University of Reading

We Tattooed Your Mother: Agential Realism, Filmic Realism, Documentary Practice

Ph.D. in Film, Theatre and Television

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Declaration of Authorship

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

This thesis and its associated practice-as-research film, *We Tattooed Your Mother*, explore filmic realism and documentary objectivity through Karen Barad's agential realism (1996; 2007). The practice-based research makes methodological use of editing, sound and visual effects to complicate the apparently teleological relationship between myself, my Brazilian, Catholic mother Regina, her mother Edith, and her Polish, Jewish grandmother Helena/Hencza. I term this methodology devised through rigorous experimentation *diffractive*, after Barad's adaptation (2007; 2014) of Donna Haraway's term (1997; 2004). The written and filmic components of this research thus generate a theory-practice-theory feedback loop through an essayistic first-person documentary of my transnational matrilineal genealogy, resulting in a filmic materialisation of my mother's and my own entangled embodied reality. *We Tattooed Your Mother* investigates our entwined intergenerational identities, including questions of gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, class and religion within the context of a relatively commonplace scenario of Eastern European Jews immigrating to early 20th Century Brazil. The film is a story about intergenerational hauntings, the powerful currents of geopolitics and migration, and the complexities, limits and possibilities of an auto/biographical film produced over more than a decade.

Barad's account enfolds theoretical quantum physics with feminist and queer theory to challenge the representational metaphysics that also permeates documentary theory. Drawing from Barad's materialist update (2007) of Judith Butler's performativity (1999; 2011), I propose that the filmmaking apparatus is performative. I argue that agential realism generates a framework for documentary objectivity without

a representational foundation that intrinsically separates human practices from nature. Engaging filmic realism through agential realism, I illustrate how Barad's work suggests a different understanding of how film meaningfully enacts the world on screen. I conclude that, at their best, documentary films inspire a rethinking of reality by displacing boundaries that might otherwise be taken for granted, with material and ethical consequences.

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Note to the Reader

I recommend that the reader watch the practice-as-research film, *We Tattooed Your Mother* (2024), before reading this thesis. The film is 87 minutes long and can be accessed at the link below:

[redacted]

Aims, Objectives and Rationale

> I theorize *with* my films, not *about* them. The relationship between the verbal, the musical and the visual, just like the relationship between theory and practice is not one of illustration, description or explication. It can be one of inquiry, displacement and expansive enrichment. The verbal forms a parallel track and is another creative dimension.
>
> —Trinh T. Minh-ha (Trinh and Hohenberger 2007: 107).[1]

This thesis and its associated film research aim to rearticulate notions of filmic realism and documentary objectivity in light of Karen Barad's agential realism (1996; 2007). The double trajectory of written text and creative film practice-as-research constitute the coextensive arrangement of research. This text outlines the theoretical inquiry that informs and is informed by the non-fiction film component titled *We Tattooed Your*

[1] I have identified only my emphasis added to citations within this thesis. Any unidentified emphasis comes from the original cited text.

Mother (*WTYM*). The film practice element is enriched by agential realism without being about the philosophical approach itself. The internationally accepted definition of research set out in the *Frascati Manual* (OECD 2015: 44) states: 'Research and experimental development (R&D) comprise creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge—including knowledge of humankind, culture and society—and to devise new applications of available knowledge'. *WTYM* undertakes creative and systematic work through the practice of filmmaking, including post-production methodologies. The essayistic, first-person documentary uses editing, sound and visual effects to complicate the apparently teleological relationship between myself, my mother Regina, her mother Edith, and her grandmother Helena/Hencza. This methodology was implemented through rigorous experimentation, and I term this approach 'diffractive' after Barad's adaptation (2007; 2014) of Donna Haraway's notion of diffraction (1997; 2004), developed later in this introduction, and in Chapters 1 and 3. This text aims to explore how the film's production was guided by the theoretical frameworks described herein, while also attempting 'to gain rigorous insights into how a work was made' (Batty and Kerrigan 2018: 1). *WTYM* thus generates a theory-practice-theory feedback loop through an essayistic first-person documentary about my transnational matrilineal genealogy. The film materialises my mother's and my own entangled embodied reality.

The objectives of this thesis and attendant film can be more specifically summarised as follows:

- To develop potential approaches to filmic realism, particularly within documentary studies, in light of agential realism's ethico-onto-epistemological proposition.

- To re-configure theoretical notions of documentary objectivity, drawing from Barad's materialist update (2007) of Judith Butler's performativity (1999; 2011).
- To re-articulate agential realism through practice-led research.
- To re-imagine and theorise my own documentary film practice methodology drawn from agential realism, in particular its deployment of Haraway's diffraction.
- To re-imagine my matrilineal heritage through creative screen practice.
- To complicate given notions of cultural identity and matrilineal inter-generational temporalities.
- To use visual effects, generative artificial intelligence, editing and a/synchronous sound as research tools.

The relevance of Barad's interdisciplinary approach to film studies, including documentary theory, is becoming more visible in recent publications, notably in William Brown's monograph *Non-cinema: global digital filmmaking and the multitude* (2018) and making two recent appearances in influential journal *Screen* at the time of writing (Cooper 2022; Lübecker and Rugo 2023). I believe Barad's contribution provides a way of thinking about documentary filmmaking as a specific enactment or unit of reality rather than its re-presentation. Representationalism, as defined by Barad (2007: 46), 'is the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing'. In other words, Barad argues that a pervasive philosophy of representation across disciplines entrenches a problematic and consequential duality between human (culture) and world (nature). As such, this thesis

proposes that the act of filming participates in the generation of phenomena rather than re-presenting easily isolated natural entities. To borrow Barad's terminology, I suggest that filmmaking is a material-discursive practice; it is a worlding.[2] The premise that informs my argument, drawn from agential realism, is that ontological reality is inseparably entangled with the various human and non-human epistemologies through which it is understood, including documentary films. Agential realism demonstrates how any understanding of the world, whether human, non-human, or more-than-human, is fundamentally enmeshed in how it materialises.[3] In the case of this thesis, I outline the ethical repercussions agential realism has for documentary film practice and its theorisation, particularly in Barad's expansion of Butler's performativity and Haraway's diffraction.

Synopsis: *We Tattooed Your Mother*

In 2010, I filmed my Brazilian mother Regina getting one tattoo covered with another in Salt Lake City, Utah. This event prompts a series of interviews about her multiple

[2] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985a; 1985b) subverts Martin Heidegger's aesthetic notion of worlding to mean the construction of worlds through various narratives, knowledge systems, and discourses. Spivak (1985b: 253) demonstrates how violent imperialist erasures of indigenous worlds rely on the categorisation of colonies as 'uninscribed earth' prior to being cartographically mapped by Europeans into 'thingliness'. Worlding in this sense is not a neutral or objective process but rather an objectification of the world along a particular logic of power relations. As a second point, Barad's use of the term 'discourse', inherited from Butler and Foucault, implicates language as a materialising action that is deeply embedded in social relations of power. Barad (2007: 63) is careful to outline that 'Discursive practices are the material conditions that define what counts as meaningful statements'. It is important to emphasise that discourse and meaning are entangled, and not solely related to language. This is important because, as Dai Vaughan (1999: 51) puts it: 'In documentary, as perhaps in film generally, meaning precedes syntax. Film has no "parts of speech"; and only in granting it significance do we freeze its association into a presumptive grammar'.

[3] Rogers, Castree and Kitchin (2013) define more-than-human as a 'term used positively to highlight the absolute dependence of humans on a vast and complex array of non-human entities, only some of which are subject to human control. In both cases the more-than-human accents a relational worldview in which parts cannot be dissociated readily'.

tattoos and our relationship, leading to a transnational journey investigating her past, her mother's past, and her grandmother's past. The pre-title sequence sets the stakes in a letter addressed to her. The film is subsequently divided into six 'phases'. The first phase is set in the tattoo parlour alluded to above. Phase 2 is set in Oeiras, Portugal and Phase 3 in São Paulo, Brazil, where I interview Regina about various things, including her mother and grandmother. In phase 4, set in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, I film the streets where she lived as a child and adolescent. Phase 5 is set in Rio de Janeiro where her grandmother immigrated to in the 1920s and where her mother grew up. The sixth and final phase takes place in Poland, in the location where her grandmother is thought to have been born, a former *shtetl* eradicated by Nazis. *WTYM* is a story about intergenerational hauntings, shifting identities, the powerful currents of geopolitics and migration, and the complexities, limits and possibilities of an auto/biographical film produced over more than a decade.[4]

Agential Realism, Representation, Diffraction

Barad draws from Niels Bohr's physics-philosophy to propose an alternative definition of realism—agential realism—that does not choose between the material or the discursive, proposing instead that they are indivisibly entangled: primacy is given to relations rather than pre-existing relata. Representation encompasses various specific

[4] I borrow the slashed figuration of the term 'auto/biographical' from the title of Laura Marcus' book on the subject (1994). As Marcus (1994: 9) has it: 'disciplines, as well as genres, have histories, and that their boundaries are always contestable. Autobiography functions in this book as a topic, a resource and a site of struggle'. Marcus' parameters align well with how auto/biography functions in *WTYM*. On a practical level, the film is both autobiographical as it concerns my past, but evidently generates biographies of my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. The boundaries between auto and matrilineal biographies are sites of struggle articulated in the film.

meanings within different disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics, the law, politics, and the arts. It is widely applied in documentary studies. Barad (1996: 168) develops agential realism by questioning the pervasive philosophy of representation in the field of science, challenging the assumption in classical, Newtonian physics of 'an autonomously existing world that is describable independently of our experimental investigations of it'. The fact that measurements can be reproduced, Barad (1996: 169) continues, is used as objective evidence that they re-present 'intrinsic properties that characterize the objects of an uncontrolled, independent reality'. Scientific practices of measurement, Barad suggests, effect a Cartesian cut that make distinct entities intelligible as what is being measured (the object) and the apparatus that measures it (the subject). I will outline this reasoning in more detail as I develop how we might think about documentaries and the possibility of objectivity without grounding the argument in representation or unprovable metaphysics. Indeed, representation has a long history in film and media studies, and I will engage with these notions presently. In the first instance, I would like to highlight that suggesting, after Barad, that there are insoluble ethical issues in systems of representation does not mean this rich theoretical history should be discarded wholesale. Nonetheless, I align myself with Lübecker and Rugo's suggestion (2023: 172) that an approach rooted in the European and North American humanities tradition of representation 'is out of sync with current scientific knowledge and problematic for a contemporary understanding of politics and aesthetics'.[5] Furthermore, many documentary films have been moving away from representation as a paradigm for decades, most notably those that we might term

[5] Several academics are engaging with cinema using eastern and indigenous philosophies that resonate with my proposed agential realist approach. See Brasil and Belisário (2016); Fan (2022); Yu (2020; 2023) for some notable examples.

essayistic, a notion I will outline in more detail in Chapter 3. As such, I propose that Barad's work calls for a re-evaluation of how documentary films are theorised, and that it can also inspire documentary practice. Agential realism challenges many of the epistemologies and ontologies in European and North American philosophical traditions. This thesis engages with many of these discourses by seeking out what Elizabeth Grosz (2005: 3) calls 'an affirmative method, a mode of assenting to rather than dissenting from those "primary" texts'. This is a key aspect of a diffractive approach. Haraway (2004: 68ff) argues that diffraction moves away from fixed divisions between word and referent, meaning and matter, nature and culture. Further, diffraction functions as feminist practice by sidestepping the 'politics of negation' implicit in reflective critique which, according to Iris van der Tuin (2018: 99), serves only to put 'the negated on a pedestal'. In other words, to negatively critique the problematic aspects of a work simply draws more attention to the very object the critique aims to change—it entrenches the implicit duality of criticism. Diffraction proposes using the productive parts of any work, canonical or not, to find resonances and moments of insight that produce knowledge by virtue of being interfered with. This kind of impure approach resonates with my sensibility as a filmmaker; it is not, however, an excuse to circumvent rigour as I hope will be clear to the reader by the end of this thesis.

Haraway (2000: 103) claims that pervasive metaphors of reflection and reflexivity reiterate 'polluted' notions of re-production that reify an objective separation from nature. Nonetheless, she is clear in not being against self-reflexivity, or dismissive of this rich tradition across disciplines. As she (2000: 103) puts it:

> Visual metaphors are quite interesting. I am not about to give them up anymore than I am about to give up democracy, sovereignty, and agency and all such polluted inheritances. I think the way I work is to take my own polluted inheritance—cyborg is one of them—and try to rework it.

In my case, while I draw from agential realism to complicate the inherent primacy of the pro-filmic event within the notion of indexicality, the index as trace continues to be a useful concept in my rearticulation (see Chapter 1). The idea is to intervene upon the notions being drawn upon without 'leaving a text untouched' (van der Tuin 2011: 23), thus disengaging from binaries of celebration or critique in favour of transforming texts being read into something new, while tracking the effects of that difference. Haraway (2004: 69) puts this in the context of 'pregnancy and gestation', a useful connection for a project concerned with mothers and their offspring. Haraway argues that diffraction displaces 'the terminology of reproduction with that of generation. Very rarely does anything really get reproduced; what's going on is much more polymorphous than that'. In a theoretical context, productive aspects of texts can be put into dialogue with one another to generate something different and open to change. As such, when this thesis questions inherent limitations of ontological approaches, this does not equate to doing away with ontologies altogether. The point, to borrow Vilém Flusser's metaphor (2013: 11), is to avoid inverting the epistemological function of a model to the point where we look at the landscape to orient ourselves on the map. A map is useful so long as we understand its onto-epistemological, productive function. The same applies to the ontological boundaries defined by documentary film studies.

Representation, Phenomena, Performativity

In Stuart Hall's definition (1997: 17), representation 'is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language, and that it is through these linguistic concepts that we refer to 'the "real" world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events'. The material world, Hall argues, does not convey meaning, it is ontologically separate from its epistemological representation. Hall draws from Marx, Saussure and Foucault, among others, to propose a foundational formulation of cultural representation as partly constitutive of both knowledge and identity. His influence is fundamental to the field of Cultural Studies, with a consequent bearing upon film studies. Nagib (2011: 3) points out that Hall's nuanced work is often reduced to a view that any cultural object is encoded with a distorting ideology which can be 'decoded' from pure reality. As she puts it: 'the critic is invested with the role of a decoder who sets out to unearth from an artwork what underlies its treacherous appearance, that is to say, its 'real' meaning'. Nagib argues that in this scenario, the distanced critic has unmediated access to pure reality, which is unavailable to the blind artist who can merely represent their own ideological standpoint. Seeking a different approach, she sketches out a timeline of the notions of 'representational' versus 'presentational' film practices, drawing upon Noël Burch, Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault. In these accounts, a presentational cinema originating in raucous British music halls, North American vaudeville theatres and French *caf'concs*, practices that Gunning (2006) terms a 'cinema of attractions', is 'quite at ease in acknowledging its own artifice' (Nagib 2011: 4). Burch (1990) posits that several syntagmatic inventions in the first four decades of cinema practices result in the standardisation of an 'institutional mode of representation' (IMR) in commercial

cinema. For Burch, the IMR seeks to discipline and suture the subject-spectator into identifying with the camera and a fully immersive, enclosed diegesis—a practice inherited from bourgeois theatre. This reasoning, Nagib posits, establishes a duality between mainstream and counter-cultural practices that serves only to entrench both.

Gunning and Gaudreault add nuance in arguing how early cinema intended to show the world rather than represent it, and Jacques Rancière (2006: 117) suggests that cinema undoes the 'representative regime' of earlier artforms to produce a new, 'aesthetic regime'. The cinematographic camera, he argues (2006: 2), records things 'as they come into being, in a state of waves and vibrations, before they can be qualified as intelligible objects, people, or events due to their descriptive and narrative properties'. He (2006: 117) posits:

> The representative regime understands artistic activity on the model of an active form that imposes itself upon inert matter and subjects it to its representational ends. The aesthetic regime of art rejects the idea of form wilfully imposing itself on matter and instead identifies the power of the work with the identity of contraries: the identity of active and passive, of thought and non-thought, of intentional and unintentional.

Rancière (2006: 118) draws heavily here from one of cinema's earliest theorists, Jean Epstein, to argue that cinema escapes the representative regime because of the inherent passivity of the camera combined with the active eye of the artist-director, which produces 'pure affects extracted from the state of things'. To elaborate, an artwork from the representative regime does not require the presence of the object it depicts in order

to be created; a painter's memory of a table is all she needs to re-present it upon her canvas. A pre-requisite of a photographed object, however, is that it be present in the situation when and where its photographing takes place. Filmmaking is thus empirical, becoming an artform according to a filmmaker's aesthetic treatment of each individual image and their sum duration. For the audience, the filmed object is understood to have been objectively present at the time of photography. A film's aesthetic is judged solely upon how the filmed objects are framed by the filmmaker's images; in other words, a film's mode of address. For Epstein, Christoph Wall-Romana (2013: 3) claims, 'a movie is not the *representation* of a pre-existing story, but the *presentation* of dramatic situations considered chiefly in how they appeal to our imagination and perception here and now'.[6] Rancière adds that nonfiction films enjoy the privileged position of experimenting 'more freely with the variable game of action and life, significance and insignificance'. By being understood as a recording of documentary situations framed by directorial intention, Rancière's 'film fable' emerges when cinema's essential ontological equivalence becomes understood epistemologically. In Rancière's account reality is meaningless; film *presents* meaning.

Nagib (2011: 8) proposes that the distinction between presentational and representational cinema is a matter of a filmmaker's choice to either privilege a filmic 'production of reality' or its simulation. Presentational or representational films, for Nagib, are defined not by how well they re-present reality but by the modes of address that result from specific modes of production. Nagib (2011: 11) draws from Alain Badiou to argue that a productive fidelity by the crew to the truth of the unpredictable

[6] The latter is entangled with Epstein's notion of *photogénie*, a concept I will grapple with in Chapters 2 and 3.

pro-filmic event is an ethical matter. In other words, realism is a question of ethical commitment and responsibility to the contingent, unpredictable pro-filmic reality that is conveyed to the audience by way of a film's address: its engagement with the reality on location.

Agential realism posits that systems of representation have far deeper metaphysical implications. Drawing from Niels Bohr, Barad (2007: 126) posits that reality is inherently indeterminate, becoming determinate within specific 'intra-actions'. While meaninglessness, unpredictability and indeterminacy might on the surface seem like closely related terms, Barad begins from a different starting point. Drawing on 'quantum physics, science studies, the philosophy of physics, feminist theory, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, (post-) Marxist theory, and poststructuralist theory', Barad (2007: 25) argues that reality is not an enclosed entity subject to inherent physical or philosophical laws passively waiting to be measured by neutral instruments. In this account, as will become clear in due course, the film camera is not the passive recording device suggested by Rancière. Barad builds upon Bohr's theory of complementarity, which proposes an inherent connection between meaning and becoming, rather than the assured existence of unknown or unknowable aspects of reality (per Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle). This 'radical reworking' (Barad 2007: 33) formulates a new set of terms and definitions, the key one being intra-action: '*the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*' through which phenomena are enacted. According to Barad, agency shifts from being a human-centred capacity to act to become material activity itself—a doing that makes intelligibility possible while constraining that same intelligibility. Drawing from Butler's performativity (1999; 2011) that articulates gendered identity as repetitive performative behaviours

constrained by social interpellation, Barad (2003: 813) argues that repeated intra-actions result in 'thingification': the attribution of inherent properties and boundaries to objects that enact their very intelligibility as objects. Agency here is the dynamism of matter from which objects-in-phenomena emerge in intra-action. Barad's linguistic reinventions aim to displace habitual reasoning about reality and representation. These rearticulated terms and their logic, crudely sketched out here, take some getting used to; I will use various examples throughout this text that illustrate their significance to documentary film practices.

In the first instance, it is important to differentiate Bohr's definition of phenomena from the Platonic definition of appearances that mimic a transcendent world of Ideas. Bohrian quantum mechanics challenge the notion of atemporal, divine Forms to propose that objects obtain specific properties within phenomena. Barad (2007: 412) clearly articulates how this differs from philosophical phenomenology: 'phenomena should not be understood as the way things-in-themselves *appear*: that is, what is at issue is not Kant's notion of phenomena as distinguished from noumena'. Phenomena are entangled, 'ontologically primitive relations—relations without preexisting relata' (2007: 139). Rather than the phenomenal perception of an object appearing as a representation of a pre-existing, singular, easily disentangled object, an object comes to be in phenomena—in all the possible ways it becomes intelligible. And even then, it remains entangled with what is excluded within each specific phenomenal enactment. As Barad (2007: 140) summarises it: 'Phenomena are constitutive of reality. Reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena'. Take, for instance, a simple example of how we might observe an object emerging from a simple scenario. If I stand atop a cliff, the solidity of the rock beneath

my feet stops me from falling to my death. Let's say this rock is, to me, smooth and slippery. We can intuit how it is simultaneously uneven, porous and sticky to an ant creeping along its underside. The same cliff can be traversed by a microorganic endolith that thrives within the equally solid boundaries that hold me up and to which the ant attaches itself. To claim a cliff is inherently solid, slippery, or flat excludes the possibility that it is not so to an ant or an endolith, to name a few. The larger point is that there is no inherent material determinacy to what we are calling Andrew, cliff, ant, or endolith.[7] I have drawn semantic boundaries of intelligibility by meaningfully taxonomising them as separate entities through my intervening observation; observation which is constrained by multiple other intra-acting agencies. These objects emerge in phenomena through repeated intra-actions that generate relations of exteriority and interiority. Drawing these boundaries enacts specific ontological properties in relation to each defined entity. Each intra-action generates its own onto-epistemological properties, possibilities and spatiotemporalities while excluding several others. We might parse these differences in terms of scale, but the notion of scale is observation based on human perspective, an application of a specifically arranged intra-active difference in the world rather than a simple re-presentation of what is already there. We only need to think about the anthropocentric assumption signified by the terms macroscopic and microscopic: we can intuit that the experience of an endolith is not the microscopic realm we identify it as, but simply the size of the world. In other words, the size of the world is indeterminate until made determinate by specific, repeatable

[7] Graham Harman (DeLanda & Harman: 2018) derisively suggests that for Barad 'objects have no reality apart from their interactions with the mind', an inaccurate reading of agential realism. Barad clearly avoids inscribing inherent dualities or transcendental properties into matter itself as Harman implies here. In an agential realist account, the mind has no ontological primacy over any other entity: it also emerges through intra-action.

practices (intra-actions). Our concept of size, constrained by material intra-activity and the discursive measurements we arrange accordingly resolve this indeterminacy as it repeatedly comes to be *enacted*, to use Barad's term.

Barad employs Butler's performativity to develop the claim that repetition and reiteration are necessary building blocks of phenomena as units of reality. For Butler, gender is performed, enacted, rather than inherent. It materialises through discursive repetition. Butler (2011, xviii) defines embodied matter not as a fixed 'site or surface, but *as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*'. Normative, socially interpellated and continuously policed enactments of gender stabilise over time to become unquestionably natural. In other words, the formation of subjectivity through repeated performative enactments over time also generate the very materiality of the gendered human body. Barad emphasises that Butler's influence cannot be overstated. Limiting the performative to discursive practices alone, however, does not attend to materiality. Per Barad (2007: 192):

> while Butler's temporal account of materialization displaces matter as a fixed and permanently bounded entity, its temporality is analyzed only in terms of how *discourse* comes to matter. Butler's account fails to analyze how *matter* comes to matter. What about the "material limits": the material constraints and exclusions, the material dimensions of agency, and the material dimensions of regulatory practices? Doesn't an account of materialization that is attentive only to discursive limits reinscribe this very dualism by implicitly reinstalling materiality in a passive role?

Barad thus expands Butler's term (1999: 101ff) 'enactment' in tandem with Haraway's notion of diffraction as polymorphous generation, arguing that the logic underpinning both gender performativity and diffraction can be applied beyond the human subject to matter itself.[8] I will develop how performativity and diffraction function in relation to filmmaking in Chapters 2 and 3. It is important to highlight that in this account, the repeatability of material-discursive practices generate the possibility for objectivity. Objectivity, in an agential realist sense, is constrained by both discourse and matter.

As I will illustrate throughout this thesis, Barad's physics-philosophy suggests that the science of measuring light and sound that underpins filmmaking technology plays an entangled part in determining the reality of the pro-filmic event. In this specific sense, an agential realist account coincides with Rancière's claim that cinema can escape an artistic regime of representation because of the apparatus that produces it. However, this account diverges from Rancière's description, mentioned above, of the camera as a passive instrument. One of Barad's key claims is that no practice of scientific measurement re-presents an independent entity—choice does not come into the matter. For the agential realist, reality is enacted in relations that make 'waves and vibrations' intelligible because the recording apparatus exerts agency upon reality as it 'come[s] into being'. A reflexive mode of address can attempt to take responsibility for these technical and conceptual constraints, but in this account every filmmaking practice constrains how reality comes to be regardless of being self-reflexive. I hold that agential realism has much to contribute to the field of filmic realism and vice-versa.

[8] 'Enactment' here is not to be confused with the use of the word in cognitive science, deftly employed by Pia Tikka (2008) in conjunction with Sergei Eisenstein's film theory to investigate how cinema is partly enacted from and entangled with the filmmaker's mind.

Furthermore, Barad's concern with the possibility for objectivity makes it especially relevant to the documentary and its claim to accessing reality.

Documentary, Ethics, Objectivity

If filmmaking is approached as the generation of specific enactments of reality—a reality generator—the abdication of responsibility implied by mimesis becomes ethically unsustainable. In other words, once we become cognisant of the ontological boundaries being drawn by our practices, we are accountable for their material consequences. This responsibility becomes even more pressing when it comes to documentary films, which claim to depict reality in one way or another. Rather than over-determining in favour of either the film camera or language, I suggest that the very encounter between a physical or conceptual apparatus and its object of investigation generates and constrains the very division drawn between them. In this account, the act of filmmaking participates in the definition of what it generates rather than being a neutral reflection of a world that pre-exists in a pure state. As André Bazin (2009: 9) has it: 'photography plays a real part in natural creation, rather than substituting for it'. For Barad, reality is indeterminate until it is enacted through specific relations. Indeterminacy does not equate to a transcendental reality, which is just another path towards representation relative to a mysterious, ineffable Real. Instead of assuming *a priori* that there is an uncertain world beyond knowledge patiently awaiting human discovery, this account holds that knowledge and the world are intrinsically connected. As knowledge changes according to its context, changing how we know the world

influences its materialisation. For me, this is where filmmaking can intervene in reality to enact material changes; to make a difference in matter.

By articulating that film is generative rather than representative, the question of Gilles Deleuze's influence should be tackled up front. While I do not consider this to be a Deleuzian piece of research, I acknowledge its affinity with his philosophy. In many ways this study resonates with Ilona Hongisto's Deleuze-inspired monograph *The Soul of the Documentary* (2015) and the avoidance of representationalist logic therein. The most significant difference between her Deleuzian approach and mine is Barad's concern with technical apparatuses and the possibility for scientific objectivity. Hongisto (2015:15) argues that in her analysis: 'investments in objectivity have been replaced by an interest in the malleability of the image and its import on the experience of temporality in documentary works'. This is a productive position, and I do not mean to set up an opposition here. Nonetheless, this thesis articulates how documentary objectivity is enabled without reverting to representationalism by Barad's notion of the agential cut, which I will outline in due course.

