses those pictures of the My Lai massacre on March 16, 1968, which the US Army photographer Ronald Haeberle did not hand over to the military but published in the US; images of the village taken by Heynowski and Scheumann ten years later; and interviews with several survivors, in an effort to reconstruct the perspective of the victims. Their short documentary *Remington Cal. 12* (1973, 15 min.) is a particularly stringent realization of their aesthetic approach.

Remington Cal. 12 begins with references to hunting: shots at flying birds, short remarks by hunters about Remington projectiles used for hunting, and a detailed examination of one Remington cartridge. Caliber 12, not generally available for hunting, is shown to contain 20 tiny arrows, which fragment in human bodies—a killing method forbidden by the Geneva Convention. The effects of this cartridge on materials that range from hard to soft to organic are demonstrated in a setting of technical testing. Remington/Dupont as producer of guns and ammunition for hunting animals is briefly brought into the widening perspective. The film avoids polemical rhetoric and drains emotional connotations of its commentary in an attitude of technical inspection and sober reporting. But the perspective changes when the film shifts from a hunting to a military context. The bestselling song "Ballad of the Green Berets" accompanies brief scenes of American Special Forces preparing for action. Images of helicopters and a glimpse of a dark-haired prisoner provide a brief reference to Vietnam. The carefully constructed escalation of images of potential violence leads to a sequence

17 Steinmetz, "Heynowski & Scheumann," 365–79.

in which a Special Forces soldier handles his gun and praises the deadly effects on humans of this particular type of cartridge (fig. 4). The film does not include any battle scenes or even images of direct violence against people. In a sequence of economically placed short scenes, it develops an image-based associative line of argument: that killing in Vietnam is done as a form of animal hunt. The didactic conclusion is attached in the printed words of an army publication, which report that the US is testing new weapons in the war in Vietnam. The film avoids representation of actual events in Vietnam. Instead, it uses various image sources—from arranged and staged scenes, American film material, and some printed pages—to develop the careful visual construction of an argument: that the Vietnam War is a culmination of a culture of violence. In the wide range of documentaries critical of the Vietnam War, *Remington Cal. 12* is not unusual, except in one essential aspect. It implies the concept of an entire society which fuses war, the weapon industry and fighters into a system without an alternative.

A different form of radical documentary criticism of the Vietnam War emerged in the context of the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dffb) and the student movement in West Berlin. The Berlin film academy, the first academic training institution in the Federal Republic of Germany, opened its doors in 1966 with expectations that it would provide an essential impetus for the recovery of German film after the destructions of the war. Escalating confrontations brought the student movement also into this institution. Students began to make films about the conservative cold war press, the killing by police of student Benno Ohnesorg, the shooting of student leader Rudi Dutschke, and about the war in Vietnam. They occupied the film academy and changed its name to Dziga Vertov Academy. In November 1968, 18 of the students were expelled, among them Harun Farocki. Decades and many films later, Farocki started teaching at the dffb and became a professor at the University of Vienna.

Farocki's film *Nicht löschbares Feuer* (*Inextinguishable Fire*, 1969) broke with several documentary conventions in ways that left significant traces in the history of the genre. In the US, Jill Godmilow responded to Farocki's film almost 30 years later with his own *What Farocki Taught Us* (1998).[18] *Nicht löschbares Feuer* deals with the use of napalm in Vietnam

18 Kahana, *Intelligence Work*, 341–47.

Fig. 4: Screenshot from Remington Cal. 12 *(Heynowski and Scheumann, 1973)*

with rigorously anti-illusionary methods. The film emphasizes its non-realistic method and appeals to the intellect, to morality and, at the end, to the need for action. With minimal props, it creates something like a laboratory space and atmosphere, where people perform functions as non-actors and actions are staged as demonstrations of intellectual analysis. After reading, in a neutral voice, the report of napalm effects on one victim, Farocki demonstrates the limits of images trying to represent reality directly when he burns himself with a cigarette and explains how much hotter napalm is (fig. 5). The images of napalm effects, he argues, would close our eyes and stop our analysis. Opposing the heat of napalm with the coolness of his representation, Farocki proceeds to demonstrate, in a Brechtian form of 'estrangement', or anti-illusionary showing, the process of production whose end result is napalm. His analysis looks beyond the war in Vietnam and the use of napalm at the division of labor and the production for destruction and profit. Relying on the assumption that the logic of capitalistic production can be reversed, and made to serve human needs, the film leads up to an appeal to transform analysis into action: now.

Fig. 5: Screenshot from "Nicht löschbares Feuer" *(Harun Farocki, 1969).*

Farocki's subsequent films, more than 90so far, develop his method of analysis and didactic demonstration, but without the activism of this early film. In 1969, however, Farocki could see himself as one of many carried along by worldwide historical change. In Berlin, still occupied by the wartime Allies, the sectors in the West provided the space for a new alliance, where American and German youth movements interacted closely in the protest against the war in Vietnam. Beyond, but also on the fringes of existing institutions and political structures, a culture of transatlantic opposition to cold war mentalities and the Vietnam War emerged under they eyes of the Western Allies. At the Freie Universität, initiated and financially supported by the US as an alternative to the university in East Berlin, professors who had emigrated and returned taught a younger generation. Herbert Marcuse, by that time a professor in San Diego and a guest professor at the Freie Universität Berlin, spoke to big crowds in a series of lectures in 1967. American SDS and German SDS, the student organizations, developed close contacts.[19] The war in Vietnam provided a common focus for a wide

19 Klimke, *The Other Alliance*, 10–39.

spectrum of the countercultural impetus which shook up the 1960s. Representations by the dominant media lost their legitimacy for those who expected a better world, and producing their own images was an essential part of 1960s activism.