As a practice that incontrovertibly excludes more of the world than it keeps within the frame, documentary filmmaking makes for an ideal artform in which to investigate Barad's thinking. In the logic of agential realism, a documentary is both ontological and epistemological. At their best, documentary films inspire a rethinking of reality by displacing boundaries that might otherwise be taken for granted. By queering normative frameworks of intelligibility, documentary films can reconfigure ways of being in the world.

As a queer, feminist, antiracist, human scholar, Barad aims to trouble the limits of natural properties and systems of intelligibility designed in a culture steeped in

anthropocentric, patriarchal, white supremacist, imperialist, capitalist thinking. These frameworks enact strict, divisive boundaries around humans and nature, indeed what or who counts as human and/or natural, what it means to be human, and in relation to what normative convention. While *WTYM* in many ways takes the embodied boundaries of its subjects for granted, it attempts to diffract those subjectivities by making interventions into our shared pasts. These filmic interventions seek to question the fundamental and recurring process of a child becoming independent from their mother. As such, the film investigates how one embodied subject becomes two, and how that difference is materially-discursive through ever-shifting entanglements of space, time, nature and culture, including historiography. These questions are not ultimately resolvable; the inherent indeterminacy of reality guarantees that. What is important, as Haraway (2004: 70) puts it, is to investigate 'where the *effects* of difference appear'. What difference does an intervention make? How does one account for and take responsibility for those interventions and their effects? *WTYM* attempts to acknowledge its generative interventions within these matters by employing a diffractive methodology.

Limitations, Research Questions, Outcomes

To outline a definitive account of agential realist cinema is not only far beyond the scope of this thesis, but also runs against the grain of agential realism. The drawing of boundaries is a practice of exclusion, of framing or editing out, a necessity in any research or film project. These boundaries are not inherent; they could be drawn and re-drawn otherwise, and this is a vital point made by Barad's entangled ethical/epistemological/ontological approach to the various ways that reality is enacted.

With that in mind, the three main research questions with which I aim to grapple in this thesis are: how does agential realism reconfigure notions of objectivity in documentary studies? What are the ethical implications of an agential realist documentary film practice? How can performative agencies enacted by film practices be queered through diffraction? Some of the themes that emerge in the specificity of the practice-as-research component delimit the scope of the text, providing points of intervention for this inquiry. I will attempt to describe my reasoning for the interventions I make, proposing alternative investigations without claiming this task to be complete. This is not, therefore, a thesis setting out to defend agential realism against all other forms of realism. Nor is it intended as a set of instructions on how to ethically produce a documentary based upon my own attempts at exploring these complex issues. Rather, I aim to creatively engage agential realism through my concerns with representation, performativity, subjectivity, objectivity, recording apparatuses and ethics. I will limit my investigation to certain points where the camera and sound apparatuses meet the pre-filmic to constitute the pro-filmic event and its registration; and then again during post-production, where a 'genealogical accounting of material-discursive processes' (Barad 2007: 169) becomes possible. I will not, however, exhaustively analyse or describe the intention behind every frame of *WTYM*. As Alisa Lebow (2008: 89) reminds us: 'Statements of intentionality, which comprise the majority of authorial commentary, have some limited historical interest, but they have little theoretical value and may even inhibit valid and imaginative hermeneutical engagement with the work'. What I hope to highlight is how the theoretical research influenced the practice-as-research without fully determining the outcome, which was also constrained by the filmed events themselves and the intractable relationship between me and my mother

Regina. Indeed, distilling agential realism through a personal story about a son and his mother posed one of the great difficulties I faced in the generation of both film and thesis. A philosophy troubling the enactment of fundamental material boundaries becomes nearly unworkable when it comes to an embodied subject who could not be more substantial to me. The idea is to push against the limits of these various entangled constraints as a way of, as Butler (2011: xvi) puts it, 'reconfiguring what will count as the world'. The film investigates my relationship with Regina through our various entangled relationships to history and landscapes through time; how transgenerational migration, identities, and imperialism haunt us in our embodied present. My research contribution comes in theorising and practising a diffractive approach to a documentary film in relation to performativity and agential realism. A diffractive approach in film is not an innovation that I claim to have invented: what I am describing as diffraction can be identified as a method across documentary history. Diffraction, as I understand it, is especially salient in essay films, as detailed in Chapter 3.

Both outcomes resulting from this research project, the feature-length, essayistic first-person documentary and this text, are deeply entangled with one another while also functioning as individual entities. The film is not about agential realism *tout court*, but rather a pursuit of its logic as a philosophical approach within a documentary narrative. Making the conceptual framework clear is the role of this text, but not of the film component. Indeed, the initial shoot, outlined in Chapter 2, predates the start of this research. As such, I aim to partially document the film's production, and how my thinking changed (and continues to change) throughout the research process.

Like any study, this research excludes far more than it could possibly include. Jack Halberstam (2011: 88) claims that 'The queer art of failure turns on the

impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being'. This written research and the many queer failures of the practical research have certainly enabled me to imagine 'other goals' for being as a filmmaker, for being as a scholar, and for being with my mother.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 1, I will use my reading of André Bazin's influential and widely debated theorisation of filmic realism to help clarify my deployment of Barad's agential realism in relation to documentary filmmaking. I address the challenge Barad poses to totalising, metaphysical ontologies and how this produces ethical questions consequential to documentary theory and practice. I introduce Barad's development of Donna Haraway's diffraction, arguing that it can usefully serve as both an 'object of investigation' and an 'apparatus of investigation' (Barad 2007: 73) in the making and theorisation of films.

In Chapter 2, I broadly outline Butler's well-known notion of performativity and position how this study associates the term with documentary filmmaking, proposing a non-representational approach that moves away from its current use as a classificatory term. I draw on Barad's extension of performativity beyond the human to propose that the experimental apparatuses that enable filmmaking are also performative. This leads to a discussion of the entanglement of objectivity and meaning in filmmaking via the agential cut, and how I see this in relation to the recurring narrative and aesthetic theme of colour and black-and-white in *WTYM*.

In Chapter 3, I implement a diffractive approach in thinking through the practical challenges of generating an aesthetic film practice inspired by a wide-ranging philosopy heavily based on the intractable complexities of quantum physics. I engage with a variety of theoretical standpoints to outline how I approached the filmmaking process as an essayistic attempt to leave the indeterminacies of my matrilineal background open-ended and open to change. The final section seeks to delineate the topics tackled by this written thesis and how I have attempted to answer the research questions posed above.

Chapter 1: Reality

Filmic Realism, Agential Realism, The Real

> The most pernicious ideology was the one that led us to believe that we have (or are) something opposed to nature.
>
> —Vilém Flusser (1990: 399).

Lúcia Nagib (2016: 133) reminds us that for Bazin, reality 'was never a point of arrival, but an interrogation mark'. Indeed, in describing the effect World War II had upon William Wyler's experience of reality, Bazin (2009: 52) claims that there is not a singular definition of realism, but rather a plurality of realisms: 'Every era seeks its own, meaning the technology and aesthetic that can best record, hold onto and recreate whatever we wish to retain of reality'. For Bazin, a shift or innovation in the medium generates a new cycle of film aesthetics. The challenges posed by agential realism propose a shift in how reality is understood, which inspires not only alternative approaches in film aesthetics but also enables a reconsideration of filmic realism. This is especially pertinent in documentary filmmaking with what Bill Nichols (1991: ix) describes as its 'linkage' to the 'historical world'. Barad's philosophy is beginning to work its way into film studies as mentioned, although not yet used in an affirmative reading of Bazin's realism.[9] In this section I will outline how agential realism rearticulates how we might understand reality given the ontological doubts raised by discoveries made in quantum physics, as well as some foundational questions posed by

[9] For other productive interventions applying agential realism, see Beckhurst 2019; Kember and Zylinska 2012; Kuc 2016; 2018; and Gatto 2020.

feminist and queer theory. In short, I will argue that a paradigm of representation in documentary theory generates insoluble conundrums based on assumed binaries of nature and culture. Noël Carroll (1996a: 303) has argued that 'film theorists, especially nonfiction film theorists, must become philosophers themselves, or, at least, learn to think philosophically about their deepest presuppositions'. I would add that nonfiction filmmakers concerned with objectivity should become acquainted with the physics and engineering practices that enable and constrain the functions of their cameras (see Chapter 2). Within the narrow limitations of this chapter, I attempt to briefly sketch out some of the wider philosophical contexts of my theoretical intervention into documentary film studies in relation to filmic realism.

In his commentary on *Farrebique* (1944), a documentary about French peasants, Bazin (1997: 104) posits that the essence of artistry in cinema stems from how 'The technical objectivity of photography finds its natural extension in the aesthetic objectivity of the cinema'. Daniel Morgan (2006) argues that Bazin's work on realism is far more concerned with the tension between the technical and the aesthetic than the *ex post facto* notion of cinematic indexicality that is often attributed to him.[10] As an alternative, Morgan (2006: 443–44, emphasis mine) proposes that: 'Unlike much of contemporary media theory, classical theories are interested in the kind of physical objects images are. They start with the idea that *the nature of the physical medium is a necessary part of our thinking* about the images it supports'. Morgan (2006: 444) highlights the importance Bazin places upon 'the productive tension between the form

[10] Peter Wollen (1969) influentially reconceptualised Bazin's ontology by translating Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic index into a filmic trace or imprint that produces a material bond between the image and its referent object in the physical world. This addendum is often automatically iterated to contemporary accounts of Bazinian realism.

in which an artist expresses subject matter and the kind of thing an image is, between style and ontology'. This is the achievement of cinematic realism for Bazin: a historically situated balance between a film's style and its image, the latter being ontologically identical to the world according to the 'rigorous determinism' (Bazin 1958: 15, my translation) of the camera.[11] I will come back to Bazin and objectivity in the next chapter.

As mentioned in the introduction, a paradigm of representation has become a mainstay in film theory and media studies. This tendency assumes a singular reality ruled by natural law that human beings approximate through representation. Physicist Bernard d'Espagnat (2011: 13) defines 'conventional realism [as] a combination of two distinct views: the idea that the notion of a mind-independent reality is meaningful and the one that this reality is in principle knowable by human beings'. To be clear: I agree that the world exists regardless of a human being thinking it exists. In that very specific sense, whatever is meant by the word 'reality' might be categorised as independent of human thought (although there are many implicit assumptions in making such a statement). Nonetheless, I resist the notion that reality can be intrinsically characterised or contained by inherent laws of nature conceived or speculated by human thought. Human thought is inseparably part of reality; laws or properties of reality are therefore fundamentally entangled with the thoughts and measurements that help shape them.

[11] Bazin (1958: 15) writes: 'Pour la première fois, entre l'objet initial et sa représentation, rien ne s'interpose qu'un autre objet. Pour la première fois, une image du monde extérieur se forme automatiquement sans intervention créatrice de l'homme, selon un déterminisme rigoureux'. Hugh Gray (Bazin 1967: 13) appears to combine these sentences, translating 'selon un déterminisme rigoureux' and 'objet' to 'the instrumentality of a non-living agent'. Perhaps Gray was attempting to clarify his reading of Bazin's logic, although the original phrase cleverly leaves enough scope to question what (or who) construes the camera's rigorous determinism, or indeed what that determinism might mean. The word 'agent,' particularly in the context of agential realism, is in my view too easily misconstrued, so I opted for a more direct translation here.

Barad articulates how the world materialises in entangled relations, intra-actions, that precede the properties mapped on to it. How we understand the world plays a part in how the world emerges, and vitally, that emergence is inherently multiple. Put another way, consider this oft-repeated statement from documentary editor and theorist Dai Vaughan (1999: 21): 'film is about something, whereas reality is not'. An alternative to this is that reality is about every potential phenomenon whereas a film is about some of those phenomenal possibilities. Furthermore, documentary films are creative interventions *about* reality—and this by implication makes them ontological and epistemological practices. As we are said to be living in the era of 'post-truth' (Harsin 2018), I align myself with Barad (2007: 353) in asserting that: 'Believing something is true doesn't make it true'. Recent interventions into documentary studies have called into question whether aesthetic approaches such as reflexivity and the essayistic remain necessary when, according to Erika Balsom (2017: 5), 'The notion that we best access reality through artifice is the new orthodoxy'. The goal here is not, as Balsom contends, to '[annul] a distinction between truth and falsity', in fact I propose that objectivity remains crucially meaningful and can only emerge through rigorous, repeatable evidence. The differentiation and classification of otherwise indeterminate matter is manifestly a vital action in the survival of any being, not least in the face of the current climate emergency. However, objectivity here does not equate to a straightforward, universal, objective reality. Furthermore, as Toby Lee (2021: 17) argues in response to Balsom, for oppressed and marginalised people 'the "real" has long been a battle ground, or worse yet, a tool of oppression'. There has never been an era of truth for those whose lives were not included within what is deemed to matter in an imperialist, capitalist discourse. To posit another way of understanding agential realism, I

reconfigure one of Bazin's most brilliant arguments about cinema as a provocative illustration of what we might term onto-logical thinking.

Cinema, Discourse, Physics: The Myth of Total Reality

In his article *The Myth of Total Cinema* (2009), Bazin claims that the real inventors of cinema are not the industrialists who develop the technology that make it possible. He claims that the Lumière brothers and Thomas Edisons of the world misunderstood the aesthetic and commercial potential of cinema, content to profit off what they predicted would be a short-lived novelty. Bazin proposes instead that it was the fanatic visionaries like 19th Century scientist Joseph Plateau and 16th Century potter-philosopher Bernard Palissy who idealised a mythical art form that could fully and indistinguishably perform as reality: a total (or totalising) cinema. As such, Bazin (2009: 17) reasons that cinema has not yet achieved the dream that drives its inception. He concludes that 'Cinema has yet to be invented!'

Extending Bazin's brilliant inversion of cause and effect to ontological philosophies helps bring Barad's agential realism into sharp relief. According to philosopher Edward Craig (1998), the branch of philosophy concerned with metaphysics broadly asks two questions:

> The first aims to be the most general investigation possible into the nature of reality: are there principles applying to everything that is real, to all that is? […] The second type of inquiry seeks to uncover what is ultimately real, frequently offering answers in sharp contrast to our everyday experience of the world. Understood in terms of these two questions, metaphysics is very closely

> related to ontology, which is usually taken to involve both 'what is existence (being)?' and 'what (fundamentally distinct) types of things exist?'

A metaphysical ontology seeks to provide a comprehensive framework that totalises existence on a universal level, often including concepts such as identity, knowing, being, space, and time. To borrow Bazin's phrasing (2009: 15), ontological philosophers desire 'the complete and total representation of reality'. The pursuit of such a conceptual system begins with the assumption of reality as a singular entity that can be corralled, much like the one envisioned by fanatics pursuing a total cinema. As Theodor W. Adorno (2004: 13) argues, 'Traditional philosophy thinks of itself as possessing an infinite object, and in that belief it becomes a finite, conclusive philosophy'.[12] In other words, an ontology claiming to model the world presumes that a mythical pure reality exists in a manner that can be totalised, re-produced, and re-presented. Indeed, we might say that the dream that drives the philosophical and scientific quest for a physical theory of everything is a dream of containing total reality within its schema. As any theory re-presenting the metaphysical secrets of the universe is a matter of ongoing debate and experimental invention, we might say, provocatively appropriating Bazin: reality hasn't been invented yet!

The objectivity of filmmaking, in the agential realist sense of repeatable practices within a specific experimental arrangement, makes it the ideal artform to express the non-totalisability of reality. Nagib (2016), drawing from Bazin as well as Jean-François Lyotard's *Acinema* (1986), uses the term 'non-cinema' to describe films

[12]Adorno (2004: 13) continues: 'A changed philosophy would have to cancel that claim [to the infinite…]. Its substance would lie in the diversity of objects that impinge upon it and the objects it seeks, a diversity not wrought by any schema'.

that negate their own cinematic narrative through various intermedial or impure approaches, highlighting the camera's limited scope to fully encompass the world. In other words, when a film reaches for total cinema and encounters its limits, it becomes non-cinema.[13] Using the same logic, I suggest that when ontology reaches for total reality, it becomes non-reality by denying the multiplicity of matter as process. I follow Haraway (1988: 581) in arguing that any ontological attempt to totalise reality in this manner is to conjure the divine in what she calls a 'god trick'. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2019: S303) ties the dream of totalisation to what he terms 'empire thinking', a simplified model of reality that conceives of the world, human and non-human, as discrete resources for extraction. Viveiros de Castro argues that what is necessary in the Anthropocene is an embracing of the multiplicity of life rather than the imperial urge to reveal and decipher the world in its totality.[14] We might also connect empire thinking to the imperial impulse to completely catalogue the world into a singular regime of truth outlined by Trinh (1993) thirty years ago in *The Totalizing Quest of Meaning*. As she (1993: 91) puts it: 'Truth and meaning: the two are likely to be equated with one another. Yet, what is put forth as truth is often nothing more than *a* meaning'. What Trinh suggests, as does this thesis and indeed Bazin, is that reality is indeterminate because it can be materialised in countless ways. The way matter is made meaningful

[13] William Brown (2018: 2ff) defines non-cinema from a different starting point to Nagib's. He proposes that the commodification of cinema identifies what counts as cinema. As such, films considered poor or essayistic or non-commercial by the hegemonic marketplace can be understood as non-cinema.

[14] The term 'Anthropocene' (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000) has been contested for the implied homogenisation of responsibility for the climate emergency across human populations as well as the capitalist greenwashing of some proposed solutions. I align myself to Tsing, Matthews and Bubandt (2015: G3) in embracing the multiplicity of meanings it has provoked: 'Our use of "Anthropocene" intends to join the conversation—but not to accept the worst uses of the term, from green capitalism to technopositivist hubris'. Tiago de Luca (2022: 15) has also persuasively argued that regardless of responsibility, repairing practices require solidarity and collaboration across the planet.

plays a role in how it materialises. Problems arise, Trinh (1993: 104) argues, when this meaning becomes a totalising truth, usually at the expense of those considered 'primitive' or 'other' by those who 'absolutize meaning'.

An approach that emphasises the importance to language, discourse and meaning might be dismissed as an example of what Carroll (1996a) calls 'postmodernist skepticism', or part of what is often described as the linguistic turn.[15] In an agential realist account, the properties understood to belong to a thing at any given time and space are a meaningful part of its very thingness (including the properties of time and space). To take for granted that an object precedes its definition is to make that word, 'object', external to human thought. The primacy of objects underpins Graham Harman's (2013) object-oriented ontology (often shortened to OOO or OOP, for object-oriented philosophy). Harman insists that objects are irreducibly individual and not only precede human perception but are ultimately inaccessible in their withdrawn, mysterious reality. As he (2013: 192) puts it: 'Objects are not convertible into knowledge, since knowledge inevitably translates or distorts their reality by abstracting certain principal features from their total reality'. For Harman, objects exist as pure, unadulterated, totalising and completely inaccessible entities. All that is available to those who experience objects are secondary, sensual qualities: and these distorting

[15] The 'linguistic turn' (see Rorty 1967) groups together several 20th Century thinkers deeply concerned with the relationship between language and ontology. Notable amongst these are Bertrand Russel, Ludwig Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin to name but a few. Barad (2007: 132) clearly distinguishes agential realism from this category: 'Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every "thing"—even materiality—is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. […] Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that doesn't seem to matter anymore is matter'. Nonetheless, Barad draws from several key thinkers often associated with or influenced by linguistic philosophy, namely Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

abstractions are unrelated to the pure reality of the object. Authentic reality is in the mysteriously metaphysical individuality of the object itself. This inherent inaccessibility leads Luka Arsenjuk (2016: 212–213) to conclude that 'what OOP seems to chart is a certain philosophical orientation for which an encounter with cinema does not at all present a crucial condition of thinking'. Indeed, as Arsenjuk points out, Harman (2002: 290) categorically states that 'there are no *images*—only *things*'. In Harman's speculation, images are also objects—things—that are distanced from any other object, including those that we might reasonably associate within the image with the object they appear to look like. A vase in a photograph bears no relation to the real vase; the image itself is an object that only seems, sensuously, to resemble the true vase. Things exist in a withdrawn state from everything else, including other objects, in their own 'dark subterranean reality that never becomes present to practical action any more than it does to theoretical awareness' (Harman 2002: 1). Discourse, thought, cinema, relations themselves: these have nothing to do with Harman's inaccessible, mysterious total reality of objects. At heart, Harman and the wider group of philosophers known as speculative realists (see Bryant et al. 2011; Grusin 2015; Shaviro 2014), aim to speculate about what reality might look like beyond human thought. There is a seeming resonance here between agential realism and OOO in attempting to de-centre human thought from ontology. Indeed, despite his insistent and repeated attacks upon agential realism, Harman (2016) on this point claims that 'Barad is an ally of object-oriented philosophy'.[16] However, while Barad (2007: 32) defines agential realism as a

[16] Harman's critiques remain unacknowledged and unreciprocated by Barad. See Geerts and van der Tuin (2016) for a pithy summary of and response to several of Barad's most vocal critics including Harman and Slavov Žižek.

'posthumanist performative account', a later clarification (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 18) highlights a distinct position from OOO's:

> There are many conflicting conceptions in play of what *posthumanism* is or ought to mean. My point is not to get *beyond* the human, but to ask the prior question of what differentially constitutes the human—and for whom. And it requires addressing it not in some universalizing sense but always in its specificities.

Chelsea Birks (2023: 73) sets OOO alongside Georges Bataille to make a valiant attempt at thinking cinema outside 'the anthropocentric circle'. This approach is productive in positing (2023: 78) that film 'represents a desire to exceed the limits of subjectivity and occupy an objective position, and it simultaneously bears witness to the impossibility of doing so'. Indeed, we can find resonance here with Bazin's total cinema, developed by Nagib (2016) in her definition of 'non-cinema'. There is no stepping outside of the anthropocentric circle; humans are manifestly entangled within the reality through which they come to be. Cinema, made by and for humans regardless of the presence of humans on screen, is evidently anthropocentric. The fact that it is also entangled with the non-human is precisely the point Barad makes: so is the human. Further, Birks (2023: 10) cautions that ignoring the questions asked by thinkers associated with the linguistic turn risks 'ideological blind spots. This is in part because the seductive promise of the new can allow us to forget or cover over aspects of thought that are potentially troublesome or reactionary'.

Agential realism does not propose an alternative ontology to OOO, speculative realism or any other metaphysical philosophy. In an interview, Barad (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 19) makes this clear:

> It is not so much that I am trying to put forward an ontology of the world. Rather I am issuing an invitation, or provocation, or opening. Ontology, for me, is neither a thing, nor a theory of what *is*. Ontology is the "theorizing of what is" by materializing things in certain ways, a particular form of intra-acting, and as such part of the world. [17]

Having said that, Barad's 'provocation' is partly founded upon rigorously repeated and debated experiments in quantum physics over the past century that provide solid, material evidence for an agential realist approach. It is not a philosophy analogous to quantum physics, but rather one that does not assume a neat separation between physics, philosophy, linguistics and matter. What can be drawn from quantum physics is the inherent entanglement of all matter, including meaning. As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis does not aim to defend agential realism against all other ontologies. Agential realism's radical framework does tend to raise (or wrinkle) eyebrows. As such, I will limit myself to briefly outline two famous discussions in quantum physics to clarify Bohr's theory of complementarity, which also illustrate the relevance of diffraction as both a material process and conceptual methodology. These highlight how Bohr gives due importance not only to the physical experiments

[17] Barad, like Butler, often explains what they mean by pointing out what they are *not* saying. Philip Højme (2024: 10) has proposed that both are inadvertently deploying Adorno's negative dialectics 'to show how something is not what it appears to be'.

themselves, but also the fundamental role that language might play in experimental outcomes.

At the centre of Barad's argument on the possibility for objectivity is the essential difference between Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and Niels Bohr's theory of complementarity. Both are inspired by paradoxes that emerge in the field of quantum mechanics. The famous double-slit experiment, first attempted by British polymath Thomas Young in 1801, aimed to show that, contra-Newton, light is a wave rather than a particle. Young fired a beam of light through two slits extracted from a plate (see figure 1), with the light passing through towards a screen on the other side. The slits diffract the light beam, producing an interference pattern of light and dark upon the screen. This leads to a general acceptance that Young is correct; light is a wave, not a particle. However, further experiments complicate the result. If single particles are fired through the slits, a random pattern of dots emerges on the far screen, indicating that light indeed behaves as a particle. Both possibilities cannot be accounted for in classical physics: a particle is a physical point in space; a wave is a disturbance in a field. There are several other experiments that follow, each posing further fundamental questions, including the inherence of time as a universal property (see Barad 2007: 247ff).

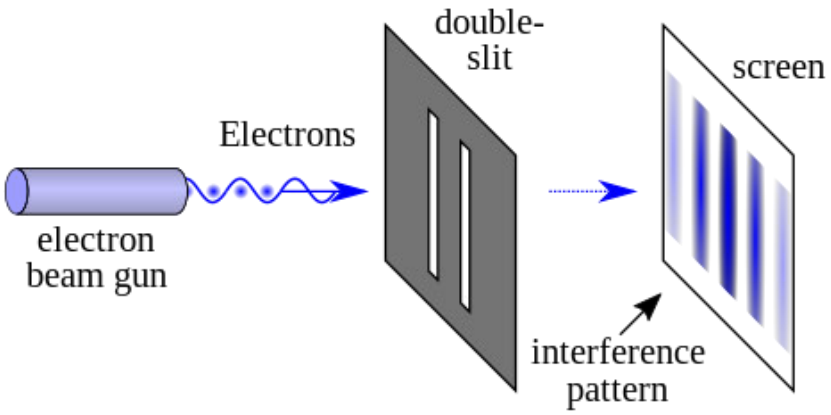


Figure 1: Double Slit Experiment illustrating a diffractive interference pattern resulting from

single electrons randomly fired through two slits (NekoJaNekoJa 2017)

A second conundrum occurs in the measurement of a particle's position and momentum. An experimental apparatus designed to accurately measure the position of a particle cannot rigorously assess its momentum without a change in its physical configuration, and vice-versa. Newton's deterministic laws of nature posit that the entire trajectory of any matter should be determinable according to its position and momentum; experimentation makes this impossible to prove. Heisenberg concludes that there is a limit to how precisely we can know certain pairs of properties of a particle. The more accurately we measure the position of a particle, the less certain we are of its momentum. For Heisenberg, this introduces an inherent uncertainty into our knowledge, and hence of our objective understanding of these fundamental properties. Bohr's theory of complementarity provides an alternative framework. In response to Heisenberg, Bohr asks what is meant by position? What is meant by momentum? As Barad (2007: 117, emphasis mine) puts it: 'For Bohr, the analysis of these conditions rests on the crucial insight that *concepts are meaningful*, that is, semantically determinate, *not in the abstract but by virtue of their embodiment in the physical arrangement* of the apparatus'. Bohr proposes an indeterminacy principle: the notion that measuring for position excludes the possibility for accurate measurement of momentum because neither are definitive attributes of matter, but rather concepts that are *applied to* matter. These concepts come from experimental observation, a process of constructing apparatuses and tinkering with them until the sought after results are repeatably recorded. In doing so, Bohr argues, they play a role in meaningfully materialising phenomena. According to Barad (2007: 118), 'Bohr understands the

reciprocal relation between position and momentum in *semantic* and *ontic* terms, and only derivatively in epistemic terms (i.e., we can't know something definite about something for which there is nothing definite to know)'.

Bohr reasons that all phenomena must be understood as an inseparable meeting of observation agencies and objects under observation; they cannot be understood as inherently separate objects. Barad (2007: 19) describes his position here:

> The lesson that Bohr takes from quantum physics is very deep and profound: there aren't little things wandering aimlessly in the void that possess the complete set of properties that Newtonian physics assumes (e.g., position and momentum); rather, there is something fundamental about the nature of measurement interactions such that, given a particular measuring apparatus, certain properties become determinate, while others are specifically excluded. Which properties become determinate is not governed by the desires or will of the experimenter but rather by the specificity of the experimental apparatus.

That Bohr considers language to participate in the materialisation of objective measurements is something that should be taken seriously. Without overdetermining in favour of language, Barad (2007: 91) describes the ramifications of Bohr's philosophy:

> Making knowledge is not simply about making facts but about making worlds, or rather, it is about making specific worldly configurations—not in the sense of making them up ex nihilo, or out of language, beliefs, or ideas, but in the sense of materially engaging as part of the world in giving it specific material form.

In my account, framing film practice through agential realism attempts to come to terms with the philosophical and social consequences of the 'linguistic turn' that cause what Avery Gordon (2008: 10) calls 'a crisis in representation, a fracture in the epistemological regime of modernity, a regime that rested on a faith in the reality effect of social science'. Thomas Elsaesser (2009: 6) points out the repercussions of this 'crisis' for film practices in what he calls 'ontology mark two, or post-epistemological ontology'. He claims (2009: 6–7):

> The post-epistemological ontology [...] breaks with the Cartesian subject–object split, abandoning or redefining notions of subjectivity, consciousness, identity in the way these have hitherto been used and understood. By extension, it does not mourn the so-called loss of indexicality of the photographic image.

Elsaesser lands on a crucial question posed by a historical 'erosion' in cinematic realism, but also a key question of Western philosophy and social sciences following the ongoing reverberations of crumbling empires across the globe. I agree with Gordon's claim (2008: 12) that 'we are not "post" modern yet', that undoing the catastrophic geopolitical, social and environmental consequences of modernity and its neoliberal aftermath has barely begun. She continues:

> It is arguably the case that the fundamental contradictions at the heart of modernity are more exposed and much is up for grabs in the way we conceive

> the possibilities for knowledge, for freedom, and for subjecthood in the wake of this exposure.

Conceiving alternative 'possibilities for knowledge, for freedom, and for subjecthood' is precisely Barad's concern. However, as opposed to Elsaesser's 'post-epistemological ontology', Barad's move is to fuse epistemology and ontology, inseparably entangling knowing and becoming. Agential realism claims the world is onto-epistemological, but that does not mean the end of scientific objectivity nor does it overdetermine in favour of language. Agential realism questions how ontological thinking becomes understood as independent nature—the role discourse plays in materialising and constraining phenomena. Viveiros de Castro (2019: S306) suggests that practising an 'ontological anarchy' forgoes the totality of any ontological map. Rather than becoming servants to a single ontology, ontological thinking should serve as a useful model while avoiding the totalising impulse. Jacques Derrida (1994: 202) proposes that, in order to achieve such an anarchic, revolutionary spirit:

> it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration.

Barad proposes that a diffractive technique can be employed as a hauntological tool, avoiding a totalising model. The use of diffraction in the double-slit experiment produces experimental results that suggest that something haunts the deterministic, total

reality posited by classical physics. The experiment introduces an alternative to the ontology conjured by Newton that eventually generates a revolution in how the physical universe is understood. I propose that diffraction can also be employed as a filmmaking technique, and indeed the kind of thinking that resonates with diffraction can already be identified in several films throughout cinema's history. I approached the post-production of *WTYM* using diffraction as a tool of analysis, as I will illustrate in Chapter 3. First, I will briefly outline why I consider diffraction to be a useful analytical tool.

Index, Ethics, Difference: Diffraction and Film

> Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals.
>
> — Donna Haraway (1997: 273).

> My diffractive methodology and ethical sensibility is not to reject things out of hand, to put the old out to pasture, but to renew ideas by turning them over and inside out, reading them deconstructively for aporias, and re-reading them through other ideas, queering their received meanings.
>
> — Karen Barad (Barad and Kleinman 2012: 34).

Diffraction is a physical phenomenon whereupon waves encounter an obstacle in their path, including other waves, resulting in patterns of interference. In contemporary feminist new materialism, diffraction is also employed as an alternative mode of

thought to reflexivity.[18] Drawing from Trinh T. Minh-ha, Haraway (2004: 70) coins the term to counter the critical distance and consequent objectivity implied by reflection and reflexivity with an optical metaphor 'set to produce not effects of distance, but effects of connection'. Practices of theorising interfere with the object under scrutiny; they make it different, and diffraction aims to account for this intervention. For Barad (2007: 72), diffraction functions as 'more than a metaphor'; it is to be far more expansively understood (2010: 243) 'as synecdoche of entangled phenomenon'. Combining Bohr's physics-philosophy, quantum field theory, science and technology studies with feminist and queer theory, Barad proposes that diffraction patterns can be understood as fundamentally constitutive of how the world materialises. Barad deploys diffraction in a dual manner (2007: 73): as an 'object of investigation' and an 'apparatus of investigation'.

In physics, diffraction occurs in any wave-like behaviour, including the light and sound that constitute audiovisual media. When waves meet an obstruction such as a breakwater, another wave, a lens, or a microphone aperture, one affects the other. The encounter generates mutual difference resulting in a pattern of interference—in filmmaking we might think of recorded images and sounds as the remaining mark or trace of this interference between light waves and the recording apparatus. I will outline how I integrate this approach with the more familiar film theory notion of indexicality

[18] It is worth emphasising that the employment of diffraction is not intended as a renunciation of reflexivity. As Barad (2014: 185) puts it: 'reflection and diffraction are not opposites, not mutually exclusive, but rather different optical intra-actions highlighting different patterns, optics, geometries that often overlap in practice'. Haraway (2000: 104) also points out that: 'Obviously, I am not against being self-reflective, but I am interested in foregrounding something else'. Diffraction as a method suggests an alternative way of thinking about optical metaphors against the grain of the usual tropes of mimesis and reflection but does not therefore discredit all the important reflexive work that came before.

in due course. In my view, as both object of investigation and apparatus of investigation, filmmaking functions in a diffractive manner. As an 'object', diffraction is technically inevitable in cinematography (and indeed in human vision). Light waves travelling through a lens aperture distort before meeting photosensitive material within the camera body, with identifiable optical effects (blurry hazing around light sources, for instance). The deep focus preferred by Bazin is attained by reducing the lens aperture. While this makes more planes of framed objects appear in focus, fine details within the overall shot become soft. Low depth of field, achieved with a wider aperture, reduces the effects of diffraction and sharpens the details of the focused object, however other planes fall away into blurry softness. Light sources in the pro-filmic event, distorted by lens apertures, generate glowing halos and starburst effects as they spread out and bombard photosensitive surfaces. As such, the film camera can be described as a diffractive apparatus—an object of investigation. As Barad (2007: 73) points out:

> while it is true that diffraction apparatuses measure the effects of difference, even more profoundly they highlight, exhibit, and make evident the entangled structure of the changing and contingent ontology of the world, including the ontology of knowing.

Optical instruments have a 'practical resolution limit' imposed by diffraction (Ray 2002: 145). The inescapable patterns of interference within cinematographic images provides evidence of Niels Bohr's complementarity, or in agential realist terms, the intra-action between apparatus of observation and observed matter in the generation of phenomena. A diffractive approach also rearticulates indexicality to function across

photographic media, analogue and digital, as Claire Grace points out (2019: 71) while examining Gabriel Orozco's photographic practice:

> Unlike photochemical indexicality, diffraction is structural to digital as well as analogue technologies. […] Where the index is concerned, diffraction proposes a distinct set of coordinates for documentary practice in a postdigital age.

Grace argues that diffraction enables a rethinking of indexical causality, moving away from the indexical object as an ahistorical entity unchanged by the encounter and symbolised merely by its mark, from which it is subsequently absent. Grace claims (2019: 73) that diffraction is indexical in the sense that waves are physically caused; the effects of diffraction, however: 'hinge on a complex system of transformation operative between an initiating force and a resulting sign. Rather than producing a one-to-one correlation of cause and effect, diffraction bends and warps phenomena in the process of transmission'. In my view, distinguishing an 'initiating force' of any wave is inevitably artificial: there will always be preceding forces before the one being drawn out *in media res*. Moreover, these interferences never occur without other intractably entangled agencies complicating what might, in abstraction, seem simple. Nonetheless, Grace's notion of diffractive indexicality gestures towards the intrinsic materialism of diffraction, as well as countering simplistic binaries of object and sign. The index, in this sense, engages with a complementary notion of apparatus and the mark left upon it. To take a more Bohrian approach, the index shifts from being the trace left by an independent object, but rather the referent is a specific object-in-phenomenon made intelligible by the measuring agencies of the camera. The index continues to be a useful

mark emerging through intra-activity that can be objectively accounted for within the experimental conditions that enact it. In this account, the index remains intact so long as we include the role played by the discursive, rigorous determinism of the camera—analogue or digital—that makes the object intelligible.

As an apparatus of investigation, I propose that some existing film criticism already fits a diffractive framework. Cinema's well-documented impurity (see Nagib and Jerslev 2014; Pethő 2011) speaks to how other artforms and mediation inspire and interfere with the medium of film. The same can be said for the reverberations of culture and history in filmic realities. Giuliana Bruno (2018) architectonically connects film history and cinema itself to the palimpsest, a metaphor I will later argue can be productively understood as diffractive via Sarah Dillon (2005). Nagib (2006) has, in effect, argued for a diffractive approach to the study of world cinema. She calls for a shift away from notions of central and marginalised cinemas, based instead upon regional waves of filmic creativity that then travel the globe, fomenting new waves by connecting and interfering with other cultures, cinematic and otherwise. As she puts it (2006: 30–31): 'to approach world cinema through its waves is all the more attractive for the fact that waves have peaks in different places and times'. These peaks, one might call them interference patterns, are resonances and dissonances of different film movements threaded through time and space that make a difference upon one another in their entanglement. This is not to suggest a straightforward causality: one cinema movement does not simply *cause* another; but we might say that cinematic practices generate meaningful differences in filmmaking across the globe, practices that are always shifting, never still. Stella Bruzzi's term 'approximation' (2020: 3) also speaks

to a diffractive practice of 'a process whereby a subject, event or act is evoked through bringing together contrasting versions and interlocking points of view'.

Richard Rushton's (2011) critique of the representational philosophy underpinning political modernism also suggests a diffractive approach without ever calling it as such.[19] Rushton's proposal has some resonance with this project. Political modernism, he argues, begins with the opposition Peter Wollen (1982) establishes between commercial cinema and the counter-cinema of the avant-garde, an opposition Rushton (2011: 20) argues is fundamentally one between reality and cinematic illusion. Avant-garde practices claim to approximate reality by breaking down the illusion of cinema through reflexivity. Wollen does not invent this distinction; he (1982: 82) traces it back to the 'estrangement-effects' of Bertolt Brecht's modernist theatre practice. Rushton (2011: 21) posits, providing several examples, that the distinction between the illusionism of cinema and reality continues to pervade film studies despite 'the consensus today […] that film studies has moved on from the discourse of political modernism'. Rushton draws on Deleuze to argue that films generate reality when we watch them; they are a part of reality rather than merely representing it. He combines new readings of canonical figures such as Bazin, Metz, Rancière, and Deleuze to reach the open-ended conclusion (2011: 191) that there are 'myriad ways of conceiving of filmic reality'.

Nagib (2020: 20) points out that while Rushton's engagement with filmic reality from a spectatorial perspective might be productive, there is 'very little of that experience that is actually demonstrable'. Nagib goes on to examine '*how* these images

[19] He comes close in his afterword (2011: 192), employing John Mullarkey's term 'refractions'. However, as Rushton argues, Mullarkey's argument re-invokes a transcendental real. Refraction in his account appears to simply substitute for the notion of mediation.

and sounds are manufactured and captured' at the point of production. Nagib is here engaging with key questions of objectivity, fidelity and ethics. In my own filmmaking practice, I can only understand filmic reality from the ways I record and concoct images and sound, which is to say the film's mode of address, not by extrapolating an impossibly universal spectatorial experience. I borrow from Bohr (1963: 4) to argue that the only 'unambiguous account' of the reality enacted within the film image 'must, in principle, include a description of all relevant features of the experimental arrangement'. In other words, an objective account of a filmic experiment should aim to include the arrangement of the cinematic apparatus at the point of production and the further entanglement of post-production processes. I make no claim that every filmmaker is duty-bound to include such a description as a rule of thumb; I am however arguing that filmmakers are responsible for the reality they partly enact through filmmaking practices, including all that they necessarily exclude.

Barad (2007: 361) proposes that a diffractive approach provides a method of investigation that accounts for its intervention in the world: 'scientific practices do not reveal what is already there; rather, what is "disclosed" is the effect of the intra-active engagements of our participation with/in and as part of the world's differential becoming'. As such, we are ethically accountable for our participation in generating intelligibility from indeterminacy. Barad (2007: 392) develops Emmanuel Lévinas' humanist notion of responsibility to the other into 'a posthumanist ethics, an ethics of worlding'. The drawing of boundaries that enact what is—and is not—Other entangles the world within which they are drawn. It is worth quoting Barad (2010: 265) at length here to elucidate this point:

> Ethics is an integral part of the diffraction (ongoing differentiating) patterns of worlding, not a superimposing of human values onto the ontology of the world (as if 'fact' and 'value' were radically other). The very nature of matter entails an exposure to the Other. Responsibility is not an obligation that the subject chooses but rather an incarnate relation that precedes the intentionality of consciousness. Responsibility is not a calculation to be performed. It is a relation always already integral to the world's ongoing intra-active becoming and not-becoming.

In this account, the Other in question is no longer the radically-other human as proposed by Lévinas; it is matter itself. Furthermore, alterity only becomes apparent in relations rather than being so in principle. My responsibility, which is to say my ability to respond, to what is enacted as not-myself is already constitutive of what *generates* my material subjective becoming: 'Ethics is therefore not about right response to a radically exterior/ized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part' (Barad 2007: 393). Stated differently, the other is as inseparably us as we are the other: our responsibility is in understanding how the boundaries of sameness and otherness—of alterity—are drawn in intra-action, much like the camera shutter others what it frames. Barad thus avoids an 'alterity in principle' that, in Alain Badiou's (2012: 22) criticism of Lévinas, produces the Other as 'the ethical name for God'.[20] The boundaries drawn by intra-activity are not inherent to reality, they are specific material-discursive enactments of reality.

[20] Sarah Cooper (2005: 30n21) disagrees with Badiou's reading of Lévinas as 'a philosophy annulled by theology'. Cooper (2005: 20) shows how Lévinas' Other is 'transcendent in relation

Notably, Rushton's critique of political modernism makes no mention of the ethical conundrum at the heart of his proposal. He appears to reject all of feminist, queer and critical race film theory subsequent to political modernism by simply re-establishing a canon of white, male, European and North American theorists. While this account may resonate with Rushton's questioning of representation as a foundation for film theory, he never seriously concedes that 1970s apparatus theory and political modernism emerges from a cinema history that forecloses the heterogeneous reality of women, racialised, colonised, poor, disabled, and queer folk. He claims (2011: 104) 'a great deal of sympathy with these positions', while implying that their basis upon a 'foundational opposition' between illusion and reality renders them apparently useless today. In my view, while Mulvey's oft-cited theory of visual pleasure (1989) generated vital critical debates about essentialising audience reception, it does not change the irrefutable power of her argument that the mode of address of 20th Century Hollywood cinema gives primacy to male pleasure and agency, producing an inescapable constraint upon the spectator. If cinema enacts reality as Rushton claims, the *meaning* of that reality matters a great deal, particularly for those with whom he claims sympathy, without displaying a great deal of solidarity. While the reflexive approaches of 1970s feminist counter-cinema may not equate to a more truthful reality contra the supposed illusions of mainstream cinema, by Rushton's own reasoning these reflexive films *also* generate reality on screen. In his generous re-readings, he seems to find very little that is worthwhile examining in avant-garde, feminist, black or queer film theory in the way he does, for instance, with Bazin's fundamentally representationalist ontology. I am

to the self', which is to say never fully aligned with—or a mirror to—the perceiving subject, while carefully articulating that the Other is not therefore a divine totality in its irreducible alterity.

also employing Bazin for my own non-representational purposes, which leads me to the point I want to make. Diffraction, as outlined by Barad's quote at the start of this section, attempts to avoid falling into the critical trap of teleological dialecticism by not '[putting] the old out to pasture', but rather employing an 'affirmative method' (Grosz 2005: 3).

These are not new ideas in feminist circles. Audre Lorde (2007: 112) famously coined the influential phrase '*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*' at the Second Sex Conference in New York, 1979. Twenty years later, Sara Ahmed (2004: 2) raised the problematics of feminist readings of 'male' theory through dialectics that simply re-stage the same arguments repeatedly. The question is how feminism and queer theory can enact change from within a prejudicial system without reiterating the very system it proposes to change. To borrow from Ahmed's book title, how can we make a difference that matters? Rather than a negative approach based on critical opposition—pitting one theory against another in search of a reductive, totalising synthesis—diffractive readings aim at producing change by reading interdisciplinary accounts through one another. As Barad (2007: 135) puts it:

> Diffractively reading the insights of poststructuralist theory, science studies, and physics through one another entails thinking the cultural and the natural together in illuminating ways. What often appears as separate entities (and separate sets of concerns) with sharp edges does not actually entail a relation of absolute exteriority at all.

As is hopefully clear by now, this thesis functions as an open-ended diffraction of agential realism through several film studies approaches, most notably Bazin's work on cinematic realism. The goal is to generate precision by seeking out resonances and dissonances, and equally to open both agential realism and film theorisation to further connections beyond this study. Haraway (1988) argues that the social and the scientific can never be absolutely exterior to one another. Equally, I am attempting to use diffraction to highlight the material entanglement of the technical with the social within filmmaking practices.

What agential realism and diffraction make clear for me as a practitioner is that the *specificity* of relations that enact phenomena is universal: difference is not measured from an essential hegemonic norm, but rather difference is what we have in common. Making and watching documentaries can be philosophically useful and socially transformative not because they tell stories about the 'Other', but because filmic interventions can interrogate the specific effects of difference upon both filmmaker and spectator. Cooper (2005) argues that an interrogative mode in some French documentaries generates productive encounters with Lévinsian alterity that are implicitly understood as irreducible to the spectator's reality. Therein lies the potential to enact change in how the spectator sees the world. Cooper (2005: 92) claims that:

> [an interrogative mode] questions the existence of resemblance and similarity between worlds and suggests that others are never fully knowable through the filmic image. However, it is through this that a possibility for relating in non-reductive terms to others beyond film may be glimpsed.

For Trinh T. Minh-ha (1988), alterity and likeness can function as a dissonant harmony: 'Difference as understood in many feminist and non-Western contexts, difference as foreground in my film work is not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness'. In other words, feminist, antiracist, decolonial and queer difference enfolds and (in)appropriates the similarities of difference. Trinh (1988) claims that:

> Many of us still hold on to the concept of difference not as a tool of creativity to question multiple forms of repression and dominance, but as a tool of segregation, to exert power on the basis of racial and sexual essences. The apartheid type of difference.

She suggests that the production of essential binaries abstracts complex, specific entanglements into straightforward representations of simple difference, usually with European, white, heterosexual, cisgender male as the reference point from which difference is measured. A diffractive approach sets out to generate open connections that make positive change possible, to involute otherness in place of producing further apartheids of otherness or absolute closure. Trinh (1988) argues that for the 'inappropriate/d other':

> Differences do not only exist between outsider and insider–two entities. They are also at work within the outsider herself or the insider, herself–a single entity. She who knows she cannot speak of them without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story, also knows that she cannot make a gesture without activating the to and fro movement of life.

Much like Haraway's diffraction, patterns of difference are mutually constitutive, and this includes conceptual materialisations such as history, identity, exteriority and interiority. Trinh proposes a filmmaking practice that finds differences in binarised identities and makes them universal in their specificity, a position to which I align myself. Trinh (1991: 232) argues that it is a requirement of artistic excursions to look 'at the spaces, times and events and not [take] them for granted, as inherent. Questioning their boundaries, what is effaced, excluded as well as what is produced in general, rather than in specificity'. Agential realism enables the expansion of Cooper and Trinh's reasoning to the non-human and more-than-human. Diffraction aims at non-totalising specificity; it is materially resonant with the entangled phenomena of reality. This logic greatly influenced how I arranged the 'phases' of *WTYM* as I will explain in Chapter 3. Before I delve into the structure of the film, however, I will develop the important matter of what is meant by objectivity in a performative agential realist sense and how this applies to documentary film practices.

Chapter 2: Performativity

Performativity and the Documentary

> Without grievability, there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life.
>
> – Judith Butler (2016: 29).

Taxonomies are both useful and limiting; they exclude by imposing a system of intelligibility, but they also provide important conventions or paradigms for analysis. My goal here is to diffract Butler's term 'performativity' through its current use as a taxonomical documentary category. This serves two purposes. First, it provides a context in which to understand Butler's complex theory through filmmaking practices and to add complexity in line with Barad's rearticulation of performativity. Second, it argues that Butler incontrovertibly states that performativity demonstrates how gendered subjects are produced rather than describing a behavioural choice, informing my application of the term to documentary film practices. As the term performative is already employed in documentary studies (see Bruzzi 2006; Nichols 1994; 2017), I begin this chapter by considering these existing applications to make my deployment more precise in the context of agential realism. I then develop the role performativity plays in producing technically objective film recordings, drawing from Barad's notion of the agential cut. Finally, I employ the shifts between colour and black-and-white in *WTYM* to diffract the aesthetic objectivity of these decisions through the technical processes that enable the recording of colour by the camera apparatus.

At the heart of Butler's oeuvre lies a series of related questions: why are some bodies deemed to matter more than others? How do some lives come to be considered grievable, while others are considered less valuable, if they are considered at all? Who counts as a human and why? What does it mean to be counted as a human? How does the human come to be identified as such? The philosophy Butler continues to develop today asks fundamental questions about subjectivity, identity (including gender, race and sexuality), violence and ethics. Performativity remains Butler's best known and farthest-reaching contribution. They articulate a framework that accounts for how the body becomes culturally intelligible as a human subject. Butler (2011: 4) develops this a step further to argue that sex and gender, rather than being inherent attributes we are born with, are discursively enacted in a 'scenography and topography of construction […] orchestrated by and as a matrix of power'. This matrix, according to Butler, directs according to a heterosexual hegemony in which the male heterosexual functions as the norm according to which difference is made intelligible. Regulatory practices that begin before birth ('would you like to know the sex?') make sex and gender intelligible and are reified through 'incessant and repeated action' (Butler 1999: 143). The possibility for subjectivity relies on the imposition of practices which generate intelligibility. In other words, intelligibility that excludes most possibilities (this is a human; the rest is not-human) is a precondition for subjectivity. Butler argues that subjectivity is a precondition for identity (I am a human man). The latter is open to subversion in a manner that the former is not (see Brady and Schirato 2011: 60ff). With this potted summary of a far more complex philosophical approach in mind, let us proceed to the performative as it is currently deployed in documentary theory.

Bill Nichols (1994: 93) defines the 'performative documentary' as an extension of what he previously (1991: 56) characterised as 'the reflexive mode'.[21] The latter, according to Nichols, attempts to include an account of how a film represents an otherwise independent 'historical world'. For Nichols, a documentary in the reflexive mode represents the historical world while reflecting upon the problems of the documentary as a representative form. The performative mode, he claims (1994: 93), marks a shift in non-fiction filmmaking that 'does not draw our attention to the formal qualities or political context of the film directly so much as deflect our attention from the referential quality of documentary altogether'. Nichols (1994: 94) goes on to say:

> This shift blurs yet more dramatically the already imperfect boundary between documentary and fiction. It also makes the viewer rather than the historical world a primary referent. (These films address us, not with commands or imperatives necessarily, but with a sense of emphatic engagement that overshadows their reference to the historical world.).

The performative documentary functions, Nichols (2017: 156) later argues, by stressing 'the filmmaker's embodied, expressive engagement with an issue, situation, or event'. It questions epistemologies from a situated, subjective perspective that addresses the audience directly. Nichols does not reference Butler's gender performativity in relation to this documentary mode he establishes, and in fact makes it clear he (2017: 151) draws more upon 'the tradition of acting as a way to bring heightened emotional

[21] 'Mode' in Nichols' taxonomy is shorthand for 'mode of representation'.

involvement to a situation or role'. Nichols (2017: 177) does, however, briefly cite Butler in the context of the performative mode that flourishes in what he terms 'gay and lesbian documentaries'. Nichols (2017: 177–8) summarises Butler's position here:

> the performative dimension of sexuality does not simply imply a choice of drag or camp as a parody of sexual norms but also insists on the construction of any sexual identity, straight or gay, as a performative act in which sexual identity can only be established by what one does rather than what one presumably is or says. This question of the fluid, flexible presentation of self in a social context where discrimination has warped the field of play makes the performative mode particularly appealing.

Nichols draws attention to the fact that Butler's philosophy makes an ontological argument about the constitution of *all* subjects, including the white heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied white male positioned atop the matrix. Further, he highlights the important point that performativity is not a choice. Butler is deeply critical of essentialist notions of identity stating that it is the only site that is open to subversion, as opposed to the constraints of subjectivity without which a subject is not intelligible and therefore cannot be categorised. Butler (1999: 4) goes so far as to argue that essentialism should even be avoided in 'the "subject" of feminism [… that] turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation'. For Butler, assuming the inherent link between discursive categories of women, gender—and indeed feminism—to pure, universal, ahistorical entities that

precede these taxonomies undermines feminist actions by ontologically entrenching sexual difference.

Stella Bruzzi (2006: 1–2) argues that ‘documentaries are performative acts, inherently fluid and unstable and informed by issues of performance and performativity’, adding that reading Butler was ‘akin to finding a new pair of spectacles through which to look at nonfiction film and television’. Bruzzi (2020: 6) sometimes states that ‘all factual representation is performative […] a complex negotiation between reality on the one hand and interpretation on the other’. Elsewhere, however, she posits (2006: 185) that a performative documentary is ‘a mode which emphasises—and indeed constructs a film around—the often hidden aspect of performance, whether on the part of the documentary subjects or the filmmakers’. She elaborates (2006: 187):

> there are two broad categories of documentary that could be termed performative: films that feature performative subjects and which visually are heavily stylised and those that are inherently performative and feature the intrusive presence of the filmmaker.