In the 1960s, images of the war in Vietnam were a daily presence in American homes, and they circulated around the globe. Those who resisted this military excursion had grown up with TV and understood the specific power of images, joined the struggle over their control and hoped to reach out with their own visual interventions to a different and wider, ultimately global public. The Vietnam War provided for a heterogeneous and widely dispersed countercultural movement an opportunity to fuse various local and international issues in a utopian desire for a better world. In Germany, the reaction against the involvement of an older generation in fascism and war was a strong motive in an anti-war stance, although not infrequently as an unacknowledged subtext—as in Farocki's documentary about napalm.[20] In the US, a tradition of idealistic hope for a 'new world' pervaded many forms of 1960s protest. De Antonio's critical analysis of the Vietnam War includes a patriotic subtext about a better America.[21] Todd Gitlin, president of SDS from June 1963 to June 1964, published his dissertation about the media perception of the American student movement in 1978 under the title "The Whole World Is Watching"—a distinct echo to the seventeenth-century Puritan belief that "the eyes of all people are upon us" and that a small group of the committed was, in fact, a historical avant-garde, whose actions needed to be recorded. Documentary critiques of the Vietnam War varied widely in their perception and their aesthetic realization, but shared, more or less, the hope that the images they produced were historical documents and would shape the course of events towards a better world without war.

FILMOGRAPHY

Apocalypse Now. Directed by Francis F. Coppola. *Apocalypse Now Redux*, extended version. München: Universum Film, 2009. DVD.

20 Kahana, *Intelligence Work*, 343.
21 Hoenisch, "History Is the Theme," 235–66.

The Fog of War. Directed by Errol Morris. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Classics, 2004. DVD.

Frontline. Directed by David Bradbury. Mullumbimby, Australia: Frontline Films, 1979. DVD.

Hearts and Minds: A Historic Visual Chronicle of the Vietnam War. Directed by Peter Davis. Produced by Touchstone-Audieff Production for BBS Productions. Orland Park, IL: MPI Home Video, 1991. VHS.

In the Year of the Pig. Directed by Emile de Antonio. Emile de Antonio: Films of a Radical Saint. Chatsworth, CA: Home Vision Entertainment, 2008. DVD.

Nicht Löschbares Feuer. Directed by Harun Farocki. Harun Farocki Filme 1967–2005. Berlin: Absolut MEDIEN, 2009. DVD.

Remington Cal.12. Directed by Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann. Berlin: Progress Film-Verleih, 1972.

Why Vietnam? Washington, DC: US Department of Defence, 1965.

Bibliography

Amman, Frank, Benjamin Gabel, Roy Grundmann, Kristin Vincke, and Reiner Walther. "Ein schriftliches Interview mit Emile de Antonio." In *Der amerikanische Dokumentarfilm der 60er Jahre*, edited by Mo Beyerle and Christine N. Brinckmann, 377–78. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1991.

Barnouw, Erik. *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Barsam, Richard M. *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Capps, Walter H., ed. *The Vietnam Reader.* New York: Routledge, 1991.

de Antonio, Emile. "'History Is the Theme of All My Films': An Interview with Emile de Antonio." By Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas. *Cineaste* 12, no. 2 (1982): 20–28.

———. "*In the King of Prussia*: Emile de Antonio Interviews Himself (1982)." In *Emile de Antonio: A Reader*, edited by Douglas Kellner and Dan Streible, 301–308. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

———. “Radical Scavenging: An Interview with Emile de Antonio.” By Bernard Weiner. *Film Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 3–15.

Gitlin, Todd. “The Achievements of the War-Protest Movement.” In Capps, *Vietnam Reader*, 157–67.

Grajeda, Tony. “The Winning and Losing of Hearts and Minds: Vietnam, Iraq, and the Claims of the War Documentary.” *Jump Cut* 49 (Spring 2007): 1–23.

Herr, Michael. *Dispatches.* New York: Avon, 1978.

Hoenisch, Michael. “‘History Is the Theme of All My Films’: Geschichtskonstruktionen in Emile de Antonios *In the Year of the Pig* (1969) und Barbara Kopples *Harlan County, U.S.A.* (1976).” In *Die Repräsentation sozialer Konflikte im Dokumentarfilm der USA*, edited by Michael Hoenisch, 235–66. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1996.

Kahana, Jonathan. *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Klimke, Martin. *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Lewis, Randolph. *Emile de Antonio: Radical Filmmaker in Cold War America*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000.

Nichols, Bill. “The Voice of Documentary.” In *New Challenges for Documentary*, edited by Alan Rosenthal, 48–63. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Vineland.* New York: Penguin, 1991.

Renov, Michael. “Imaging the Other: Representations of Vietnam in Sixties Political Documentary.” In *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, edited by Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, 255–68. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Rowe, John Carlos. “Eye-Witness: Documentary Styles in the American Representation of Vietnam.” In *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, edited by John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, 148–74. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Scott-Heron, Gil. “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.” In *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, edited by Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay, 61–62. New York: Norton, 1997.

Steinmetz, Rüdiger. "Heynowski & Scheumann: The GDR's Leading Documentary Film Team." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no. 3 (2004): 365–79.

Westerbeck, Colin J., Jr. "Some Out-Takes from Radical Film Making: Emile de Antonio." *Sight and Sound* 39, no. 3 (1970): 140–43.

Westmoreland, William C. "Vietnam in Perspective." In Capps, *Vietnam Reader*, 116–24.

Zinn, Howard. "The Impossible Victory: Vietnam." Chap. 18 in *A People's History of the United States*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005.