While I agree with Bruzzi that performativity is a productive way to understand documentary filmmaking, I would like to highlight some dissonance between the use of performativity here and my own reading of Butler’s work.

Bruzzi employs Butler’s analysis of *Paris is Burning* (1990) to outline her own application of the term. In her elaboration of Butler’s thinking, she cites a phrase from *Bodies that Matter* (2011: 84): ‘There is no subject prior to its constructions’ only to dismiss it as ‘dogmatic’ (Bruzzi 2006: 194). It is worth returning to the original context

of Butler's statement that launches the discussion of *Paris is Burning* to observe where some divergences appear:

> There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the "we" cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. It is the space of this ambivalence which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds—and fails to proceed.

Paris is Burning is a well-known documentary filmed in New York City in the late 1980s, focused on black and Latinx queer performers competing in different categories at drag balls in Harlem. The film intercuts talking-head and audio interviews with various participants about the social context in which the balls take place with the ballroom performances themselves. Butler is not a film theorist. Their interest in *Paris is Burning* is focused not on the film's aesthetics but on how the filmed participants subvert hegemonic gender norms in their ballroom performances while simultaneously reiterating their social interpellations as queer subjects of colour.

Writing about the film, Caryl Flinn (1998: 429) posits that 'it is no stretch to say that documentary films, in many ways more so than other cinematic forms, reveal the constructed—indeed, performative—nature of the world around us'. This would seem to tally with Butler's notion of performativity. Bruzzi (2006: 188) disagrees, positing that Flinn is 'conflating form and content'. While the film is performative according to

Bruzzi's (2006: 187) stated criteria of featuring 'performative subjects', it is not performative in the sense of highlighting 'the intrusive presence of the filmmaker'. We can establish from this response that for Bruzzi, 'documentary films' here are the form, and 'the world around us' is the content, which we might further distil to a question of conflating discourse with matter. The conflation of discourse and matter is the core element of Butler's performativity—in the sense that the 'form and content' (discourse and matter) of both gender and sex are co-constitutive. For Bruzzi (2006: 189), however, the performative documentary is 'in an unstable state of redefinition and change' only when a filmmaker makes her intrusion clear, while the 'conventional' documentary is stable and fixed presumably by way of a filmmaker's apparent lack of intervention. Bruzzi's 'conventional' documentary resonates with what Nichols (1991: 38) calls the 'observational mode [… stressing] the non-intervention of the filmmaker. Such films cede "control" over the events that occur in front of the camera more than any other mode'. This allows us to consider how all of these statements emerge from a framework of representation that holds film and reality as distinct dimensions. According to Butler, what makes any gender normative (or 'conventional') is a historically contingent but also materially constrained hegemonic framework of intelligibility that generates the gendered subject. We can also follow this logic in the practice of documentary filmmaking. However, one of the most important aspects of Butler's theory must be taken into consideration before it can be employed in such a way.

Both Bruzzi and Nichols categorise the performative documentary as ones whose filmmakers *choose* to thematise performance of one sort or another. Take, for instance, this concluding thought by Bruzzi (2006: 252), in which she claims the 'new'

documentary maintains an interest in 'the more overt forms of performativity: reconstruction, acknowledgement of and interplay with the camera, image manipulation, performance'. Performativity, for Butler (2011: 59) 'is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance'. To further clarify Butler's view on performance as choice, consider this statement given in an interview (Butler and Kotz 1992: 83), outlining a 'bad reading' of performativity:

> The bad reading goes something like this: I can get up in the morning, look in my closet, and decide which gender I want to be today. I can take out a piece of clothing and change my gender, stylize it, and then that evening I can change it again and be something radically other.

Gender performativity, and subjectivity more broadly, are not for Butler a question of choice or even something that can be parsed in autonomous terms. Later in the same interview (1992: 84), Butler says:

> "performativity" is not radical choice and it's not voluntarism. […] Performativity has to do with repetition, very often with the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms to force them to resignify. This is not freedom, but a question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in.

In my reading, extending Butler's philosophy to the realm of documentary films requires acknowledging that all documentaries are performative in the sense that they function according to the norms that make them intelligible as documentaries, and

indeed tend to reify that discursive structure. As Carroll (1996a: 287) argues, a documentary film is '*indexed*' as a documentary before a spectator sees the first frame. In other words, for Carroll it is by being called a documentary that a film is understood to be a documentary, rather than according to any distinct aesthetic property. A documentary is thus identified according to a recognisable discursive framework that, as Carroll puts it, 'tells us something about its commitments, specifically that it is committed to certain standards of scientific accuracy and attendant protocols of objectivity'. While this definition of documentaries might generate questions and contestations, Carroll makes the point that by eliding a discursive framework, a documentary would have to escape its intelligibility; it would no longer be understood or 'indexed' as a documentary film. The conundrum for Butler is how a subject can become intelligible without the concurrent constraints that enable their very differentiation: 'how to work the trap that one is inevitably in'. As such, while I find Butler's performativity less useful in defining a category of documentaries, it undoubtedly proposes some useful strategies to analyse filmmaking practices, as I will go on to develop. As for the categories developed by Bruzzi and Nichols, I wonder if both might not be better served by cinematic theatricality as it has been theorised by Ismail Xavier (see 2009 for example) and more recently by Ilia Rhyzenko (2022), thus avoiding the inevitable confusion with Butler's philosophy.

I agree with Carroll and Bruzzi that objectivity in documentaries is possible, and part of what I argue resonates with what Bruzzi (2006: 7) terms the 'dialectical relationship between the text, the reality it represents and the spectator'.[22] I contend that

[22] In my view the expression 'dialectical relationship' does not quite express the complexity of the entanglement between the filmmaking apparatus, indeterminate matter, and indeterminate

Bruzzi's reading of Butler stems from an unquestioned assumption of ontological representationalism, and indeed it is where this study most significantly departs from hers (see also Lübecker and Rugo 2023). Bruzzi (2006: 197) states that 'documentary cannot but perform the interaction between reality and its representation'. In my account, Butler's philosophy insists upon performativity not as a method, technique, or indeed a representation, but as an inescapable material fact without which subjectivity cannot exist. Just as Butler posits that subjectivity is not an essence or a choice, but a doing contingent upon a system of coherence, this thesis claims reality not as an essential whole with fixed properties, but rather essentially indeterminate until it becomes intelligible. This intelligibility is not a choice either; but it can be queered.[23] What is required is a way to become cognisant of the reiterative effects of performativity in order to rearticulate the limits and constraints of that intelligibility. For Barad, this shifting of attention away from binaries of language and matter, sign and referent to a philosophy of relational co-constitution provides a way to understand how Cartesian divisions come into existence through material-discursive practices. In other words, instead of ping-ponging between subjects and objects, we shift focus to the very practices that constitute these divisions. Scientific apparatuses, like a motion picture camera, record the world according to a framework of intelligibility that is part of their design. The pro-filmic event does not simply perform for the camera; the camera is also performative in delimiting what is recorded, as I will develop in the

spectator. For Bruzzi (2006: 6), on the other hand 'the pact between documentary, reality and the documentary spectator is far more straightforward than many theorists have made out'.

[23] I use the term queer here in the sense proposed by David Halperin (1995: 62): 'Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant'. In other words, queer refers less to homosexuality than it does to re-structuring relations by highlighting and counteracting normative frameworks.

context of *WTYM* later in this chapter. Before then, I will briefly outline the original shoot that eventually resulted in both the final film and this thesis.

A (partly contested) Backstory

> How *reality* is understood matters.
>
> —Karen Barad (2007: 205).

The raw materials for *We Tattooed Your Mother* (*WTYM*) come from an almost unplanned film shoot in 2010 of my Brazilian mother, Regina Philip, having a tattoo she disliked covered by a new one. The original body art consisted of an unidentified insect with Regina's four grandchildren's names written in its wings. Regina was not happy with the resulting tattoo and wanted a new one superimposed that would completely conceal the original illustration. How we got to that particular tattoo parlour at that particular time remains the subject of dispute, an issue I touch upon within the filmic narrative. What can be ascertained from the footage metadata illustrated below is that I recorded a total of 1 hour, 47 minutes, 17 seconds and 20 frames at 25 frames per second in the ASI tattoo shop on 1142 South State Street in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, in 2010. The encoded data verify that the first shot was created on 1 July 2010 at 01:27:06 UTC (figure 2).[24] The last shot was created on 1 July 2010 at 03:26:43, with a duration of 4 minutes and 18 seconds (figure 3), so between the first frame of footage and the last, there was a duration of 2 hours, 3 minutes and 55 seconds. I have a signed release form from the tattoo artist, Sarah Dalbec, dated 6/30/10, agreeing to be in the

[24] Figures 2 and 3 display technical data from the files containing the first and last shots of Regina in the tattoo parlour. The time zone is set to UK time (UTC). I include these as documentary evidence to my claims about the events of that day.

film, and my sister Libby and her daughter Araceli, or Celi, also appear in the recorded images. At the time of writing, Libby continues to reside in Salt Lake City, where her husband was born. The footage was shot on a Canon EOS 7D digital SLR fitted with the EFS 55–250 zoom lens that came bundled with the camera body. I did not have an external eyepiece to look through the viewfinder as I operated the camera and could not comfortably reach the built-in one. I framed, focused and set exposure of the shots based on what I could see through the LCD screen, measuring 7.5cm diagonally (6.5cm x 3.7cm). Shooting through a small screen meant I did not notice the stroboscopic effect resulting from the frame rate and shutter speed being set for use in the UK (where the camera was purchased). The US fluorescent lights run at a different electrical frequency to the camera's shutter speed, generating flickering images.

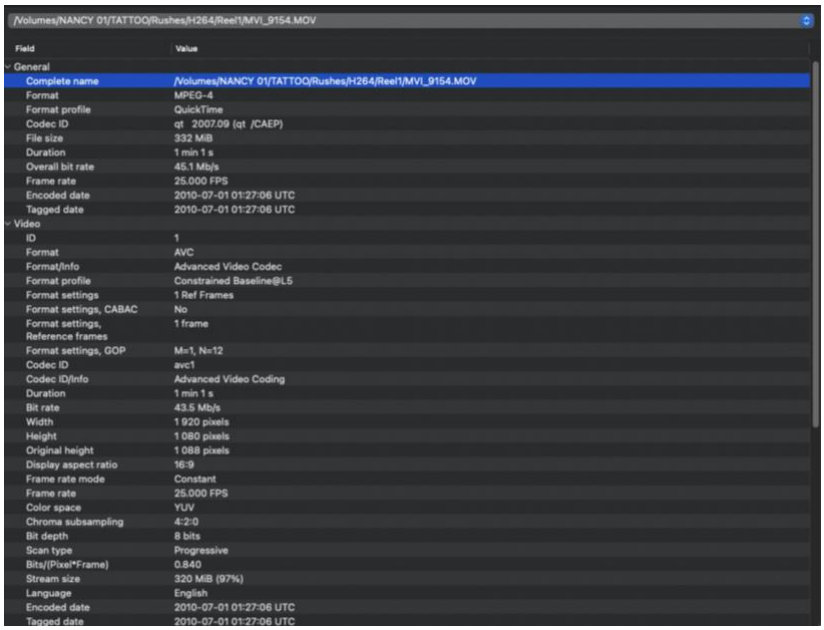
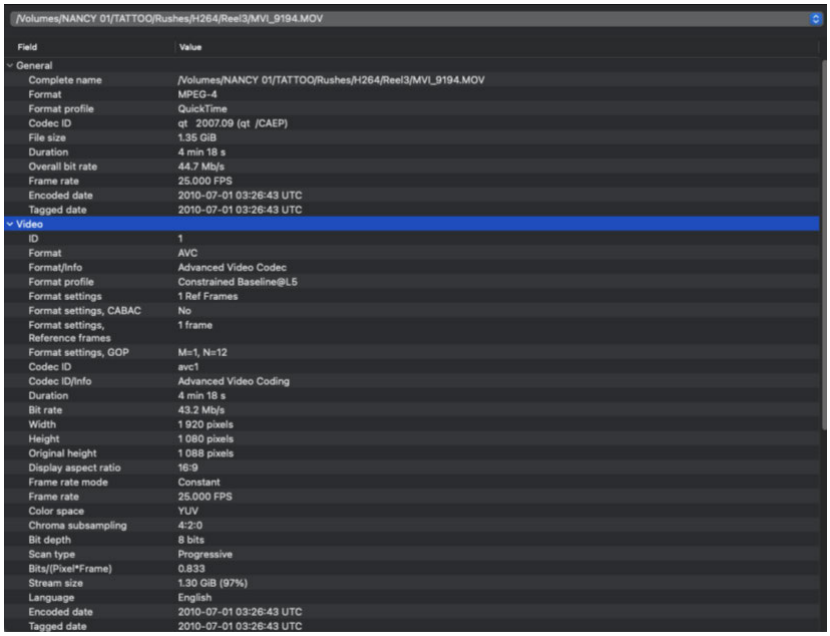


Figure 2: Metadata from the first shot of the original shoot (author's screenshot).



/Volumes/NANCY 01/TATTOO/Rushes/H264/Reel3/MVI_9194.MOV

Field	Value
General	
Complete name	/Volumes/NANCY 01/TATTOO/Rushes/H264/Reel3/MVI_9194.MOV
Format	MPEG-4
Format profile	QuickTime
Codec ID	qt 2007.09 (qt /CAEP)
File size	1.35 GiB
Duration	4 min 18 s
Overall bit rate	44.7 Mb/s
Frame rate	25.000 FPS
Encoded date	2010-07-01 03:26:43 UTC
Tagged date	2010-07-01 03:26:43 UTC
Video	
ID	1
Format	AVC
Format/Info	Advanced Video Codec
Format profile	Constrained Baseline@L5
Format settings	1 Ref Frames
Format settings, CABAC	No
Format settings, Reference frames	1 frame
Format settings, GOP	M=1, N=12
Codec ID	avc1
Codec ID/Info	Advanced Video Coding
Duration	4 min 18 s
Bit rate	43.2 Mb/s
Width	1 920 pixels
Height	1 080 pixels
Original height	1 088 pixels
Display aspect ratio	16:9
Frame rate mode	Constant
Frame rate	25.000 FPS
Color space	YUV
Chroma subsampling	4:2:0
Bit depth	8 bits
Scan type	Progressive
Bits/(Pixel*Frame)	0.833
Stream size	1.30 GiB (97%)
Language	English
Encoded date	2010-07-01 03:26:43 UTC
Tagged date	2010-07-01 03:26:43 UTC

Figure 3: Metadata from the last shot of the original shoot (author's screenshot).

Following are some legally documented facts: Regina was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1947 and has lived in São Paulo for nearly five decades—since before I was born—at the time of writing. She is a retired primary schoolteacher who had married my Scottish father aged 20. They had four children before she turned 30 and separated when she was 42 and I was 12. She has lived mostly alone since I left home to attend university in the United States in 1995. I am the youngest of her children, all of whom now live abroad. I was born in São Paulo in 1977 where I attended a private British school, from ages 4 to 18, free of charge as my mother taught there. I left Brazil for the USA in 1995 shortly after turning 18 and have lived in London since 2002. I have been a practitioner in various post-production capacities since 1999, editing mostly nonfiction films for cinema and television as well as producing commercial animations for online distribution. I have also engaged in some professional camerawork, and I am an avid

stills photographer. Regina is not a filmmaker and has no experience in the production of films or in the visual arts.

At the time of the shoot, I was working in London as a professional editor and motion designer at a small production company owned by a music management company. Being a director was not a strong ambition for me. As someone who constantly questions decisions, including my own, I felt better suited to the tranquillity of an edit suite, where there is usually the luxury of time to interrogate and investigate alternatives. I find the pressures of immediate answers required in the heat of professional productions a source of anxiety. At the same time, I had been consistently shooting still photographs with film cameras since at least 1998, when I attended my first photography course as an undergraduate; however, I considered myself an amateur photographer. I investigate how embracing non-professionalism later becomes a guiding idea in the production of *WTYM* in Chapter 3.[25] I had recently bought the Canon EOS–7D, a Digital SLR capable of shooting High-Definition video with interchangeable lenses. These relatively affordable stills cameras with secondary video capabilities were at the time being touted as a democratising tool for independent filmmakers who could use cheap second-hand prime lenses to achieve low depth of field—often described as a cinematic look. I also invested in a £12 monopod, bringing it with me to Salt Lake City. I had likely mentioned to my sister that I hoped to practice shooting with the camera with a view to getting more professional camera work. In other words, I considered myself an amateur, if experienced camera operator.

[25] I did have some previous experience working as a camera operator in New York City, being credited as cinematographer for my work on a true crime series for *America Undercover*, at HBO. However, these fictional shoots entailed re-enacting the amateurish shooting style associated with police officers documenting a crime scene, and arguably with a longer genealogy of North American direct cinema practices of the 1960s.

As I recall, my intention during and immediately after the shoot was to produce a short documentary for a limited, domestic audience in what Bill Nichols (1991: 58) might classify 'the observational mode': driven by the dialogue and physical interaction between Regina and the tattoo artist, Sarah, happening on location.[26] I am of course constantly interacting with the camera: reframing by moving my body, the height of the monopod, and the focal length of the zoom lens. As Ilona Hongisto (2015:13) says, a documentary camera operator that reframes the image speaks to the blurry boundaries of documentation and creative practice. In the context of the unplanned shoot, I also acknowledge David MacDougall's (2006: 7) claim that a 'hunting' camera records more than the event alone, also documenting the uncertainty of a filmmaker who is 'looking at nothing but hoping that by moving the camera over the surface of a subject something will be gathered up' (see also Chapter 3). As I recall, I hoped to intrude as little as possible and allow events to unfold before the camera, allowing the interaction between Regina and Sarah to dictate the direction of both the conversation and action. I planned enough to obtain the release form from the tattooist, indicating an awareness that the work might be exhibited beyond a familial setting. I can find no documentation to corroborate my memory of hiring a small, professional, directional stereo microphone that was mounted to the camera's hot shoe. Either way, upon screening the footage I became aware that the microphone had failed or was incorrectly fitted. The only available recorded sound was from the camera's built-in monaural microphone. While the sound is audible, I felt the quality was not good enough to be usable. Furthermore, the owners of the tattoo parlour did not switch off the commercial radio

[26] While I acknowledge the limitations and problematic teleology of Nichols' taxonomy, as per Stella Bruzzi's critique (2006), it provides a useful shorthand for the straightforward modes of address I was initially cogitating for the film.

playing in the background, making any clean up attempts even more difficult. Two years later, on July 4, 2012, I digitally recorded an audio interview with Regina when she was visiting my home in London using a Tascam DR–40 device. In two takes, we recorded 50 minutes and 19 seconds of our conversation. I asked her about what she remembered of the day in question, and her answers led me to dig deeper with further questions.

The video shoot in the tattoo parlour and subsequent audio interview are the primary recordings that would eventually become, eight years later, the springboard for the rest of the film. In the audio interview, I can hear my surprise and irritation at Regina's memory of the film shoot. According to her recollection, I had conceived and planned everything, including her getting the tattoo. I was able to determine, based on the footage, the inaccuracy of some things Regina reported, such as who was at the tattoo shop. Nonetheless, I was troubled by the limits of what could be confirmed based on what we did not document. Considering Regina's certainty of how events had unfolded, I realised that my memory could not objectively be considered any more credible than hers. All I could rely on was the footage that had recorded most of the two hours while we were on location. At that point, I decided to hinge the film upon this uncertainty: to use the audio interview to narrate our contradictory memories of that day against the images recorded by the camera. My first attempt to construct the film in what we might call a 'reflexive mode' (Nichols 1991: 56) in 2012 ended in failure. I did not believe I had enough interesting material to create a compelling metacommentary on the filmmaking process, even if only for a domestic audience. Unsure what I was trying to achieve with the film and unable to find an adequate documentary genre to contain it, I shelved the project.

There is some affinity here between my struggle to find a story from a filmed record and the early history of documentary itself. When John Grierson (1933: 8) famously identifies documentaries as 'the creative treatment of actuality', he points to the fact that the record itself does not make a documentary: it is engendered by taking a 'seemingly dull subject and find[ing] a way of putting it on the screen' (Grierson 1933: 9). As Cecília Mello (2019: 148) points out, while the early cinema snippets filmed and exhibited by the Lumières Brothers recorded actualities, it is only when recorded documents were crafted into a filmic narrative, by Robert Flaherty or Grierson's GPO film unit, for instance, that the documentary came to be understood as a film category. Mello cites the film essayist João Moreira Salles (2009: 228) and I repeat his turn of phrase here: 'Flaherty […] does not describe, he constructs'. Indeed, the difference between recording a document and a documentary tallies with Bazin's conception of realism. Speaking in the context of Jean Renoir's film practice, Bazin (1974: 85) claims that:

> The word "realism" […] indicates a certain tendency toward the faithful rendering of reality on film. Given the fact that this movement toward the real can take a thousand different routes, the apologia for "realism" per se, strictly speaking, means nothing at all. The movement is valuable only insofar as it brings increased meaning (itself an abstraction) to what is created.

As alluded to earlier, it is precisely this tension between aesthetic meaning and indeterminate reality that Bazin considers essential to cinema, reaching its pinnacle when it achieves the perfect balance between the two. The success of realism according

to Bazin depends on the crafting of a film that generates an understanding about reality without completely foregoing its potential for ambiguity. For Bazin, we might say, cinematic realism is onto-epistemological. For Barad, this also applies to reality.

While I am not asserting that Bazin was an agential realist *avant la lettre*, he quite clearly points out that for him a cinematic fact is a meaningful photographic expression of otherwise indeterminate, 'multiple and equivocal' matter. Although his interest is not to define an ontology of how objects in nature come to be understood as such, he is crystal clear in pointing out that ambiguity is inherent to the object itself. The ontological equivalence of photographic image and object is also crucial in this equation: matter is not passively awaiting inscription; it is already multiple in its potential for meaning. Take, for instance, the following quote (Bazin 2005: 35, emphasis mine) written in the context of Italian neorealism:

> It is not of the essence of a stone to allow people to cross rivers without wetting their feet any more than the divisions of a melon exist to allow the head of the family to divide it equally. Facts are facts, our imagination makes use of them, *but they do not exist inherently for this purpose*.

In this case, facts do not exist merely to fulfil their anthropocentric factual purpose. The neorealist filmmaker, according to Bazin (1967: 37), makes a meaningful addition to reality by aesthetically shaping matter, while leaving enough open to the further indeterminacy of the spectatorial experience: 'neorealism tends to give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality'. In the same article, Bazin (1962: 33, my translation) clarifies that a fact is a 'fragment of raw reality, in itself multiple and

equivocal, whose "meaning" emerges only *a posteriori* thanks to other "facts" between which the mind establishes relationships'. [27]

The 'fragment of raw reality' documenting Regina getting her tattoo remained archived on a hard drive until 2020, when I first came across Barad's work, which inspired me to revisit it. Re-listening to the audio interview and watching the footage following the eight intervening years, I felt there was enough material to dedicate towards this doctoral research. These are the mostly recorded and documented facts of the matter at hand. If you have not done so already, I strongly suggest watching *WTYM* before beginning the next section.

Queering Habitual Subjects

This section introduces some of the themes within *WTYM* which will be elaborated in the rest of this and the following chapter. I argue that performativity as a concept can clarify how diffraction de-naturalises or queers norms and constraints, thus generating new ways of thinking about the disruptive potential of documentaries, past and future.

[27] Bazin (1962: 33) writes 'L'unité du récit cinématographique dans *Paisà* n'est pas le « plan », point de vue abstrait sur la réalité qu'on analyse, mais le « fait ». Fragment de réalité brute, en lui même multiple et équivoque, dont le « sens » se dégage seulement a posteriori grâce à d'autres « faits » entre lesquels l'esprit établit des rapports'. Hugh Gray (Bazin 2005: 37) translates the second sentence as: 'A fragment of concrete reality in itself multiple and full of ambiguity, whose meaning emerges only after the fact, thanks to other imposed facts between which the mind establishes certain relationships'. The translation significantly alters the meaning in the replacement of 'equivocal' with 'full of ambiguity' and the addition of the word 'imposed' before 'facts', as well as not replacing Bazin's pointed use of guillemets on the words 'meaning' and 'facts'. Timothy Barnard (Bazin 2009: 241) translates the same passage to 'The unit of *Paisà*'s narrative is not the shot, with its abstract perspective on the reality being analysed, but the event—a fragment of raw reality, inherently multifarious and ambiguous, whose meaning becomes apparent only after the fact, though other events connected up in our minds'. Barnard also omits the emphasis from Bazin's original text. He combines the two sentences, changing the word 'fait(s)' to 'event(s)'. In my view, a writer as careful as Bazin was deliberately employing and repeating the word 'fact', not least through the emphasis employed in both occurrences.

When it comes to first-person documentaries such as the final version of *WTYM*, the inherent problem of using literary tropes to speak and write about film comes to the fore. As Christian Metz (1991: 40) points out, film 'is apparently a *kind of language (une sorte de langage)* but it [is] seen as something less, *a language system (une langue)*'. Without eschewing the notion that cinema is discursive, Metz (1991: 41) explains how applying a fixed syntax to film relies upon a retroactive causality: 'one understands the syntax because one has understood, and only because one has understood, the film'. The immanent multiplicity of meaning contained within any single image makes it impossible to taxonomise cinema into a totalising syntax. And yet that image, or the combination of images and sounds that make up a film, generate a material constraint of what can be said, or understood, as does the language we use to speak of any film, or indeed any experience.[28] The entanglements of the ontic and semantic shape and limit one another. This lack of linguistic coherence in film leads Elizabeth Bruss (1980: 296) to make her well-known assertion that 'there is no real cinematic equivalent for autobiography'. Bruss (1980: 298) begins her argument with the Cartesian assertion of selfhood, a 'metaphysical necessity', from which the autobiographical voice springs. Conceptualising such a unified literary authorial voice in reductive terms has been widely contested (see Rascaroli 2009: 8–10 for a summary). At first glance it would appear much simpler in a literary context to be concise about the form and function of a situated, first-person address identified by the use of a first-person pronoun. Alisa Lebow (2008: xii) points out that the autobiographical self is always already in-relation, 'never conceivable in isolation'. As for first-person

[28] Material and discursive constraints are not, however, preserved in aspic. They are agential intra-actions; the nature of those actions change within every entangled context.

documentaries, Lebow (2012: 2, emphasis mine), draws on Jean Luc Nancy to point out that:

> The first person grammatical structure can be either singular or plural. By not specifying which form is to be privileged, *we allow the resonances to reverberate between the I and the we*—to imagine indeed, that the one doesn't speak without the other, that in fact, the 'I' inheres in the 'we', if not vice versa. […] The individual 'I' does not exist alone, but always 'with' another, which is to say *being one is never singular but always implies and indeed embodies another*.

In the case of Regina, my mother, this process becomes even more complicated in the sense that, quite literally, my existence implies (and implicates) her embodiment; we reverberate through one another in our mutually entangling materiality, genetics, and psychology. The large crew Bruss assumes is necessary in a film's production diffuses, she claims, the coherence of the speaking subject. However, the presence of a crew has not been necessary at least since the development of mobile film cameras that enabled Carolee Schneeman's avant-garde, autobiographical practices in the 1960s, for instance. It became even less of an issue with smaller, cheaper video cameras that enabled self-shooting filmmakers to take on multiple production roles in the 1980s and 1990s (see Renov 2004; Rich 2013). Furthermore, while there are several handheld tracking shots filmed by me within *WTYM*, where we might assume the 'eye' stands in for the 'I',

these are not strictly necessary for a documentary to be classified as first-person.[29] What is essential is a situated mode of address that brings 'the filmmaker to the fore' (Rascaroli 2009: 5). This need not be a fully intelligible subject. The 'metaphysical necessity' of a unified, coherent self is, according to Bruss (1980: 297) 'shattered by film'. In my view, therein lies the very diffractive potential of film practices, indubitably different from a written autobiography, and in no way a replacement for its literary predecessor. I will return to the notion of the diffracted self in *WTYM* in Chapter 3. Suffice for now to state that cameras affirm even as they interfere with the shifting boundaries of coherent selfhoods that are drawn and redrawn from within the pre-filmic, in relation to the very complexity of the reality in which meaningful subjectivities and identities materialise.

Lebow (2008: 88) outlines the 'paradoxical space' from which to position the theorisation and criticism of one's own film. I share her concern that an autocritique may be less incisive than one emerging from outside both the making of the film and its deeply personal subject matter. However, like Lebow's first-person(s) documentary *Treyf*, co-directed with Cynthia Mandansky (1998), *WTYM* is in many ways a film about a crisis of identity; a case of being an insider and an outsider at the same time. The moment of birth is a separation of mythical proportions for all of us as we are exiled from the prenatal womb, generating an insider/outsider relationship between mothers and their children. *WTYM* is driven less by an autoethnographic epistephilia about my hereditary origin than by a wish to complicate, as Lebow (2008: 36) puts it,

[29] While these might be defined as point of view shots, I hesitate to make the moving camera's view surrogate to the filmmaker's or the spectator's given Daniel Morgan's persuasive argument (2021: 14) that this correlation is linked to the 'underlying desire' for identification with the camera, 'a deep epistemological fantasy' rather than an easily evidenced ontological fact.

'the displaced nature of memory itself'. The film's participants could not agree on the events that led us to the tattoo parlour: would it be possible to remember how we became intelligible as our selves on a more fundamental level? Instead of pursuing either an observational or a reflexive mode for the film, in some ways the final result might fit better with Michael Renov's (2004: 218) description of a '*domestic ethnography* […] the documentation of family members or, less literally, of people with whom the maker has maintained long-standing everyday relations and has thus achieved a level of casual intimacy'. For Renov, the proximity of this often familial relation implicates the filmmaker with the filmed subject, a kind of 'supplementary autobiographical practice', one that troubles the boundaries of insider and outsiderdom. It is in this way that I hope to queer my matrilineality without claiming that it is possible to fully achieve this goal. My strategy includes interrogating how Regina's identity both as mother but also beyond motherhood is always haunted by her mother Edith and grandmother Hencza/Helena as well as the complex personal, social, and historical material-discursivities which entangle through all of these. Historical and social circumstances that help shape individuals defy grand narratives while being inevitably constrained by them. There is a danger of a personal film such as this reiterating the atomisation that is one of the hallmarks of neoliberal society. I draw again from Lebow (2013: 263) to posit that first-person films of this sort can also potentially 'instantiate the integration and interpenetration of the particular and the universal, the subjective as intersubjective, intervening in the distribution of the sensible in unsettling ways'.

Regina says that the story of this film starts with her tattoos. They are the catalyst or excuse to question an earlier, deeper, transgenerational memory from which

a loose backstory emerges, an experimental intervention into the past ‘in order to find an absent, but perhaps possible, other present’ (Haraway 2004: 63). What can be generated by questioning these genealogical, social, and geographical inscriptions that haunt us? Henri Bergson’s duration (1991: 78) speaks to the continuous movement of matter from which we carve out our present as a prolongation of the past: ‘we may speak of the body as an ever advancing boundary between the future and the past, as a pointed end, which our past is continually driving forward into our future’. To illustrate two functions of memory, Bergson uses the metaphor of repeatedly studying a lesson to learn it by heart. This repetitive action, he claims, forms a habitual memory—a learned pattern. The memory of each successive reading of the lesson, however, is related to an unrepeatable event, it is a spontaneous action. By differentiating these two types of recollections Bergson posits that remembering the event of the lesson is equivalent to slicing through a specific moment in duration. The memorised lesson, on the other hand, becomes an action; ‘it is part of my present, exactly like my habit of walking or of writing; it is lived and acted’ (1991: 81). It becomes, in other words, an automatic embodied behaviour. We can change how we walk by concentrating and abstracting the repeated series of movements, but it is hard to break the habit of a lifetime. Bergson goes on to distinguish these two perceptual types of memory from pure memory that, as Paula Amad (2010: 121) summarises it: ‘remains unrecollected, virtual, and heterogeneous; it points to the preservation of the past in and for itself’. For Bergson (1991: 155), these planes of memory do not remain separate, but constantly interfere with one another: ‘In normal life they are interpenetrating, so that each has to abandon some part of its original purity’.

The automatism of Bergson's habitual memory resonates with Butler's gender performativity. Butler's gendered subject is constituted by and through performative reiteration constrained by social interpellations. Butler continuously refines the tension between interpellated limitations and the possibility for resisting them in the wake of the profoundly influential *Gender Trouble*. Donald E. Hall (2004: 128) argues that there is '*potential* agency' within subjectivity to rework conflicting interpellations once they are recognised as such; which is to say when they are de-naturalised from the habitual. Hall (2004: 128) claims:

> To de-naturalize our *selves* is not to make them easily manipulable, but it is to disrupt and disturb the *automatism* of their relationship to fixed scripts and values of the past (and the present, too, in the dogma of fundamentalism, narrow essentialism, and other reactionary movements).

The making and watching of films are also iteratively learned, performative practices—per Bazin (1967: 16), 'cinema is also a language'. What is intelligible in a film partly relies on the habitual memories of watching other films. There is a certain automatism in their modes of address that make them intelligible as particular types of filmic narratives. These practices are performative in the sense that Butler outlines: they are constituted and constrained by the frameworks that make them intelligible while repeating these very frameworks that make them readable. A genre film is constrained by the rules of its genre that become established through the reiteration that makes them intelligible. Yet these can also be subverted in a manner that makes apparent the rules we might have otherwise taken for granted. Documentary films are constrained by what

makes them intelligible as documentaries, and indeed these constraints can also be subverted or de-naturalised. By disrupting the documentary, with its claim to the real, there exists the potential to de-naturalise given semantic and ontic frameworks of intelligibility about reality. The point of de-naturalisation, as Sara Ahmed (2006: 158) reminds us, 'is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do—whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope'. Changing how reality is understood, to borrow from Jacques Rancière (2011: 139), 're-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible'. In the next section, I discuss how an agential realist understanding of matter as performative generates the possibility for technical objectivity that comes with understanding the camera and audio recorder as performative apparatuses.

The Performative Camera

> Measurements imply values. Whose values are they?
>
> – Felicity Colman (2014: 19).

> The fact that every thing which has come into our consciousness is remembered points to its leaving permanent marks in the organism.
>
> – Niels Bohr (1963: 28).

Bohr's statement above, easily contested when taken out of context, comes from an unfinished manuscript where he considers the relationship between physics and biology. What Bohr means by 'our consciousness' here is our habitual, embodied

processes of breathing, of our heartbeat, our flexing muscles and articulating cartilages. Note the implication that these processes remain indivisibly entangled in what we usually consider a more narrative concept of remembering. Bohr argues that a shift in sensory data leaves a 'mark in the organism', making an irreversible change in our nervous system that functions to re-establish stability, an embodied feedback system. These embodied iterations, or performances, take no thought at all: they become second nature. While Bohr claims that only the potential for feedback is genetically inherited, recent research (see Yehuda and Lehrner 2018) points to what Bohr calls a 'mark' in the organism, including traumatic marks, being passed on to future generations through epigenetic mechanisms. *WTYM* is not a narrative about the kind of violent trauma that has inspired landmark studies of intergenerational transmission (see Cho 2008 or Hartman 2021 for instance). It does, however, include everyday symbolic violence, as Judith Butler (1997: 34) posits it: the messy violence of becoming a subject, which in turn produces and maintains coherent identity. The feedback systems that function to establish stability can be extended to how we understand the world's materialisation, and indeed to film practices. Butler (2011: xviii) unexpectedly aligns to Bohr when defining embodied matter '*as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface*'. The stabilisation enabled by patterns of becoming is an integral aspect of how Butler's performativity functions, and it is this stable, reiterated second nature about family history and its effects that I hope to disrupt in *WTYM*. A mark left on film also has the ability to mark the spectator: our senses are affected by watching a film, and these become a part of our embodied memory. Therein lies Bazin's ontological identity of the object, as well as the potential to generate onto-epistemological feedback and thus displace automatism.

Barad (2007: 33–4) extends performativity beyond Butler's humanist concern: 'agential realism takes account of the fact that the forces at work in the materialization of bodies are not only social, and the bodies produced are not all human'. Scientific apparatuses, according to Barad, are also performative, 'culturally sanctioned' practices of intelligibility: they execute a Cartesian separation within matter to make the subjects and objects of observation intelligible. Barad terms (2007: 139–40) this slicing-through an 'agential cut':

> Intra-actions include the larger material arrangement (i.e. set of material practices) that effects an *agential cut* between "subject" and "object" (in contrast to the more familiar Cartesian cut which takes this distinction for granted). That is, the agential cut enacts a resolution *within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological (and semantic) indeterminacy.

The agential cut provides a framework to understand how indeterminate matter becomes performatively separated into subject/object by activating a causality, in other words making a cut of intelligibility in undifferentiated matter. As documentarian Tony Dowmunt (2010: 44) asserts, film practices generate meaningful Cartesian slices in the very act of filming: 'the possession of a camera by the filmmaker inevitably renders what/who is in front of his/her lens as 'other''. To film is to mark out boundaries of difference. This is an inescapable fact of filmmaking, and I argue here that it is through similar ontologising practices that we fundamentally sequester subject from world. Cartesian dualism takes the sense certainty of interiority/exteriority to be a given fact, whereas agential realism posits that dualism emerges through a repeatable, constitutive

aspect of that intelligibility—an onto-epistemo-logical process. The practice of cinematography makes a cut in what I am calling the pre-filmic, generating a Cartesian resolution between a camera and pro-filmic event. The film shot slices through matter's potential materialisations by enacting one possibility: the shutter actions a cut that binds the pro-filmic event to the technical apparatus by recording images constituted by both. In other words, the camera both participates in the generation of phenomena and records the very difference-in-phenomena it enacts; as Barad (2014: 168) puts it 'intra-actions enact agential cuts, which do not produce absolute separations, but rather cut together-apart (one move)'. Barad (2010: 265) further elaborates upon this notion of together-apartness here:

> *Agential cuts—intra-actions*—don't produce (absolute) separation, they engage in *agential separability*—differentiating and entangling (that's one move, not successive processes) [...] Separability in this sense, *agential separability*, is a matter of irreducible heterogeneity that is not undermined by the relations of inheritance that hold together the disparate without reducing difference to sameness. Entanglements are not a name for the interconnectedness of all being as one, but rather specific material relations of the ongoing differentiating of the world.

The separation of camera as object and the pro-filmic event as subject resolves the pre-filmic's indeterminacy into a Cartesian system of cause and effect, subject and object within the inherent indeterminacy of matter. To elaborate, intra-actions and the agential cuts they enact generate exteriority and interiority in phenomena—what is exterior and

interior to the camera, for instance—and this provides a framework of 'agential separability' (Barad 2007: 140). Agential separability is the key to objectivity in agential realism in the sense that is produces a mark on the sensor of the recording instrument—footage, for example—through which we can separate the experimental conditions and agencies through which that mark is generated. Objectivity does not inherently precede the cut effected by the recording apparatus. There are myriad ways to arrange a shot which would enact a different cut in pre-filmic indeterminacy; this would have an effect on how the objective recording is understood. Needless to say, there is a material world in phenomena before filming takes place. Barad's argument is that the world is not quantifiable in its near-infinite potential for intra-action. Quantifying possibility institutes a conceptual framework that becomes second nature at the expense of excluding other potential possibilities. It constitutes the very differences it identifies in a systematic manner. The pre-filmic in this account means, in practice, an unquantifiable field of filmable possibilities or in Deleuzian terms, the virtual that is not actualised in the recorded footage.

Filmmaking practices entangle the aesthetic and the scientific. On location, the camera records scientifically: the correct measurement of focus, exposure, frame rate, shutter speeds, colour balance, and sound recording volumes are requisite to achieving images and sounds deemed technically correct. As mentioned, in the original shoot my goal was to capture the event as accurately as possible based on conventional parameters of accuracy. After Flusser (1984: 22), I intended for the camera to 'program' my gestures in order to capture what I imagined would be a direct document of the event at hand. I also mentioned that due to my lack of a field monitor, I did not notice while I was recording that the lights produced a flickering image as they were

out of phase with the shutter. The image records the dissonance of wavelengths from the light interfering with the rhythm of the electronic shutter. I archived the film in no small part due to the technically incorrect recording of the footage. Not only could I not find a story that interested me in the recorded actuality, but the inaccuracy of the footage according to the camera's program indicated that the sound and images themselves were of little value: they were unprofessional. Nonetheless, I did not delete the footage, and I recorded an interview with Regina about the event two years later.

While the footage is technically incorrect, at some point it occurred to me that the very recording of these errors highlighted the role the camera played that day. Mal Ahern (2018: 8) claims that the distinction between the handmade and the technically produced image 'has to do, most precisely, with the relative presence or absence of dynamic feedback in the image-making process'. According to Ahern, the settings of automated recording devices are adjusted to conceal their intervention in the world, to become absent in the final product. The dissonant wavelengths, for instance, would not be noticeable had I changed the shutter speed to match those of the lights. Ahern links the automatism of the camera to the automatism of the printing press. Feedback, she says, is the active response to dynamic conditions. For instance, a focus-puller shifts focus according to a moving character to keep them sharp; a skilled technician re-aligns a printing press that has shifted out of place to avoid misaligned prints. These are feedback processes. The pro-filmic matter of Regina's body being marked by the tattoo pen is undeniably recorded in the archived footage. The technical errors resulting from my lack of feedback also 'provide a record of the world from which they emerged' (Ahern 2018: 22). The error highlights a material function of the camera's digital rolling shutter that would not be legible had it been adjusted. In other words, the

'registration error' inadvertently provides a record of the lack of preparation I outlined above, but also of the many production processes entangled within the camera apparatus and of fluorescent lighting. The processes of the camera are indexed in the recording and entangled within the pro-filmic event. Crucially, the production process that generates a film image by marking the body of the camera is always included in the film image itself. However, it is the mistake that makes these remarkable rather than unremarked upon through our habitual exposure to correctly recorded moving images.

A normative sense of accurate filmmaking has a wider impact upon epistemological understanding of the functions of time. Ahern (2018: 24) claims that the shift from the hand-cranked cameras of early cinema to the automatic drive mechanism appearing in the 1920s generated 'a new epistemology, and a new sensation, of speed' resulting from the disappearance of dynamic feedback from the camera operator's hand. As the technology becomes standardised and through repeated exhibition of films produced at the same rate, footage filmed using automatic drive mechanisms perform as accurate recordings of reality, becoming epistemological markers of ontological time. As Ahern (2018: 24) puts it:

> We trust a film's record of a subject's speed in part because we understand how a film camera works, but more importantly because we have a vast number of other films, all recorded similarly, to which we can compare it. A stable frame rate—which lacks dynamic flexibility and feedback—functions, then, like the controls of a scientific experiment.

In other words, it is the reiteration of stable frame rates that generate a sense of accurate ontological time and movement on film. The experience of automated processes is performative; they repeatedly generate a framework of intelligibility.[30] Errors resulting from a lack of feedback highlight how the camera and its myriad processes function *within* the reality it purports to record from a distance: it intervenes discursively and materially upon what is recorded. It also inadvertently describes some of the experimental conditions of the practice in question.

It follows that measurements and concepts are specifically designed practices that define the norms of intelligibility through which filmic phenomena emerge. In documentary filmmaking, instead of thinking of the film camera as mere mediator between the real and its re-presentation, I suggest after Barad and Bohr that the former cannot be inherently separated from the latter without entrenching a problematic Cartesian division in matter itself. Filmmaking practices performatively participate in materialising the world, which is not to say we determine reality 'by dint of our own will' (Barad 2007: 353), but it does imply a degree of responsibility at stake. As such, Barad (2007: 26) describes agential realism as an 'epistemological-ontological-ethical framework'. Now that we have established what is meant by performativity in terms of the recording apparatus that enables film, we are ready to delve into the crucial matter of objectivity.

[30] One need only read some of the reviews for mainstream films shot in high frame rate (HFR) for a clear example of how an epistemological sense of correct frame rates pervades film reception (see Turnock 2013).

Objectivity and the Documentary

> I want my look to change reality.
>
> — bell hooks (2015: 116).

In this section, I outline Barad's notion of the agential cut as a way of complicating the technical objectivity that figures in Bazin's thinking on realism. I am arguing here that far from producing the kind of scepticism that Noel Carroll believes is the logical outcome of a postmodernist questioning of grand narratives, the agential cut makes it possible to be very precise in outlining how objectivity comes to be without relying on the ontological premise of Cartesian duality. In his treatise on documentary objectivity, Carroll (1996a: 283) begins by 'scotching' two recurring arguments in postmodernist thinking about documentaries:

> first, that there is something about nonfiction film, due to its inherent nature, that renders it, in contradistinction to other things (such as sociological treatises), uniquely incapable of objectivity; and second, that selectivity guarantees bias. Of course, the preceding argument connects these premises by means of a convenient essentialism: the film medium is by its very nature selective; therefore, it is by its very nature biased (incapable of objectivity).

Carroll's argument rests on the assertion that all objectivity is selective, but that does not necessarily equate to it being biased. However, he posits that once the possibility of bias is a recognised outcome, self-regulation can mitigate its influence. Carroll (1996a: 300) states that 'objectivity might be difficult to secure; but it is still a possibility for

nonfiction film if it is also a possibility for science or history'. Carroll (1996b: 231, emphasis mine) elaborates what he means by objectivity here:

> We call a piece of research objective in light of its adherence to the practices of reasoning and evidence gathering in a given field. It is objective because it can be intersubjectively *evaluated against standards of argument and evidence shared by practitioners* of a specific arena of discourse.

Objectivity, for Carroll, is contingent on the normative standards established for a particular field, including documentaries. This aligns with Joseph Rouse's (2003) reading of Arthur Kuhn's scientific paradigms, understood here as consensual general principles that make collaborative scientific experimentation possible. Paradigms are not, however, to be understood as fixed laws of the universe. Rouse (2003: 108) claims that 'Scientists *use* paradigms rather than believing them. The use of a paradigm in research typically addresses related problems by employing shared concepts, symbolic expressions, experimental and mathematical tools and procedures, and even some of the same theoretical statements'. Paradigms are always open to questioning and change. However, Carroll insists that contingency (or, as he calls it, 'selectivity') is not anathema to truth. Both history and science are concerned with objective causality. While he (1996a: 289) acknowledges that cause and effect are employed as narrative structures, he posits that 'historical reality' also objectively includes causal relationships. The question of objectivity is how those causalities are characterised by the historian in relation to absolute truth. For Carroll, a truthful causality is a universal fact; what changes is how it is articulated in practices and how well it fits in with the

conventions of that practice. Carroll (1996b: 231) is careful to point out that 'objectivity cannot be equivalent to truth […] The history of science is littered with false theories which nonetheless were objective'. This logic stems from a representationalist paradigm: there is a singular historical truth and then there is the historiographical telling that re-presents it; with any luck the two will intersect. The notion of selectivity would appear to resonate with Haraway's notion (1988) of 'feminist objectivity' or 'situated knowledges', but with a significant difference; Haraway (1988: 584) insists that there is no unbiased causality relative to which objectivity exists:

> the alternative to relativism is not totalization and single vision, which is always finally the unmarked category whose power depends on systematic narrowing and obscuring. The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections.

For Carroll, the primacy of cause and effect exists in a pure, unreachable, and ultimately uncertain reality that human practices accidentally coincide with, intermittently at least. Objectivity, for him, is purely relative to a reality where truth is always uncertain, and yet certainly totalisable.

At the centre of Barad's argument on the possibility for objectivity is the essential difference between Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and Niels Bohr's theory of complementarity. In Barad's estimation, every intra-action generates a performative iteration from within a given immanent possibility, a material constraint determined 'by the specificity of the experimental apparatus'. This schema enables objectivity from within without resorting to the 'god trick' required by Cartesian ontologies—per Barad

(2007: 197): 'Objectivity is defined in reference to bodies'. I include in this the body of the camera or audio device that is marked by the material intra-action it seeks to measure. In other words, every filmed shot within a documentary objectively enacts the world by and through its specifically situated framing within a meaningfully material context, as does every phenomenal relation. In this sense, Bazin's claim of ontological identity between photographic image and object makes perfect sense: they are ontologically identical in relation to how they are perceived, which is to say, in-phenomena. But filmmaking, Bazin reminds us, is also a language, which is to say it is epistemological. Mirroring the world implies neutrality, simply repeating what is already there; an agential realist approach suggests responsibility for the differences being generated (or reiterated) within a documentary film. As a practice of doing in the world, a documentary film is a reality generator with an attendant responsibility that is often eschewed within a logic of representation.

As mentioned in the introduction, Nagib (2011: 10) draws on Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière to devise a 'presentational ethics' in which certain filmmakers 'become at once the subject and object of their films, and, in so doing, condition morality and right action to the contingent real'. By committing to the contingent reality of the filmic event, Nagib's 'presentational' filmmakers take responsibility for the reality of which they are already part, which simultaneously constitutes and exceeds them. Nagib shows how a filmmaker's 'fidelity' to the moment of recording is of vital responsibility. Indeed, documentary worlding begins at the point of production, with the recording device entangled *within* the pre-filmic world.[31]

[31] This account differs from Daniel Yacavone's (2015: 54) productive notion of filmmaking as 'worldmaking', which describes a coherent artistic world generated for the spectator at the point

The agential cut provides a site of investigation through which to question the retroactive causality that separates the pro-filmic and the camera rather than taking that distinction as a given. The cut a camera makes between the pro-filmic and the film image enables a genealogical accounting of the performative agencies generated by the recording apparatus, and in that way to attain a measure of objectivity. As Barad (2007: 169, emphasis mine) puts it:

> An apparatus is not premised on inherent divisions between the social and the scientific, the human and the nonhuman, nature and culture. Apparatuses are the practices through which these divisions are constituted. This formulation makes it possible to *perform a genealogical accounting of the material-discursive practices* by which these important distinctions are produced.

Genealogy here is not meant to produce an ultimate source or origin, but rather, in the Nietzschean sense of discerning instances and locations where particular contexts generate and establish meaning or significance (see Foucault 1977). It is also related to what Derrida (1994) understands as the 'inheritance' implicit in any concept. In other words, to 'perform a genealogical accounting' is an attempt to describe some of the specific experimental conditions on which objectivity, in this account, is built upon. In the next section, I use a statement by Regina in *WTYM* as a starting point to think about the meaning of objective filmic colour and black-and-white, and to produce a

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of exhibition, although we might say the relation between filmic world and spectator generates a second iteration of worlding. In no sense can this be objectively determined, however, as per Nagib's (2020: 30) reasoning that 'the only clearly identifiable and measurable cinematic realism derives […] from modes of production'.

genealogical accounting of colour standards that enable the industrial recording of accurate colour data.

Colour and Grey Matter

> In order to decipher photographs, one must know the photographic categories, and in order to know them one must be acquainted with primary scientific theories. Techno-imagination requires knowledge of the theories on which apparatuses are based.
>
> — Vilém Flusser (2011: 198).

> We are in an industrial world which every day produces millions of objects of all types, all in color. Just one of these objects is sufficient—and who can do without them?—to introduce into the house an echo of industrial living.
>
> — Michelangelo Antonioni (1996: 283).

While we sat in the waiting room of the tattoo parlour, Regina says to my sister Libby: 'I think black-and-white photographs have more character, more life'. This statement comes in response to the tattoo artist, Sarah, saying off camera that a cover up tattoo would work better in colour, meaning Regina would be getting her first ever colour tattoo. Regina's discomfort is clear. Libby tells her not to proceed if she does not want colour in the new tattoo. In an audio interview recorded two years later, Regina repeats her preference for the monochromatic: 'one thing I like is black-and-white tattoos. […] Actually, I like life to be black-and-white'. In the context of a film, this statement gave me pause for thought. In an early cut, Regina's words triggered a shift from colour to

monochrome, simply achieved in digital post-production. Thinking through the technical, aesthetic ramifications of this shift as well as its meaning in terms of cinematic realism led towards multiple different paths of research.[32]

In his published letter *In Defense of Rossellini*, Bazin (2005: 98) famously suggests that 'There is ontological identity between the object and its photographic image', and he insists this is true regardless of the object being recorded in colour or black-and-white. The monochromatic photograph, he says, is 'a true imprint of reality, a kind of luminous mold in which color simply does not figure'. As mentioned earlier, Bazin is referring to ontological identity in how an object is perceived. In *Theatre and Film (2)* (2009: 196), he makes this inference crystal clear:

> The photographic image is not appreciably less credible than reality itself. We believe in it the way we believe in what we experience with our senses. The presence of a marvelous or fantastic quality in film, far from invalidating the realism of the image, is the most conclusive evidence of it.

Bazin, as Cato Wittusen (2019: 298) points out, regards technical objectivity and aesthetic objectivity in cinema as related but intelligible from one another. Technical objectivity speaks to the 'rigorous determinism' of photography. For Bazin, aesthetic objectivity is connected to realism as an artistic style that elevates cinema beyond mimesis. This does not mean, however, that colour makes no difference to an aesthetic;

[32] This section includes elements of research conducted for a previously published article (Philip 2021), but with a significantly different approach now that *WTYM* is completed, which was far from the case when the article was published.

simply that it is not essential to a realist aesthetic. David Batchelor (2014: 77) makes this clear in his spectatorial reception of monochrome films:

> It takes no time and no conscious effort to adapt to the greyscale of certain films and many photographs, not to notice the absence of a vast part of our everyday visual experience. It's not just that colour is not there: its being not there is also not there: its absence is not present, not felt or experienced. When I'm watching a black-and-white film I don't sit there mentally filling in the colours; I don't mourn the loss of colours because, after a few seconds of adjustment, I don't experience any sense of loss.

Thinking back to Bohr's claim that the human body feeds back to sensory input in an effort to re-establish stability, we can link Batchelor's points to the embodied automatism that enables the performative matter of black-and-white film to become natural, unmarked, and normative. This is also, of course, influenced by the remembered understanding of what a black-and-white film is and what it means (a past technology, an aesthetic decision, etc.). Furthermore, it is important to remember that while monochrome films are called black-and-white, they are in fact shades of grey. A film of pure black-and-white tests the figurative intelligibility of an image. We might say that the sections of *WTYM* that show the hexadecimal code that computationally generates audio are the only black-and-white images that appear in the film.[33]

[33] Hexadecimal notation describes large sequences of binary digits converted into a simplified code with a base of 16 digits. Rather than an endless stream of 1's and 0's, every hexadecimal digit corresponds to four binary digits in sequence. Each binary digit instructs a shift in voltage within a computational component. See Mano (1982: 75-79) for a relatively straightforward explanation of the conversion from binary to hexadecimal.

Batchelor's twin books *Chromophobia* (2000) and *The Luminous and the Grey* (2014) suggest a Western fear of colour that he traces to Plato, positing that colour has been historically dismissed as primitively foreign, seductively feminine, or dangerously queer. This, however, does not adequately explain what Regina means. She is no minimalist; given the choice, she prefers brightly coloured clothes. She once dyed a rebellious streak of shocking pink in her short-cropped salt and pepper hair. She may not fit normative conventions of Brazilian femininity, but neither is she an austere modernist who avoids colour. Even her beloved football clubs, São Paulo FC and Rio's Fluminense, have bright, tricolour shirts. Her visual life is phenomenologically in colour, having never worn glasses in her youth or been diagnosed with any ocular deficiency. Whatever this stated preference for monochrome might involve, it is not a cultural rejection of vulgar, feminine or queer colour as elaborated by Batchelor. Nonetheless, she certainly leans towards an Aristotelean aesthetics of line over colour, *disegno* versus *colore* (Batchelor 2000: 53) when it comes to her tattoos. When she refers to 'black-and-white tattoos,' she implies black ink outlines inscribed against white skin. The colour of Regina's skin briefly comes up in the film when she pinpoints a schism with her mother from the moment of her birth. Edith, Regina claims, always wanted a blonde, blue-eyed daughter. Regina was born difficult and *morena* as she puts it. As Edward E. Telles (2002: 422) points out, the word *morena* 'is an especially ambiguous referent to race and may encompass all persons with black or dark brown hair'. Although I chose the word brown in the film as I felt it was a more recognisable word, a better translation is the word swarthy, originating from the English word 'swarth', meaning dark in colour according to the OED (Stevenson 2010). Regina is classed white in Brazil, and she identifies herself as such, a fact that also relates to her

social status and education. Her skin colour, however, is a shade of brown, and this is implied in her use of the word *morena* as much as her dark hair.[34] When she talks about 'life in black-and-white,' however, Regina is not literally referring to race, although the theme of race haunts the film, and indeed, in my view, is a ghostly presence in any film taking place in the Americas. What Regina might be alluding to is the presumed simplification of life in black-and-white; and I extend this to include a simplification of the complex ambiguities of racialisation in Brazil to which neither myself nor Regina are immune. The concepts of colour and race in Brazil are deeply embedded in one another; up until 2000, the word *cor* (colour) was used in place of *raça* (race) in the official Brazilian census (Telles 2002). Race and gender, as I will develop in this section, are also deeply embedded in the history of colour photography in a manner that illustrates how Butler's performativity can be extended to the camera.

The colour-perceiving human visual system that inspires the technical design of colour photography is a complex, always changing arrangement, unique to every individual. A so-called normal trichromatic human eye is made up of an array of three classes of retinal cones, each sensitive to a range of wavelengths in the visible spectrum of light (which is to say: visible to humans). These cones are sensitive to wavelengths that are interpreted by neurological processes allowing us to differentiate between and construct taxonomies of red, green, and blue, and further combinations which generate

[34] The ideology of 'whitening' (Koifman 2017) the Brazilian population dates at least to the mid-nineteenth century and is linked to immigration policies that encouraged Europeans to fill the 'empty spaces' of the country, but also to miscegenate and thus 'whiten' the population. People with Jewish, Middle Eastern and Arabic heritage, while differentiated from Christian Europeans and at times deemed 'undesirable' by the state, are officially classed white in Brazil (in the census, for instance), particularly if they receive higher levels of education (see Telles 2002).

all the colours in the visible spectrum. Sean Cubitt (2014: 112, emphasis mine) suggests that:

> the division of subject from object, which so deeply characterizes the Western tradition, does not obtain in the case of color. Neither produced by us alone nor an exclusive property of the world, it belongs to the intersection, the *mutual greeting of human and universe*.

The constant dynamism of the universe not only produces unique, ephemeral and protean entanglements of light, but the unique, ephemeral and protean visual systems they meet to generate colour to the point where, Cubitt (2014: 112) argues, each instance of colour is potentially unrepeatable. Indeed, it was this ephemerality that inspired Goethe to write *Theory of Colours* (2015) in response to Newton's widely accepted, deterministic colour circle, which Goethe (2015: xxii) compares to an old, heavily fortified castle. For Goethe, Newton does not account for the influence of the body in the phenomena of light. As Jonathan Crary (1990: 69) explains, Goethe's contribution is in positing that the embodied subject 'in all its contingency and specificity' actively generates what Goethe (2015: 21) calls 'the spectrum of another colour'. Evidently, these ever-shifting complexities do not conform to the identical replication guaranteed by a commodity product. To be technically re-synthesised, the unpredictable dynamism of colour must be tamed and standardised. Standards must exclude the indeterminacy of matter in its determination of colour. The discursive matters that characterise these exclusions can be traced through historiographical archives.

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, scientific debate around the best methodologies and practices for the measurement and indexing of colour raged between American and European technical delegations. Sean Johnston (2001: 159) describes how: ‘as heterogeneous bodies bringing together different scientific and engineering cultures, they confronted differing worldviews’. Physicists and physiologists proposed conflicting epistemologies, unable to agree on whether colour existed in an objective, physically measurable way or whether it was generated phenomenologically and should be measured as such. This is a conundrum, it goes without saying, emerging from an onto-logic of representation. The demand for standardisation grew in tandem with the increasing manufacturing of industrial dyes, forcing an awkward compromise in 1939, amidst the turmoil of the Second World War. Johnston (2001: 168) sums it up here:

> Owing to disagreement between the interested groups, the nature of colour was debated in an unusually public manner, and finally agreed by compromise and uneasy consensus near the end of the decade. In a very real sense, colorimetry was ‘constructed’ to suit the views of members of that debate.

The Commission Internationale sur l’Eclairage (CIE) defined a ‘normal visibility curve’ by averaging the human visual system based on an earlier report by the US National Bureau of Standards, where fifty-two people under thirty taxonomised a spectrum of colours under ‘good lighting conditions’ (Johnston 2001: 172). This being the era of Jim Crow laws in the USA, we might wonder about the racial and gender diversity of this sample, although admittedly I have not found any data in that regard. In

any event, by the commission's own estimation, the resulting 'standard observer' was arbitrary, not least in the fanciful notion of defining average human vision based on fifty-two individuals. The CIE's resulting standard model of colorimetry, while welcomed by commercial laboratories, did not immediately end the debate. Anglo-American attempts to assuage delegations from opposing countries who had been excluded from the panel, namely France and Germany, were halted by the outbreak of war. By the time the Optical Society of America published *The Science of Colour* (1953), 'sheer institutional inertia made the CIE color system the de facto norm, too widely adopted to be changed' (Cubitt 2014: 140). The reduction of colours to measurable values — the colorimetry underpinning colour cinematography — emerges from a social, economic, geopolitical, and exceedingly cultural set of situated circumstances. Nonetheless, this measure has by and large remained the standard for colorimetry used across industrial manufacturing, with only minor iterations applied since 1931. Undoubtedly, standardisation was a prerequisite for colour film to be industrially manufactured. But to pose a Baradian ethical question, how is this apparatus constituted, and for whom? The recording of skin tones on analogue film presents a clear example of the potential exclusions that occur in practices of standardisation.

Lorna Roth's historical research (2009) outlining the inherent bias in visual technologies highlights how photographic film stock devised for specific use (and users) draw discriminatory boundaries by design, regardless of intention. The 'light-skin bias embedded in colour film stock and digital camera design' (Roth 2009: 111) rendered darker skin poorly, with techniques of colour balancing based on standards to correctly expose white flesh tones. By necessity, photographers of colour designed their

own technical methodology to get around the oversights and biases of film manufacturers. Alternatively, consider Kirsty Sinclair Dootson's *The Hollywood Powder Puff Wars* (2016), examining the rivalry between Max Factor and Elizabeth Arden's development of cinema makeup to fix 'vivid colors' deemed unnatural in Technicolor films. Dootson (2016: 108) states that: 'This insistence on natural skin colors was in fact deployed euphemistically to mask an insistence on whiteness as a natural state, whereby all departures from this standard were characterized as excesses, problems, or flaws'.

Euro-centric visual technologies, both analogue and digital, are often designed around normative standards of whiteness that exclude darker skin from visible recognition. There is continuing evidence for this today, despite manufacturers changing recording technology to amend these well-documented historical prejudices constructed within accurate colour standards. Some cinematographers have become well-known specialists at photographing black skin, outlining lighting strategies and makeup methods to make black actors appear as clearly and attractively as their white counterparts on digital formats (see Latif 2017; Yang 2018). Consider also Google's recent marketing campaign for the Pixel 6 smartphones (Koenigsberger 2021), that use artificial intelligence to adjust photographed images of people of colour, an algorithmic process trademarked as 'Real Tone'. The algorithmic 'enhancement' is aimed and marketed at those with darker skin, as if properly exposing skin tones is a difficult task requiring charitable investment and innovation by Google engineers. As Richard Dyer (2017: 89, emphasis mine) points out in relation to movie cameras: 'The apparatus was developed with white people in mind and habitual use and instruction continue in the same vein, so much so that *photographing non-white people is typically construed as a*

problem'. While I am of course in favour of equitable shifts in technology, the commodification of long overdue improvements to include a variety of skin tones being photographed perversely reiterates whiteness as an unmarked, natural state, reifying historical prejudices of difference in its attempt at reparation. Reparation, it bears emphasising, in service of selling new phones rather than the lofty goals of inclusion and equity implied by the campaign.

A further complication comes in the assumption of trichromacy as normal human vision that underpins the CIE's 'standard observer'. As is well known, eight percent of cisgender men and less than one percent of cisgender women have genetic colour blindness where one class of colour-sensing cone is displaced to a different range in wavelengths, meaning that the array of cones is in effect reduced to two, resulting in an 'anomalous trichromat' (Jordan et al. 2010: 1). Perhaps less known is that the mothers of colour-blind children have the potential to be tetrachromats, with a visual array consisting of four types of cones. This research suggests that up to twelve percent of cisgender women might be tetrachromats, which in effect means that they could see tens of millions of colours with no name or description; potential colours that remain in a liminal state between perception and recognition. Testing for tetrachromacy is difficult as researchers cannot identify whether the fourth cone activates the perception of these additional colours. However, the difficulty may emerge from the testing parameters themselves, as vision researcher Jay Nietz (interviewed in Greenwood 2012) suggests: 'It could be that our whole world is tuned to the world of the trichromat'; which is to say, trichromatic men.[35] This difficulty in generating a test

[35] Artist Concetta Antico, a diagnosed tetrachromat, paints using a 'vivid array of colour' that she says expresses her experience of colour in the world (Adcock 2022).

for tetrachromats might be thought of in terms of Bohr's complementarity: the test sets the conditions for the accuracy it creates based on the design of the apparatus. Ludwig Wittgenstein understood this perfectly well. As Marie McGinn (1991) points out, Wittgenstein argues that it is only by asking questions of our use of colour systems that we can find any patterns and properties regarding the ephemeral phenomenon. Regarding the Newtonian system of organising colour relations into a circle, McGinn (1991: 443–444) says:

> The question of whether this abstract system records the *correct* relations among colour concepts makes no sense; the system itself is what determines the structural relations between the elements of the system. The pattern within the system does not record relations of colours that were already there to be discovered. Rather the system itself constitutes the grammar of these colour concepts. […] These patterns orderings and relations are not only experienced as inevitable, but define what it is to calculate, or to use colour terms, correctly.

The accuracy and clarity of colour images marketed by camera manufacturers speaks only about precision within a particular, situated colour system, a programmed category of the apparatus rather than the measurement of an inherent property of the universe. Nonetheless, as a repeatable process, whereupon colours always turn out according to the system that designs their exposure, these are indeed objective practices in the sense that we can agentially separate the system that generates colour when it meets, or intra-acts, with other matter that we understand as light.

Black-and-White Thinking

Returning to the question of aesthetic objectivity in *WTYM*, thinking about what Regina meant by 'life in black-and-white' led to a series of creative decisions. While, after Bazin, colour and monochrome are not essential attributes in the achievement of realism, there is no doubt that the meaning of an image changes according to the presence and absence of chroma. Roland Barthes (1984: 81) claims that black-and-white photography produces a certain truth in the purity of its recorded light, and that the 'artifice' of color is akin to makeup used to paint the dead. Death features throughout Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, with photography providing an 'asymbolic Death' corresponding with the fading of religious fervour: '*Life / Death*: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print' (Barthes 1984: 92). Mulvey (2006: 61) draws from Barthes to acknowledge an uncanny ghostliness inherent to black-and-white film images, the haunting between 'the camera's time and its address to the future'. For Lara Thompson (2010), the use of black-and-white in contemporary films 'can be read as the product of monochrome photo-filmic osmosis,' a cultural memory that imagines the past in terms of its technical images as well as the cultural capital of monochrome images associated with cinematic modernism. For Flusser (1984: 30), 'black/white photographs are the magic of theoretical thinking, and they transform the linearity of theoretical discourse into a surface'. In his account, all technical images are images of techno-scientific concepts through which they are produced rather than of the present scenes they depict. He suggests that monochrome images more closely attest to this conceptual origin by appearing noticeably different to normative human phenomenological vision. Stanley Cavell (1979: 82) maintains that colour films can generate a world of 'the immediate

future'. Curiously, Cavell posits that certain black-and-white films also accomplish this when luminous surfaces 'function like colors' in the enactment of futurity, citing *Alphaville* (1965) as an example. We might surmise from this small sample of positions that the meaning of a monochrome image in relation to its counterpart in colour is inevitably enmeshed within its specific analytical context. What they also assert is that choosing to make a film black-and-white when colour is the norm suggests something significant about temporality, whither of the medium, the events on screen, or both.

In the context of *WTYM*, I was drawn to three entangled ways of understanding the significance of shifting from colour to monochrome: Regina's longing for simplicity; my desire to intervene in her account; and my craving as an editor for pre-existing archival material. Street photographer Joel Meyerowitz (Meyerowitz and Walker 2013: 2) defended his shift from black-and-white to colour film, against the grain of the 1970s New York art world's chromophobic snobbery, by suggesting: 'all a camera does, it describes what's in front of the camera when you press the button. I thought: If description is what it's all about, black-and-white description is half of what color description is'. Perhaps the perceived halving of description, of discourse, of expression, speaks to the appeal for Regina of 'life in black-and-white'. Wim Wenders submits, in his film about a film *The State of Things* (*Der Stand der Dinge,* 1982), that thinking in black-and-white allows you to see 'the shape of things', leading fictional cinematographer Joe, gruffly played by director Samuel Fuller, to say: 'life is in colour, but black-and-white is more realistic'. While Wenders is making a point about the 'usual Hollywood colour tricks' (Nagib 2020: 51), I am suggesting that to reach for a historical technological format through which the world has been memorialised is partly to reach for a historical way of understanding the world. For Regina, this desire for life

in black-and-white implies nostalgia for a past archived in black-and-white; perhaps imagined as a happier time with a simpler causality.[36] The 'halving' of description makes it easier, on the surface, to parse the 'shape of things'. Black-and-white is also a visual metaphor used in psychology to refer to binary thinking, and indeed experiments have suggested that black and white perceptual stimuli may have an effect on how people make decisions (see Zarkadi and Schall 2013).

At various moments in the film where Regina simplifies something that to me appears complex, the image shifts from colour to black-and-white. For instance, when I ask her whether the fact that we do not speak in her mother tongue has made any difference to our relationship, she dismisses the idea offhand. Her fluency in both languages means that our relationship would be the same regardless. Making the image black-and-white signals my disagreement. The film shifts to black-and-white as easily as she does between Portuguese and English. The adjustment indicates an epistemological shift: the meaning changes, which implies that there was meaning involved from the beginning. While, per Batchelor, as spectators we can easily adjust to the images becoming monochrome, by activating what Paul Coates (2010: 13) calls a 'monochrome-colour dialectic' the shift de-naturalises the colour that preceded it. This also nods towards my desire to intervene in Regina's account.

A notable instance of this occurs when Regina resists my request that she summarise events from our past to be used as narration in the film. I ask her to re-tell

[36] Black-and-white photography is not, however, free from the racialised history of its colour counterpart. Brian Hochman (2014) has explored the development from orthochromatic to panchromatic black-and-white cine film in the context of Robert and Frances Flaherty's *Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age* (1926). As Hochman (2014: 129) puts it: 'industrial uses of panchromatic film stock both evolved and gained traction during the 1920s out of American ethnographic encounters with racial difference. Simply put, racial thinking motivated early experiments with the technology'.

the story that for most of my life I had been assured was our family history: that my great-grandmother had to escape her wealthy life in Vienna because of the growing risk of being captured by Nazis. Instead, Regina says that Edith never spoke of Helena's past, and proceeds to tell another story. The image freezes into a black-and-white still of Regina. My voice-over announces what I had hoped for her to perform on camera. In what is perhaps the most radical intervention in the film, a synthetically manipulated version of Regina speaks the words I wanted her to say in my voice. This type of synthetic manipulation, commonly known as a deepfake, is often used nefariously to produce pornographic videos that convincingly swap the original performer's face with someone else's (see Maras & Alexandrou, 2019). Done well, the swapped face assimilates micro movements, believably mimicking every expression of the original. In the case of *WTYM*, I used the pre-existing deep learning model from Wav2Lip (Prajwal et al. 2020) that matched Regina's mouth movements to the recorded sounds of my voice. While the ethical questions raised by using digital manipulation and synthetic media in documentary films are an ongoing discussion (see Lees 2023), in this case the use of a deepfake constitutes a complex moment of documentary truth that is visibly faked. Elizabeth Cowie (2011: 8) argues that 'The process of recording fulfils the wish for reality reviewed but also brings with it the question of how far the mechanism of recording intervenes on reality to transform—and pervert—it'. Cowie's psychoanalytically inspired study examines the implicit anxiety she identifies in the watching of documentary films, namely the understanding that an image can be either truthful or false. This dichotomy is complicated by recent deepfakes employed to tell a truth that is simultaneously a signposted falsity. For instance, *Welcome to Chechnya* (2020) uses deepfakes to show the bodies and affective expressions of queer

participants who would be put in grave danger if their filmed faces remained identifiable. *WTYM* makes it clear that the deepfake of Regina is a digital manipulation (announced by the brief slate reading 'We Deepfaked Your Mother'). The clip materialises my desire for her to say what I have asked for based upon the account I was told as a child. She avoids repeating this account on camera, an example of how she consistently rebuffs my direction. The use of a deepfake on this occasion is more honest than if I had insisted on Regina repeating the words I wanted her to say on camera, with my instructions excised from the final edit. As a final note, the acknowledged use of a deepfake is intended to express the humour Regina and I both find in my frustration, and how this is characteristic of our relationship.

In voice-over and titles written on screen, the film also connects the notion of black-and-white to documents, which we might trace to the black ink on white paper of the printing press, but also to the interpellative command that they perform. Regardless of the political context in which documents are produced, they are archival evidence of a document produced within that historical context that assert meaning. One pyrrhic victory in the film occurs when I produce documentary evidence of Regina's grandfather Leopoldo / Ozyasz Lipa's birth registered in a Jewish record book in Przemyśl, a Subcarpathian city within what is today Poland. While this likely proves the inaccuracy of Regina's suspicion her grandfather was Catholic, it does not change her unshakeable belief that she has inherited some intrinsic, material Catholic identity (or mark) from her mother Edith, despite their differences. If the point of presenting this objective evidence of a documented fact is meant to end our quarrel, it fails to do so. We are still left with our diverging speculations about why Hencza and Ozyasz Lipa left Poland for Brazil to become Helena and Leopoldo, why Edith converted from Judaism,

and what that means for Regina and me in the filmic present. The black-and-white facticity of a document does not sufficiently provide ironclad conclusions about these causes and effects.

Regina is not the only one attempting to simplify the intractable. The sequences in Rio and in Poland condense the intergenerational testimony from multiple living relatives I interviewed as well as the few documents I was able to find about Helena and her immediate family. The testimonies are contradictory; the documentation sparse; the story too unwieldy to fit in the space of a few minutes. In short, these black-and-white images speak to my simplification of a historical account that is mostly oral, with some aspects undoubtedly worn smooth by its habitual telling and re-telling within my extended family. These sequences are not intended to be understood as authentic archive or reenactments from the time, but rather signalling a diffractive, 'critical fabulation' (Hartman 2008).[37] The locations I film in Rio are, to the best of my knowledge, where the historical buildings once stood and the events described took place. The atmospheric sequence that leads me to the cemetery in Wola Michowa produces my speculative fantasy of finding the solidity of a family grave, like my earlier encounter with Helena's tomb (in colour). All I find, however, are the ruins of gravestones, none of which include my ancestor's surnames. Either the documents that

[37] For Hartman, the omissions and gaps in archives of enslaved African girls precludes any institutionally acceptable historical account that is not solely based upon the violence done to them. To redress the absence of a full life beyond the terror inflicted upon the bodies of young black girls, Hartman (2008: 12) proposes the value in a critical fabulation that 'is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive'. Hartman's technique points to full lives lived outside of the archive that cannot be ignored simply because they are unverifiable by the institutions designed to forget them. There is no comparison intended between my matrilineal history and the horrors of enslavement. Nonetheless, I believe Hartman's technique suggests creative strategies that are more widely applicable when deployed with the appropriate rigour and deference to their painful source.

connect Helena to this location are inaccurate, or the wanton destruction by the Nazis has left no trace of the Graubard family. Nonetheless, the cemetery had a certain aura about it that I hoped to express in the film.[38] The black-and-white sequence in *WTYM* where the camera travels over the bridge, across the field and into the woods where the gravestones lie documents my very first approach to the location. While the hope of a climactic moment upon arriving at the village of Wola Michowa was punctured by loud and disruptive road works, the cemetery, about a twenty-minute walk away from the main road, was atmospheric, quiet and remote. Shifting the images of the cemetery to black-and-white and the addition of ethereal music acknowledges the impossibility of re-producing the precise sensory presence I experienced on location. My goal was to aesthetically generate a specifically filmic aura that remembers my presence in that place and time for a (potential) future spectator. Consider this in relation to Jean Epstein's complex notion of *photogénie*, partly defined (as translated in Wall-Romana 2013: 26n7) as 'any aspect of things, beings and souls that enhances its moral quality through cinematographic reproduction'.[39] As Christoph Wall-Romana (2013: 26) reads it, '*Photogénie* is thus foremost the melding of the filmic with the pro-filmic'. Rather than reproducing an object, Epstein's *photogénie* adds something to it; it produces something new that enhances the 'moral quality' of the original. For Epstein, in other words, the film form affords an expressive, aesthetic potential that need not be to the detriment of the pro-filmic event. In the case of my walk through the cemetery, my

[38] I use the term aura here to mean a sensory atmosphere. Walter Benjamin (2007: 221ff) proposes that mechanical reproduction cannot mimic the singular, ephemeral, sensory presence, the 'aura' of being in the world that has been photographed.

[39] Wall-Romana (2013: 26) points out the 'fuzziness' of both the terms 'moral' and 'quality' in the original French text 'since 'moral' ranges from the spiritual to the ethical and social, and 'quality' has the Bergsonian ring of duration (vs. 'quantity' which, for Bergson, is a purely spatial notion)'.

memory of the time of filming can be harnessed to generate a different affective experience on screen, a remembering that remains entangled with my experience of the aura at that place in time.

Photogénie, *Punctum*, Diffraction

Wall-Romana has pointed out that Benjamin's aura shares significant characteristics with Jean Epstein's *photogénie*. He says (2013: 29, emphasis in the original): '*Both photogénie and aura stage a scene of beholding between a subject and an object-field in which a crucial qualitative change results from cinematic mediation and nothing else*'. By filming the cemetery in Wola Michowa, I sought not only evidence of ancestral pasts but also a motion picture equivalent to what Barthes (1984: 26–27) calls a *punctum*, an emotional puncture in the '*average* affect' of, in his case, studying photographs. Paula Amad (2010: 350n86) briefly makes the connection between Jean Epstein's *photogénie* and Barthes' *punctum*, a connection which she points out needs further investigation. While such an investigation exceeds the limits of this thesis, for the rest of this chapter I will briefly articulate how *photogénie* might be productively understood through the *punctum* to formulate the notion of a diffractive, 'pensive' editor, drawing from Laura Mulvey's (2006) development of Raymond Bellour's 'pensive spectator'. This lays some of the theoretical fundaments for the next chapter, which theorises diffractive approaches in *WTYM*.

Barthes describes how in the general analysis, or *studium,* of photographs, every so often a surprising, personal emotional reaction animates the photograph beyond the sum of its parts, an effect he calls a *punctum*. Avery Gordon (2008: 106) suggests that: 'The *studium* does not refer to the detached study of a photograph, but rather to a kind

of participation in the cultural, historical, and politically transparent information of the photograph […]. The *punctum* is what "breaks" or "punctuates" the *studium*'. We might connect this to Butler's performativity. The *studium* is what becomes normative about analysing photography through repeated practice; it is not transparent by default, but the reiterated cultural and technical legibility of a photograph becomes an '*average* affect' through reiteration. The *punctum* pokes a hole in this regularity; as Barthes (1984: 42, emphasis mine) puts it 'I feel that its mere presence changes my reading, that I am looking at a new photograph, marked in my eyes with *higher value*', generating a noteworthy resonance with Epstein's enhanced 'moral quality'. Barthes' medium-specific *punctum* relies on photography's stillness, whereas Epstein (1977: 9, emphasis mine) describes an affective puncture specific to the mobility and, in the case of this quote, magnification enabled by cinema:

> The close-up is the soul of the cinema. It can be brief because the value of the photogenic is measured in seconds. If it is too long, I don't find continuous pleasure in it. *Intermittent paroxysms affect me the way needles do*. Until now, I have never seen an entire minute of pure photogeny. Therefore, one must admit that the photogenic is like a spark that appears in fits and starts.[40]

Photogénie emerges through a set of practices that, for Epstein, are specific to film's mobility and magnification.[41] A *punctum* requires something integral to be added by the

[40] See Mary Ann Doane (2003) for a fascinating theorisation of Epstein's poetic descriptions of the close-up, and the tension between mobility and stasis generated by the magnification of the human face to gigantic proportions on the cinema screen.
[41] Epstein also introduces *phonogénie* as an audial extension of *photogénie* to cine-sound experiments (see Wall-Romana 2013: 149ff).

spectator and yet is '*already there*' in the photograph (Barthes 1984: 55). Wolfgang Ernst (2016: 59) calls this 'a temporal moment, a short cut between past and present'. For Barthes (51), both practices are related to legibility: 'The *studium* is ultimately always coded, the *punctum* is not'. From an agential realist perspective, Barthes refers to a certain interference whereupon the material-discursive legibility of a photograph is de-naturalised by a specific detail entangled with the roving, knowing, interfering eye of the spectator. Resonantly, Wall-Romana (2013: 26) argues that for Epstein, *photogénie* is 'a total relation between *pro-filmic reality*, what stands in front of the camera, *filmic images*, and the *embodied viewer*'. As such, the temporal contraction characterising both the *punctum* and *photogénie* can be understood as a diffraction of spatiotemporalities. In this sense, *photogénie* does not simply and objectively exist in a film, but rather, according to Robert Farmer (2010), is 'either an approach to filmmaking, or it is a way of thinking about film'.

According to Barthes (1984: 57), another key requirement that restricts the *punctum* to photography alone is the absence of a 'blind field' beyond the frame, characteristic of motion pictures. Cinema 'continues living' beyond the frame; everything within the frame of a photograph 'dies' after the shutter clicks shut. The *punctum* resuscitates a photograph when a detail suddenly conjures a blind field from its deathly stillness. Barthes is claiming that the *punctum* animates still photography into potential life; we could express this as the transformation of a photo into cinema. For Epstein, cinema has a far greater transformative possibility—it can change how reality is understood. Epstein (translated in Abel 1988: 413) claims that 'the present is an uneasy convention. In the flow of time it is an exception to time.[…] The cinema is the only art capable of depicting this present as it is'. Cinema generates a flash of time

akin to a human phenomenal sense of the present, albeit one that can be watched over and over again. Indeed, it is this mobile ephemerality which for Barthes makes the cinema incapable of producing a *punctum*. Epstein (translated in Abel 1988: 315–16, emphasis mine) suggests that:

> in space we imagine three directions at right angles to each other, in time we can conceive only one: the past-future vector. We can conceive a space-time system in which the past-future direction also passes through the *point of intersection* of the three acknowledged spatial directions, at the precise moment when it is between past and future: the present, a point in time, an instant without duration, as points in geometrical space are without dimension. Photogenic mobility is a mobility in this space-time system, a mobility in both space and time.

The influence of Bergsonian thinking upon Epstein (see Amad 2010) is crystal clear in this passage. For Epstein (translated in Abel 1988: 318), through cinema 'a new reality is revealed, a reality for a special occasion, which is untrue to everyday reality just as everyday reality is untrue to the heightened awareness of poetry'. This 'new reality' pokes a hole in the linearity of habitual memory and that, for an instant, makes the simultaneity of spatiotemporalities, of Bergson's pure memory, available to the spectator. The latter is a necessary active, pensive participant in the interference produced by *photogénie*. Furthermore, we might extend the theorisation of *photogénie* to include the ghostly presences implied by the *punctum*. For Gordon (2008: 108), 'The *punctum* is what haunts. It is the detail, the little but heavily freighted thing that sparks the moment of arresting animation, that enlivens the world of ghosts'.

I walked towards the Jewish cemetery for the first time with the camera held before my chest without looking through the viewfinder hoping for something unexpected to happen. I hoped to record some detail that I might notice when I looked back at the footage in the edit. The camera records not only my first encounter with the cemetery, but also entangles the future which motivates the filming, as well as the past which makes the recording meaningful. I approached this filming in the expectation that I might be able to illustrate the present as, to borrow from Amad (2010: 223) 'a convention, just one perspective upon the temporal openness of reality onto the past and future'. It is in this way that I believe that Epstein's *photogénie* can be understood as a diffraction of spatiotemporalities. The first potential moment of this diffraction emerges productively through editing practices: the editor looks at the past through the present, and the effect of these different timespaces sometimes materialises a queer, de-naturing sense of connection with what was filmed; Epstein's mobile 'point of intersection' or Ernst's 'short cut'. By shifting the colour footage from the Jewish cemetery of Wola Michowa into black-and-white, I hoped to conjure the ghosts of the past in the filmic present in an attempt at *photogénie*.

Approaching the problem of finding the *punctum* in the cinematic, Mulvey (2006: 66) contends that digital technologies 'allow an easy return to the hidden stillness of the film frame'. By delaying the movement of moving images, Mulvey (2006: 186) posits, 'the pensive spectator […] may bring to the cinema the resonance of the still photograph'. Expanding upon this logic, in the next chapter I describe the difficulties of thinking theory in practice. I propose that the editor, as a film's first pensive spectator, seeks out puncturing moments in shot footage by threading through recorded pasts and attempting to entangle an imagined future spectator. There can be no

guarantee that these attempts will succeed in sparking moments of *photogénie*. The success or failure of the attempt lies in the final stage of the process: the intra-action with each spectator. Nonetheless, my contention is that close analysis and iterative, combinatory practices by a pensive editor filters spatiotemporalities through one another. These montagist interferences—diffractions— seek out potential moments that puncture or de-naturalise the performative automatism of teleological filmic timespace, conjuring something different that is '*already there*'.

Chapter 3: Diffraction

Diffracting Spacetime: Claiming a More Crowded Now

> Moments, crumbs, fleeting configurations – no sooner have they come into existence than they fall to pieces. Life? There's no such thing; I see lines, planes and bodies, and their transformations in time. Time, meanwhile, seems a simple instrument for the measurement of tiny changes, a school ruler with a simplified scale – it's just three points: was, is and will be.
>
> —Olga Tokarczuk (2017: 186).

> SpaceTime Coordinates: diffracted spatialities and diffracted temporalities, entangled 'across' space and time; past, present, future threaded through one another.
>
> —Karen Barad (2010: 254).

This chapter thematises the difficulties I encountered in devising a practice-led research methodology that employed diffraction as a methodological 'apparatus of investigation' and some solutions I devised through extensive trial and error. In the first year of my doctoral research, I found it challenging to overcome the impulse to continuously theorise a practical project that did not yet exist. This predicament was compounded by the sheer scope of Barad's philosophy and the struggle to narrow it down to a practical approach befitting the specificity of the filmic investigation. My doctoral supervisors were vital in loosening this entangled knot, specifically a meeting late into my second year of research where they advised me to pause writing drafts for this thesis and finish

the film. Theory and practice are not easily separated into disciplines: theorising is also a practice, and film practice is inevitably entangled within a contextual history of filmmaking and all the technical, philosophical and aesthetic theorisation implied therein. While I found it freeing to set aside the writing project to focus on the filmmaking, diffraction as a theoretical approach was never far beyond the frame in the later shoots, becoming central during the editing process. This chapter focuses on aspects of production and post-production in *WTYM* that were informed by diffraction as a methodology. It is important throughout this chapter to keep in mind that diffraction functions beyond mere metaphor. To reiterate an earlier quote, for Barad (2010: 243) diffraction should be understood as 'as synecdoche of entangled phenomenon'. In other words, rather than conceiving of diffraction as interference with previously existing, absolute forms, in this account interference is the very intra-activity that constitutes reality. As such, diffraction in this chapter is both discursive and material; theory and practice are generative interventions filtering fluidly through one another.

Over the course of this chapter, I attempt to outline some strategies and methodologies that developed through the practical research of this thesis. Everything begins with the initial shoot and subsequent interview in London. I spent several years working with those materials alone while researching Barad's work. All of the ensuing processes and procedures proliferated from this initial rumination. I have divided this work into three sections: the initial period in the edit suite; the resulting non-professional approach to later shoots; the methodology of dubbing as empathetic denaturalisation; and finally, the realism of essayism and epistolarity as a haunting, essayistic approach. Each one of these techniques can be read through a rich variety of

theoretical standpoints; even in a far longer text it would be impossible to cover all of this ground. Therefore, my aim in this chapter is to articulate specific aspects of theories and films that I found most elucidating for my practice and in the theoretical analysis herein. I believe that as its filmmaker, I am far from the ideal 'pensive spectator' of *WTYM*. My proximity to both the making and subject matter make it difficult to think outside the boundaries of practices and contexts in which the film came to light. Therefore, my approach is to make multiple attempts at diffraction from within: of thinking theory through my involvement in the practice, a parallel track to how theory was an absent presence, particularly in the later shoots and throughout the editing process. What ties all these theories and practices together is a sense of queer spatiotemporalities. To borrow from Carolyn Dinshaw (2012: 4), I hope in this chapter: 'to explore but also to claim the possibility of a fuller, denser, more crowded *now* that all sorts of theorists tell us is extant but that often eludes our temporal grasp'. Understanding Dinshaw's statement through Epstein's queering notion of *photogénie* as a 'point of intersection' in time and space produces the kind of diffractive filtering generated in this chapter.

As a starting point, the simplest way that *WTYM* diffracts theory through practice is the inclusion of select written quotations in the film. Early rough cuts included many more quotes from both scholarly and literary sources throughout the film's duration. These experiments were useful in attempting to work out and nod towards the linkages between theory and practice and helped me find some structuring devices for the narrative. The incorporation of written citations often came up in discussions after screenings of rough cuts. Was I allowing the voice of others to take precedence over my own in the film by including citations? Or did they open the film

up to further research as well as positioning itself in a wider context? As a result of these inconclusive discussions, only four text citations remain in the final cut. I also briefly refer to Roland Barthes and Vilém Flusser in the voice-over narration. The latter two are included within the 'letter-film' (Naficy 2001: 100) sections, and link to specific philosophical questions my narration addresses to Regina as spectator.[42] The remaining four typographic citations are by poet and novelist Ocean Vuong, Barad, essayist Maggie Nelson, and filmmaker and photographer Agnès Varda. Only Barad's peer-reviewed citation, one I will return to later in this chapter, could be described as scholarly. Nonetheless, all four citations employ a poetic register that I felt was less an assertion of closure than an opening out of meaning beyond the film's narrative. Superimposing the words over apparently unrelated vistas aims to generate diffractive moments of looking at images of different places in time through words, concepts, and ideas. Each space included is connected to the narrative, although I do not include any literal signposts to make this clear. I wanted them to be out of joint, dis/connected with the rest of the film somehow, to provide breathing space but also to raise questions about what meaning might be intended by their inclusion. The vistas linger on screen; I resisted my instinct as a professional editor (and feedback following screenings) to make them shorter. Landscapes haunt the humans in the film, just as those humans

[42] Hamid Naficy (2001: 101) posits that '[exile] and epistolarity are constitutively linked because both are driven by distance, separation, absence, and loss and by the desire to bridge the multiple gaps'. He articulates a difference between film-letters, those that are diegetically written or read by diegetic characters, and letter-films, 'epistles addressed to someone either inside or outside the diegesis'. He does not claim these to be clear cut classifications. I like this shorthand for the essayistic epistolary sections within *WTYM* because it implies a blurry but identifiable difference in modes of address that becomes increasingly entangled, culminating with my reading a letter while Regina listens and replies on camera.

haunt the recorded landscapes. To borrow a fitting quote from Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2013: 172–3):

> is your mother a landscape or a face? […] What face has not called upon the landscapes it amalgamated, sea and hill; what landscape has not evoked the face that would have completed it, providing an unexpected complement for its lines and traits?

While faces do not always accompany the vistas in *WTYM*, their presence is implicit. The quote from Agnès Varda included near the end of the film, makes this correspondence clear. As she says in voice-over in her first-person documentary *The Beaches of Agnès* (*Les Plages d'Agnès* 2008), 'if we opened people up, we'd find landscapes', which I take to mean that we are shaped by and inseparably connected to the spaces we traverse, even as we transform them. Are the landscapes contained within a maternal body still linked to those who emerge from that body? Does that remain true through deep time? Or are these purely sentimental attachments? I travel to the places related to my grandmother and great-grandmother to generate new connections with landscapes that we might already find if we were to 'open' me up, as Varda puts it. As a counterpoint, consider Chantal Akerman's film *From the East* (*D'Est* 1993), in which she films documentary images from behind the Iron Curtain just as it was falling. She refused to return to the town where her mother grew up before being captured by Nazis, stating that she was not seeking out her 'roots' in the film (see Lebow 2008: 1–2). Catherine Grant (2015) has claimed that Akerman searches for:

> images that represent nothing, and mean nothing else […] Rootless, detached images. Images in the diaspora. Is it possible to return home, to where the image can exist, outside of the commandment? Is such an image even possible?

In *From the East*, Akerman films the landscapes and scenes emerging from the same traumatic historical context that her mother, a concentration camp survivor, shares. By determinedly avoiding images easily attached to her mother's past, the 'rootless, detached images' she does film speak precisely to her own intergenerational haunting—an absent presence. Indeed, just before her tragic suicide, Akerman acknowledged how central her late mother had been to all her work (see Lebow 2016: 55). In *WTYM* I return to the site where my great-grandmother supposedly came from. The voice-over or title cards situate the viewer in these places. The images, however, remain rootless, dis/connected because I find no evidence of my ancestors there. The images offer no 'return home' despite the 'commandment' of documents that assert that this is where they were from. I do, nonetheless, find a place haunted by the historialities enfolded through it, including my own that emerges through my intervention, just as Akerman perhaps found a fluid, nonlinear connection by filming those indelible images in *From the East*.[43]

Inspired by diffraction, I decided to structure *WTYM* according to six entangled sections I call 'phases'. The word 'phase' can be used in reference to waveforms, light,

[43] I use the term historialities here in the sense posited by historian of science Hans-Jörg Reinberger (1994: 69), drawn from Derrida: 'The multiplicity of internal times in an open horizon creates what can be called *historiality*: It escapes the classical notions of linear causation, retroaction, influence, and dominance, as well as that of a purely stochastic process, to both of which the term "historicity" has been connected, by law or by singularity'. In other words, I use the word to subvert a teleological notion of history by implying the various potential operations of systematically ungrounded time in any given moment.

sound, resonance, dissonance, rhythm, (a)synchronicity, frequency, stages, change, modalities and, etymologically, to make appear, to shine. One early concept was for *WTYM* to be a multi-screen, multi-audio track installation. The gallery-goer would pick one headphone from an assortment playing different audio tracks. Some would play in sync with one video feed from three screens randomly playing video phases. Those that were not in sync—out of phase—might provide surprising, unexpected combinations. As the project progressed and the practicalities of such an installation became more unfeasible, I felt that a sequential film could effectively employ a non-linear temporality by conceiving each section as an entangled phase. As an unusual word within the habitually understood temporal linearity of an edited *timeline*, I aimed to suggest that each section functions less as an enclosed chapter and more as resonant spacetimes to be filtered—diffracted—through one another. Further, each phase tends to entangle multiple spacetimes at the same moment in the film, as I will describe in due course. The structuring of the film according to porous phases attempts to employ a theory of diffraction in practice as a way 'to devise new applications of available knowledge' through 'creative and systematic work', as per the previously mentioned definition of research and development (OECD 2015: 44). The chapter-like phases also provide a design to interleave the fragmentary timespaces in a manner that makes them easily intelligible to the spectator. As a point of comparison, in her description of the chapters used in her avant-garde film *Riddles of the Sphinx* (made with Peter Wollen, 1977), Mulvey says (Mulvey and MacDonald 1988: 334, emphasis mine):

> We were interested in trying to make a movie in which form and structure were clearly visible but which would also have *a space for feeling and emotion, that*

> *would open up a cinematic meaning beyond dependence on negating the dominant cinema's conventions and inbred ways of seeing*.

I attempted to entangle an elusive, affective space which reverberates through the fragmented memories, places and historialities included in *WTYM*. However, unlike Mulvey and Wollen, I did not begin the process of filming with a good idea of how I would eventually structure the edit. Only once the film was nearly completed was I able to produce a diagram (figure 4) to visually express the film's diffractive structure of phases. The original film shoot in the tattoo parlour acts like a stone dropped in a pond. The film is a result of the reverberating waves from this interference—but it is not caused by it per se—as the past was already playing a part in its future materialisation.

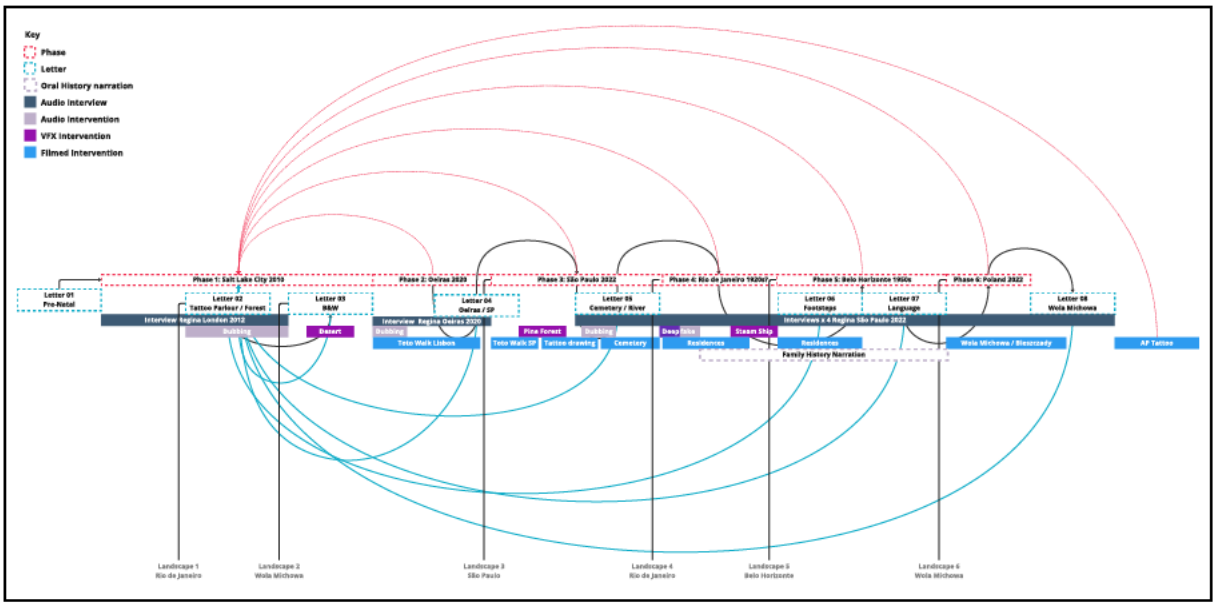

Figure 4: The diffractive phases of *WTYM*. Click here for an interactive version of this diagram, or see appendix ii for a larger image in landscape format.

WTYM is plainly linear in that it begins at one timecode and ends nearly 90 minutes later. As Mulvey (2020: 95) explains: 'Cinema is essentially temporal. It records time as it passes and reproduces it on film as well as using it as a storytelling medium'. Yet Mulvey (2020: 96) posits that film can also 'disrupt and confuse temporal logic and make visible and material a complicated temporality'. Mulvey is speaking in the context of films about mothers directed by women from a feminist standpoint. I believe that Barad's expansion of temporality and memory beyond the human provides a far-reaching way to think about how else we might disrupt the causal logic of filmic spacetimes. I was deeply struck by the following description of memory by Barad (2015: 406–7), which is cited in edited form in *WTYM*:

> Memory is not the recording of events held by a mind but marked historialities ingrained in the world's becoming. Memory is a field of enfolded patterns of differentiating-entangling. Remembering is not a process of recollection, of the reproduction of what was, of assembling and ordering events like puzzle pieces fit together by fixing where each has its place. Rather, it is a matter of re-membering, of tracing entanglements, responding to yearnings for connection, materialized into fields of longing/belonging, of regenerating what never was but might yet have been.

Barad formulates memory as something far beyond a straightforward subjective experience, but rather as the entanglement of space, time and matter that marks the universe. The essential point here is that memory is performative and relational rather than fixed and fully objectifiable, constantly reconstituted in the present in a way that

enfolds the past and the present. Barad's articulation of memory is resonant with the elasticity of Bergson's conception of memory (see Amad 2010: 121–122), extending it to the non-human.[44] Furthermore, the above description of memory tallies with the practice of editing. On paper, editing would appear to be the 'assembling and ordering of events', however the importance comes in what emerges from those practices that was not there before, at least not apparently. Editing re-members the past in particular ways. But I am getting ahead of myself. Before going into how some of the later sections of the film were produced and re-membered in the edit, I want to briefly re-turn to the arduous process of editing and re-editing of the original footage and subsequent interview that enabled me to understand how to generate 'new applications of available knowledge' through a film practice of diffractive remembering.

The Pensive Editor: Turning and Re-Turning Temporalities

David MacDougall (2019: 7) says that 'In many respects filming, unlike writing, precedes thinking. It registers the process of looking with a certain interest, a certain will'. Thinking, as MacDougall frames it, appears to mean a logocentric articulation of thinking rather than thought *tout court*. By employing the word 'looking' rather than seeing, MacDougall suggests a wilful action, not necessarily verbalised, implicit in filming: a *looking at* something, a specific framing and focus. A spectator also looks when she watches; watching implies an interpretative state that includes both looking and seeing. As mentioned, Mulvey (2006) has outlined how the ubiquity of digital video has enabled the 'pensive spectator' to employ a delayed look that pauses the flow

[44] Hristova et al. (2020) have launched an important discussion of the far-reaching consequences of Barad's reconceptualization of time in the field of memory studies.

of cinematic time. Mulvey's pensive spectator (2006: 192) interrupts the movement of film to look back 'with greedy fascination at the past and details suddenly lose their marginal status and acquire the aura that passing time bequeaths to the most ordinary objects'. Mulvey refers specifically to film theorists and cinephiles in the digital era, but she could just as easily be talking about editors. Editors are the first pensive spectators who delay the flow of cinematic time within the raw materials of the edit. Furthermore, the pensive editor never needed the digital to emerge in order to practice this diffractive technique. The women employed as early cinema's 'cutters' made editing decisions by first analysing footage as still images over a lightbox, painstakingly gluing them to another selected shot (see Hatch 2013).[45] Editors programmatically make footage stand still, only to re-wind and re-play the same images again and again, re-iterating each shot to their studious memory in search of a logical sequence. The process of editing asynchronously articulates a series of conjunctional thoughts that the 'looking' camera precedes.[46] Delaying the time of cinematic flow, as Mulvey points out, greedily fragments a film's duration for the sake of close film analysis. By slowing down filmic time, the pensive editor engages in similar close analysis while seeking a different outcome: a remembering of recorded images and sounds that enables new photogenic possibilities to emerge.

Allow me to make a small detour into a notable example, the first-person essay film *In the Intense Now* (*No Intenso Agora* 2017) directed by João Moreira Salles and edited by Eduardo Escorel and Laís Lifschitz. *WTYM* is a very different film to *In the*

[45] For two fantastic resources on the erased history of early cinema's women film editors, see Su Friederich's website *Edited By – Women Film Editors* (n.d.) and Gaines et al.'s *Women Film Pioneer Project* (2013).
[46] In her videographic essay film *After the Facts* (2019), Karen Pearlman suggests that each shot is a fact, and every edit links facts to produce thoughts.

Intense Now, not least in that the latter makes use of pre-existing archival material as its source. Nonetheless, there is a resonance between how Moreira Salles and his editors approach time, space and montage that can help clarify what I mean by a pensive editor that is perhaps not so easily articulated through the shot footage of *WTYM*.

In the Intense Now is constructed from a collection of found footage from the 1960s, including super 8 home movies filmed by the director's mother, Elisa Moreira Salles, on a trip to China in October 1966 coinciding with the early months of the Cultural Revolution. Moreira Salles sets his mother's footage alongside home movies shot around the globe by unknown filmmakers, as well as documentary footage of the 1968 student protests in Paris, including French news media clips and official government transmissions. The first-person narration written and voiced by Moreira Salles presents the thoughts of the (pensive) filmmaker analysing the screened images in both their historical context and the filmic present. Imaculada Kangussu (2018: 317, my translation) describes how 'as in a kaleidoscope, where each movement creates new images based on given elements, the film starts from existing records assembled in a new way and, in doing so, creates a new narrative and new ways of seeing'.[47] The idea that the camera shows more than was originally intended threads these disparate sources and timespaces together. The pro-filmic event is haunted by the social contexts in which the recording takes place, exceeding the camera operator's intention. Cezar Migliorin (2018: 177, my translation) proposes that by seeking out the details on the borders, the film is 'an attempt to excavate the images, comb through the debris and traces that the

[47] 'Como em um caleidoscópio, onde cada movimento cria novas imagens, a partir de elementos dados, o filme parte de registros existentes montados de modo novo e, com isso, cria uma nova narrativa e novos modos de ver' (Kangussu 2018: 317).

images bring, the lines that can tell us about the story, the event, about us'.[48] Moreira Salles uses archive footage to re-interpret what camera operators *think* they are looking at by identifying what appears at first glance to be unimportant. As he puts it in the film's narration, 'we don't always know what we are filming'. The marginalia that the film nostalgically obsesses over—akin to the photographed detail that enlivens Barthes' *punctum*—attempts to re-turn the filmmaker, and by extension the spectator, to the auspicious revolutionary mood of May 1968, but also to a time when the filmmaker's mother was alive and, he hopes, happy. The political is diffracted through the personal across the film's duration. Additionally, the film investigates that which is excluded from historical narratives, that which is deemed irrelevant or unimportant. Moreira Salles and his editors focus on how revolutionary fervour and vandalism in Paris is surprisingly shot through with youthful laughter and joy; how a little white child's first steps in Brazil reverberate with the racist social context in which they are filmed as the black nanny steps out of the camera's frame; how the political otherness of Chinese people filmed by the wealthy Brazilian tourist is exceeded by the beauty of their hands and their ready smiles. By juxtaposing apparently marginal information, Moreira Salles clearly illustrates how they interfere with one another. Entangled phenomena, personal and political, become separated—cut—in the historicised telling of grand narratives; the pensive editor can remember them through montage.

Without directly quoting him, the title of the film appears to reference Walter Benjamin's (2007: 261–2) concept of an eternal now that enables the historical materialist to 'blast open the continuum of history'. Benjamin (2007: 261, emphasis

[48] 'Uma tentativa de escavar as imagens, buscar nas sobras e marcas que as imagens trazem, as linhas que podem nos falar da história, do evento, de nós' (Migliorin 2018: 177).

mine) states that: 'History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by, *the presence of the now*'. For Benjamin, the materialist historian intervenes into the past through the present to displace a linear sense of the future to come. Moreira Salles intervenes in the footage and shows the effects of othering discourses, of difference, and of exclusion hidden in plain sight. In my view, *In the Intense Now* is an exemplary use of a diffractive technique to produce new historialities by pensively analysing archival recordings and opening this thought process out to the film's spectator. It is, to borrow Umberto Eco's expression (1989: 19), an 'open work' that is 'in movement'.[49] The pensive editor entangles with the subject archived on film as well as with the potential spectator.[50] An ethics of entanglement, as Barad (2010: 266) positions it, resonates with Moreira Salles and his team's considered approach in the film:

> Our debt to those who are already dead and those not yet born cannot be disentangled from who we are. What if we were to recognise that differentiating is a material act that is not about radical separation, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments?

WTYM forges connections with 'those who are already dead' and diffracts them through the temporalities of those who were not yet born in their lifetime. It is an attempt at

[49] Eco (1989: 12) claims that the open work 'offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work *to be completed*.'
[50] Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (2019) proposes that one way to ethically engage with archival material is to become a companion to those who are archived, a relation that entangles the archivist with the archived rather than assuming an unbridgeable, spatiotemporal gap between now and a past that is over and done with.

radical proximity, at queering linear temporality. One cousin tells me there was nothing to find in visiting Wola Michowa; that is only true if all I was looking for was the cause of an effect I had already decided upon before arriving—if I had already decided how to look at the landscape. Instead, I find a dense now that is intractable, but no less hauntingly affective as a result. Barad's troubling of temporality draws heavily on Derrida's concept of hauntology. As Derrida (1994: 161) states it:

> To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration.

For Derrida, presence and indeed the present are always spectrally entangled with what is absent, excluded and gone. The past is never quite over and done with, lingering as a ghostly presence in any present moment or concept. Barad (2010: 261) extends this thinking to include the iterative performativity of matter itself:

> *Memory – the pattern of sedimented enfoldings of iterative intra-activity – is written into the fabric of the world.* The world 'holds' the memory of all traces; or rather, the world *is* its memory (enfolded materialisation).

Filmmaking crystallises this logic. In *WTYM*, the initial footage and subsequent audio interview record my search for a story I suspected already existed in the footage. I would only find a narrative thread much later by pensively combing through and

recombining images and sounds in the edit. I thought I knew what I was filming at the tattoo parlour, although I did not have a good narrative reason to film at all. I also thought I knew what I wanted Regina to say two years later. As it turned out I was still asking the wrong questions. It was only by approaching the recordings as research material, including my own positioning within that research, that I was able to elaborate a productive context out of what might otherwise be of only marginal, personal interest. In both *WTYM* and *In the Intense Now*, the editing process functions as a rethinking and rearticulating of what the camera programs its operator to record—it is a remembering that inevitably interferes with recorded images and sounds. In going back to the original footage of Regina getting her tattoo and listening to the audio interview recorded two years later, I attempted to imagine these recordings not as singular events, but as '*sedimented enfoldings*' reverberating through time and space, much as Moreira Salles treats the seemingly distant recorded timespaces in his film. This is a similar logic to Gilles Deleuze's (1989: 335) notion of the 'crystal-image […]: the uniting of an actual image and a virtual image to the point where they can no longer be distinguished'. David Martin-Jones (2019: 6) expands upon Deleuze's thinking to propose that: 'the time-image asks us to contemplate that history is multiple, labyrinthine, and potentially falsifying of the present (as opposed to fake)'. Any number of entangled marginalia in the images focused on the process of Regina being tattooed could have become the subject of *WTYM*, the biography of the tattoo artist Sarah being an obvious candidate. In the poor audio recording, she candidly describes her working-class background steeped in an intergenerational maternal tradition of tattoo artists, as well as multiple instances of traumatic personal history. I attempted some early experiments with these storylines. However, I felt uncomfortable dubbing the audio for the words she spoke; it did not feel

like a story I could adequately embody with my voice, and certainly not one for which I could make my interference sufficiently accountable. I wondered also about my responsibility in and my ability to respond to filming this North American location in the context of the temporal, spatial and political discursivities through which it is understood. Some of my earliest experiments using simple visual effects were centred around questions of 'potential histories' (see Azoulay 2019) that thread through the agential cut enacted by the camera's shutter. Much like Varda's statement that people contain landscapes, I wanted to show how landscapes enfold other landscapes when we open them up.

Digital compositing is liberally used in contemporary film practices to excise or conceal unwanted aspects of the frame; however, it can also be used to re-imagine or puncture what is sensible by enacting the potential of a digital *photogénie*. In the sequence with the exterior of the tattoo parlour, I was attempting to generate a credible enactment of what this situated shot might have looked like prior to being invaded by Europeans. Using a straightforward digital method of cutting, masking and pasting elements within the image, I removed the present scene incrementally to reveal the desert as it might have been photographed in the past. I included images I had researched to create the composite: satellite-based imagery from Google Earth approximating the camera position to the tattoo parlour provides the mountainous landscape behind the building; a photograph from a desert landscape in a nearby location stands in for the foreground. The sky from the original shots remains in the composite. I dip out from the sound of traffic to stock audio recorded from a similar desert in the west of the USA. In the composite, and by extension in every shot of the film, the past iterates the present, but the present also co-constitutes the past. They are

entangled in ways that often become obscured by the apparent solidity of inscribed narratives, a worlding of which buildings, roads and cinema images are a part. I do not, as some viewers have interpreted, mean to make a vacuous acknowledgment of stolen land. In line with the general themes of the film, I was attempting to connect inscriptions and re-inscriptions that rupture the boundaries of space and the teleological continuum of time from their apparently well-defined stability. As Azoulay (2019) reminds us, imperial thinking encourages us to think of the past as over and done with. I hoped to conjure and connect with a ghostly landscape that seems obvious once it appears; a present absence resulting from its exclusion. The later scene where I repeat this process in the neighbourhood of Pinheiros, São Paulo, extends this conjuration to the non-human: the pine trees that give the district its name did not survive the change in climate enacted by the urban landscape. The name Pinheiros conjures their ghosts, as do the regular flash floods in an area built upon a flood plain, inundations which might be mitigated by the trees and the ecosystem in which they once thrived.

Trees and rivers are important inclusions in the letter-film sections of *WTYM*. They illustrate how material processes can help us think of memory as '*the pattern of sedimented enfoldings of iterative intra-activity*'. Indeed, Barad (2007: 180) employs the image of rings of a tree as a way to think about temporality's constant becoming:

> Temporality is produced through the iterative enfolding of phenomena marking the sedimenting historiality of differential patterns of mattering. As the rings of trees mark the sedimented history of their intra-actions within and as part of the world, so matter carries within itself the sedimented historialities of the practices

> through which it is produced as part of its ongoing becoming—it is ingrained and enriched in its becoming.

The rings of the tree become available for me to film only by first being chopped down and laid out like bodies by the side of the road. The material enfolding of time and space the rings show is exposed through the fatal intervention cleaved by the machinery that felled the tree. That is not, however, the end of the story, as each encounter with the world changes the rings that we might otherwise assume hold the past as a fixed entity. Indeed, the dead trees teem with life. I make an association between the marks on trees and tattoos, and eventually to marks on film. I was attempting to connect the various historialities in the film through a larger conception of temporality and its entanglement with memory, and how these indelible marks are only envisioned through material interference.

Nearly ten years after the original shoot I identified a latent theme enfolded in the margins of the recorded audio conversation with Regina in 2012 that had not occurred to me in the intervening years. Regina says:

> I always thought tattoos were wonderful. My parents would never… Or my mother wouldn't hear if I did say to her I'd like a tattoo. And so, what happened is, I waited. […] She couldn't believe it. She said pirates did tattoos. I was naughty and I drove my mother insane. I used to think that people just couldn't understand me.

As she casually referred to the emotional distance between her and her mother Edith, Regina's words reminded me about the similar disjunction between the two of us. It nudged me to reconsider the disinterested allochronicity I felt about Edith, of her lived experience being a *fait accompli* distinct from my own. It was, after all, a different time, a different place, so what does that have to do with me in the here and now? Eventually, I wondered if asking about Edith's life might not help me 'understand' how Regina's point of view, or, as she later puts it, her 'sense of humour' might be haunted by her mother. I acknowledge that this gradual discernment of a ghostly presence might also have much to do with my own ageing from my early thirties at the time of the initial shoot into middle age when I produced most of the remaining film. I partly attribute the film's later development to my increasing urgency in asking Regina about her life as she approached her eighties in thrall to a degenerative disease. While time is, in this account, discursive, the dynamism which produces its conceptualisation is incontrovertibly material; it is far from being a linguistic confection alone. In any event, the first step was to re-turn to the original footage, seeking out ways of grasping something that had so far eluded me. For Barad (2014: 168), diffraction begins:

> by re-turning – not by returning as in reflecting on or going back to a past that was, but re-turning as in turning it over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetimematterings), new diffraction patterns.

I began experimenting with straightforward editing practices. How might my often amusing interactions with Regina in the audio interview renegotiate or expand the

meaning of the preceding recording in the tattoo parlour? As I try to direct her to set the scene in her own words, she misunderstands my instructions or complies in ways that make them unworkable without including my presence in the conversation. By including this audio, the observational footage that makes her the object of my gaze from behind the camera is regenerated into something meaningfully different; a reflexive approach prevalent in contemporary documentaries. In *Kill the Documentary as We Know It* (2001: 9), filmmaker Jill Godmilow proposes that renegotiating synchronous documentary footage and sound adds a Brechtian distanciation device she terms a 'second track of meaning'. Godmilow (2001: 3) argues that an ethical documentary should aim for a 'cinema as poetry, as speculative fiction, as critique' rather than a presentation of documentary footage as a fixed account of the past. By this reasoning, the first experiment with a second track of non-sync audio formulates the subject matter as a series of interactions with Regina, seeking to highlight something of the incomplete or insufficient reality on screen as well as the unreliability of memory. However, this hardly ranks as a departure from what are now common practices in documentary and beyond. As Elsaesser (2004: 139) claims, a sophisticated advertising media industry emerging in the 1970s and 80s exploited techniques established by avant-garde practitioners to shill products: 'A devaluation of once radical techniques and stances, such as Brechtian "distanciation" was the inevitable consequence'. The Brechtian intent of Godmilow's second track, in this case, is undermined by habitual memories of now clichéd media practices.[51] Recognising this shortfall led me to devise

[51] For Noël Burch (1990: 262), television practices emerging in the 1980s also make evident the dangers of assuming that an alienation effect 'was inevitably illuminating and liberating, that anything which undercut the 'empathetic' power of the diegetic process was progressive'. Burch argues that the cumulative effects of perpetually shifting TV programmes designed for

further post-production experiments with the filmed images and sounds that imagines including the spectator in an 'in movement', processual filmmaking rather than simply engaging reflexivity as 'an aesthetic closure or an old relativizing gambit in the process nonetheless of absolutizing meaning' (Trinh 1993: 104). Before I could begin these experiments, however, I had to produce more footage. It was by focusing upon what was marginal in the footage from the tattoo parlour—the recorded mistakes—as well as through a process of trial and error that I was able to devise a filming methodology.

Haunting the Pro-Filmic Event: Amateur Time

> Is hauntology, then, some attempt to revive the supernatural, or is it just a figure of speech? The way out of this unhelpful opposition is to think of hauntology as the agency of the virtual, with the spectre understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing.
> —Mark Fisher (2022: 18).

> Film is the making present of an absence, the recording and mourning of a loss.
> —Sarah Cooper (2005: 49).

Once I realised that the mistakes I made while filming in the tattoo parlour were productive rather than disastrous, I decided to purposefully approach the filming and arguably the editing of *WTYM* in a non-professional manner. I do not mean this as a self-deprecating statement; the technical aspects of the film certainly benefit from my

continuous consumption results in a disengagement that trivialises everything, with images of atrocities given equal footing to entertainment programmes. The result for audiences, he argues, is a soporific distanciation from having empathy with anything at all.

experience as a seasoned post-production professional. Nonetheless, consider this description of professionalism by Carolyn Dinshaw (2012: 21):

> Professionals are paid for their work, and their expert time can be seen to share characteristics with money: it is abstract, objective, and countable. Professional work time is clock-bound and calendrical, regulated abstractly and independently of individuals, and the lives of professionals conform to this temporality.

Dinshaw is writing in the context of the historical sources she employs to devise a medieval sense of queer temporalities, however I found much in this articulation that resonated with how I approached *WTYM*. I was not paid for my labour—it was a labour of love that lasted more than a decade, on and off. Engaging with a film project as a piece of research released me from the usual temporal constraints implicit in professional work. A submitted doctoral practice-as-research project need not even be a finished work. Dinshaw posits that amateurs are freed from the predestinations that the financial and temporal restrictions of professionalism make necessary, saying (2012: 22): 'Amateur temporality starts and stops at will; tinkerers and dabblers can linger at moments of pleasure when the professionals must soldier duly onward'. While I cannot honestly state that the making of *WTYM* provided me endless pleasurable moments to linger within, it did allow me to spend an inordinate (unprofessional) amount of time with the footage that I shot, giving me an opportunity to find and generate 'the chance irruptions that occur when all is not synched up' (Dinshaw 2012: 22). This queering of professional temporality means the film was produced over more than a decade.

Certainly, a film could have been made in a shorter space of time, but not the film that ended up being *WTYM*. Furthermore, by embracing the lack of professionalism that produced flickering images in the original shoot at the tattoo parlour, I attempted to approach subsequent shoots in a similarly unpremeditated manner. In this way, I thought, I might generate further unexpected interferences from the contingent intra-actions between myself and the story I sought, the recording apparatus, and our dynamic relational entanglements with the world. I was also drawing upon Hito Steyerl's (2012) notion of the 'poor image', a digital development of Third Cinema's call for a revolutionary 'imperfect cinema' (Espinosa 2013). Steyerl (2012: 32) claims that 'the poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image'. She is talking specifically about poor resolution copies that illegally circulate online, particularly on corporate streaming platforms such as YouTube. Espinosa's manifesto proposed an imperfect 'third world' cinema as an antithetical, revolutionary approach to what he deemed the reactionary mastery of Hollywood and European filmmaking techniques. Given this background, my own intuitive early attempts to achieve a poor image were misguided, notably the shoot in Portugal where I precariously attached a plastic lens to my hacked Panasonic Lumix DMC–GH2 camera (see figure 5).[52] The

[52] The Panasonic GH2 mirrorless camera is notable for its software's capacity to be hacked and modified (see Personal View 2012). Software and filmmaking enthusiast Vitaliy Kiselev learned how to reverse engineer the GH2's software and remove limits imposed by the manufacturer including audio and video encoding bitrates, top ISO settings, restrictions in maximum shot duration and framerates. In other words, the camera software could be reconfigured to record better quality images and sounds afforded by the camera's hardware capabilities. Kiselev published the original software patch online, inadvertently founding a community of filmmaking hackers who produced a huge number of modifications freely available to anyone with a GH2, a PC and ample patience. I used one such modification patch to increase my camera software's recorded video bitrate and to enable frame rate modifications. An unavoidable drawback was the consequential instability in the camera's software operation, resulting in occasional recording crashes when the amount of image data exceeded the speed limitations of the removable SD storage card. One such moment is referred to in the final cut of *WTYM*.

Diana+ lens is manufactured by the Austrian toy camera manufacturer Lomo. Lomo cameras and lenses, manufactured for use in analogue film photography, purposefully include light leaks, lens aberrations, and poor focus that produce unexpected, unsystematic results. I attached the lens to my digital camera with an adaptor for the interview with Regina in a rented apartment in Oeiras, just outside Lisbon, in 2020. As the cheap plastic lens adapter had cracked in transit, I used the elastic bands from a reusable face mask to secure it to the camera body. The resulting images are grainy and soft, as expected from a lens specifically designed to produce unprofessional images (see figure 6). Once the narration explains that this is a failed experiment due to my directorial uncertainty, the sequence just about works in the context of the film. The letter-film frames the interview as an essayistic transition between the previous phase in Salt Lake City and the phases in Brazil to follow. It also positions the trial-and-error process I undertook as a filmmaker in my attempts to interfere with the habitual relationship between myself and Regina. Learning from the partial failure of the interview, I avoided using equipment designed to generate poor images for the rest of the film. I realised that attaching a deliberately faulty lens to a digital camera capable of producing sharper images constituted a professional approach to generating visual interference rather than authentically operating 'against the fetish value of high resolution' (Steyerl 2012: 42). We might also link my deficient approach to Butler's 'bad' reading of performativity—I was attempting to de-naturalise the image simply by changing the camera's 'outfit'. The errors recorded in the tattoo parlour in Salt Lake City were productive as a result of being unplanned: they generated additional, contingent discursive-materialisations to what I believed I was including in the frame.

They were, after Halberstam (2011), queer failures that productively displaced automatisms.

There are limits in describing my approach as amateurish. For instance, I have inevitably incorporated a certain amount of standardised, performative professional practice in composing, exposing and focusing images. I would not therefore claim that *WTYM* aims towards amateurism in precisely the sense that Kiki Tianqi Yu argues is integral to Chinese first-person documentaries. Yu (2019: 63) proposes that one category of amateurism includes 'one's self-identification as an amateur or a professional'. I continued to engage in professional post-production work throughout my research to fund the software subscriptions used in making the film as well as my travels to shoot in relevant locations, so I cannot strictly define myself as non-professional. Further, as an experienced editor, I impose a sense of rhythm cultivated over the years that I would find as difficult to bypass as changing the frequency of blinking my eyes. Finally, I always had to perform at least a minimum amount of planning to produce location shoots. My approach, therefore, was not amateurism as an aesthetic *tabula rasa*, but rather an attempt to integrate an essayistic approach to the production of footage that did not assume a specific, professional causality from the outset.

Figure 5: Panasonic Lumix DMC–GH2 mounted on Joby GorillaPod with Diana+ plastic lens and converter (screengrab from *WTYM* 00:23:34:10).

Figure 6: A ‘professional’ approach to generating poor images in Oeiras, Portugal (*WTYM* 00:24:15:11).

While I began experimenting with an essayistic epistolarity early on in the editing of the original footage, it was only after reviewing the shoot in Portugal that I began to consider how I might also include an essayistic approach at the point of production. The English word 'essay' derives from the French *essayer*, meaning to try, to attempt, to experiment. In Portuguese, we use the word *ensaio*, which also means to rehearse—to repeat word for word, to revisit a previous action or event, to practice, to prepare. I became interested in this notion of the film shoot as a rehearsal; a (re)iteration that remains unfinished, rough-edged, unprofessional. *WTYM* rehearses for a future performance that never arrives. Although the camera performs with a certain finality according to its standardised operations—the marks left on its body—the resulting footage is reiterated and rearticulated in the edit and once again with each unique spectatorial experience. Alternatively, we might say the iterative rehearsal and performance are indivisible parts of the same whole, which resonates with Butler and with diffraction. This is also, in my view, a productive way to understand essay films more generally.[53] I will expand upon the epistolary mode of address in *WTYM* as well as the tension between filmic realism and the essayistic later in this chapter. Reviewing the footage recorded in Oeiras, I reconsidered what other queering, amateurish experiments might enable this sense of filming as essayistic rehearsal.

Ahern (2018) suggests that the standardisation of 24 frames per second (FPS) in the cinema produced an epistemological shift in the collective sense of accurate filmic time and movement accrued from the habitual watching of films at 24 FPS (see Chapter

[53] I do not intend to enter the fray in attempting to strictly define the essay film as either mode, form or genre—an unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) question tackled in depth by a great many scholars over the past decade or so. See, for instance, Alter & Corrigan (2017); Papazian & Eades (2016); Rascaroli (2017); Weinrichter López (2015).

2). While 24 FPS is the standard for cinema, broadcast standards differ globally; most digital cameras include multiple optional framerates as part of their software design.[54] One strategy I deployed in *WTYM* was to use slightly different framerates throughout the film's production. In São Paulo, for instance, I recorded much of the footage at 29.97 FPS, the standard for television broadcast in the United States. Most contemporary software editing packages will reconfigure footage shot with framerates that do not match the rate set in the edit timeline. This usually entails either removing frames (to reduce 29.97 FPS to 24 FPS, for instance) or generating interpolated footage by estimating missing image data to artificially add frames and thereby increase the framerate—a digital conjuration of spectral frames. I did not, for the most part, use interpolation, preferring to conform any variant framerates to match the editing timeline running at 25 FPS, as per the original footage in the tattoo parlour. While this might sound like a form of compliance, the technical meaning of conforming footage is slightly different. Conforming keeps all the recorded frames in the footage but instructs the editing software to conform it to a specific framerate. Clips with framerates higher than 25 play back more slowly, and those with fewer frames speed up recorded motion. With the small shifts in framerates I used in *WTYM*, these changes are subtle, just enough to generate a feeling of time being, as Shakespeare (2019: 62) puts it, 'out of joint'. Shifting framerates also appealed to Epstein, for whom slow and accelerated motion were two elements that could alter time's arrow 'so as to present us with another face of our sensible experience of the world' (Wall-Romana 2013: 73).

[54] For a useful summary of the entangled intricacies between human persistence of vision, shutter speeds, brightness of projector lighting, and the power supplies complicating broadcast engineering standards, see Tozer (2004: 156-158).

Haunting the Pro-Filmic Event: Amateur Space

I identified several sites relevant to my matrilineal history through archival research but also by interviewing my aunt, uncles and several of my mother's and grandmother's cousins. As I wandered around these locations, often for the first time, I filmed them with a GoPro camera held at chest height, hoping to record something that I might later find resonant in the edit. Having even a small professional crew with me would mean generating a shooting schedule with, at the very least, a sketched-out plan for each shooting day. Travelling alone, I was able to film the location multiple times, on multiple different days. I returned to Wola Michowa from my lodgings numerous times over three days, filming my approach to the village from several different routes. I was able to find out much more about the area on location than I had through my online research, based on signs in Polish I was able to translate with software on my phone. These discoveries alerted me to other details to include film. The knowledge, for instance, that gravestones were broken down by invading Nazi soldiers for use in roads and fortifications, as well as to erase any Jewish presence in the area led me to film the visible layers of the road being resurfaced in a specific manner. A non-professional approach afforded me flexibility and, importantly, to avoid any feelings of liability for wasting the time of other busy professionals.

MacDougall (2006: 7) suggests that when 'young filmmakers start out, you often notice that they are looking at nothing but hoping that by moving the camera over the surface of a subject something will be gathered up'. MacDougall's 'young filmmaker', we might say, is an amateur who does not know how to look as an experienced filmmaker does and, for MacDougall, is as 'blind' as a surveillance camera. A filmmaker who looks with laser-like purpose will almost certainly produce a

film that more closely aligns to standards of professionalism, but inevitably the planning necessary to achieve a predetermined aesthetic effect—of devising where one *must* look—comes at the expense of contingency. Minutely planned filmmaking is obviously a valid approach, by no means am I suggesting otherwise. However, I do question MacDougall's implication that uncertain filmmaking necessarily results in a poorer film rather than one that may queer contingent professional or aesthetic standards of causality (see Brown 2018). In the case of *WTYM*, the 'blindness' and inefficiency of the filmmaking becomes part of the narrative intervention, leading to some pleasingly serendipitous outcomes. For example, while walking the street where Regina spent part of her childhood in Belo Horizonte, she coincidentally texted me while I was recording. Almost immediately afterwards, someone gave me a religious pamphlet. These extemporaneous events recorded by the camera seemed important to include in the film precisely because they are causally unimportant to the plot. To borrow from Epstein (translated in Abel 1988: 243), they are nothing very much happening. The expectation from habitual narrative tropes learned from spectating films is that by being included they should be of some consequence. In my view, the lost content of Regina's message matters less than her interfering upon my interference into her past. The unsolicited religious pamphlet handed to me summons the presence of religion that haunts the story even in a sequence when it is apparently absent. Although the distant spatiotemporalities of the filmic present and the past the camera seeks never quite sync up, they remain palpably entangled because of these filmic interventions.

There are of course moments when my flaneur-like wandering ends up somewhere significant that I have researched beforehand: usually a sepulchre. However, I hoped to avoid implying the inevitable causality which is emblematic of

professional filmmaking. Stated differently, I aimed to queer the conceptual linearity in my matrilineality by 'thinking with and through dis/continuity—a dis/orienting experience of the dis/jointedness of time and space, entanglements of here and there, now and then, that is, a ghostly sense of dis/continuity' (Barad 2010: 240). Given the intentional erasure of Jewish burial sites in eastern Europe, existing graves in the film are particularly solid memorials to a specific death—as are the logs piled by the side of the path. My great-grandmother's tomb in São Paulo felt like an exceptionally apt location to enact 'a ghostly sense of dis/continuity'.

To a different degree, Regina's São Paulo apartment is another dis/continuous location for me. The five months I spent conducting my research in Brazil constituted my first extended period living in her flat, before which I felt no significant connection to it other than as the place where my mother lived. It soon became apparent to me, however, that the objects in the apartment made it hauntingly familiar: photographs, bibelots, paintings and books that I recognise from previous homes where I had spent substantial time. As noted earlier, the interest that *In the Intense Now* pays to marginalia in both mise-en-scène and their heterogeneous contexts made an impression on me. John Gibbs (2002: 5) defines mise-en-scène as 'the contents of the frame and the way that they are organised'. It occurred to me that the contents of Regina's flat—an architectural framing—and how they are organised, much like her tattoos, reveal something about her own embodied lived experience and subsequent mode of address, so to speak. Each ornament carefully positioned upon a shelf enfolds entangled political and economic historialities as well as specific personal resonances for Regina. I was struck by the pride of place given to the framed silver cutlery hanging in the immediate sightline of whoever enters the flat, engraved with the letters *H. Graubard* (see figure

7). These belonged to Regina's estranged grandmother, Helena, remnants from a restaurant owned by Regina's great-grandfather Kalman Graubard in Antwerp, Belgium—or so I was told.

Figure 7: Cutlery belonging to Helena hang in Regina's apartment (*WTYM* 00:33:04:21).

The interviews at Regina's apartment were the first that occurred in a space that belonged to and was arranged by her. I decided to compose the first interview I carried out in such a way that included framed photographs within the filmic present (see figure 8). I found inspiration in the composition of interviews in the documentary film *Santiago* (2007), named after director João Moreira Salles' butler, Santiago Badariotti Merlo, who is portraited in the film (see figure 9). Resonating with the fragmented and extended production time of *WTYM,* Moreira Salles set aside the unfinished film for over a decade before returning to it after Merlo's death. The film juxtaposes shots of the modernist, spacious Moreira Salles family home where Merlo once worked alongside the compact apartment where he lived at the time of filming, many years later. The

several notebooks, sculptures and curios that crowd the frame around Merlo speak to his wide-ranging interests in art, culture and history, as examined in the documentary. These beautifully composed images seemed to communicate so much about what haunts this character as well as his complex relationship with the filmmaker, a notion I sought to emulate in the interview set up with Regina.[55] Beyond the filming format (*Santiago* is shot using black-and-white, 16mm film stock), dramatic artificial lighting, and the use of a longer lens that compresses the volume of Santiago's apartment, a significant difference between the production of these two interviews returns us, once again, to my non-professional approach. Less than ten production crew members are credited in making *Santiago*; a small crew by any measure, but nine more than I had helping me film the relevant interviews for *WTYM*. While the challenges and risks involved in filming alone mean this is not necessarily a methodology I could conscientiously recommend, it did produce several contingent errors and failures—effects of difference—that informed the filmic research in unexpected ways.

[55] As a further note, *Santiago* ends with a postscript, appearing after the credits, where we see clips from Yasujiro Ozu's masterpiece *Tokyo Story* (*Tôkyô monogatari* 1953). The narration tells us that the 'severe framings' in Ozu's film were an influence upon Moreira Salles at the time of filming *Santiago*. To my shame, I only saw *Tokyo Story* after I had conducted the interviews with Regina. I can now see how the frames arranged by Ozu and cinematographer Yûharu Atsuta inadvertently resonate through *WTYM*, an example of how film pasts haunt and connect with the present in unexpected, im/material ways.

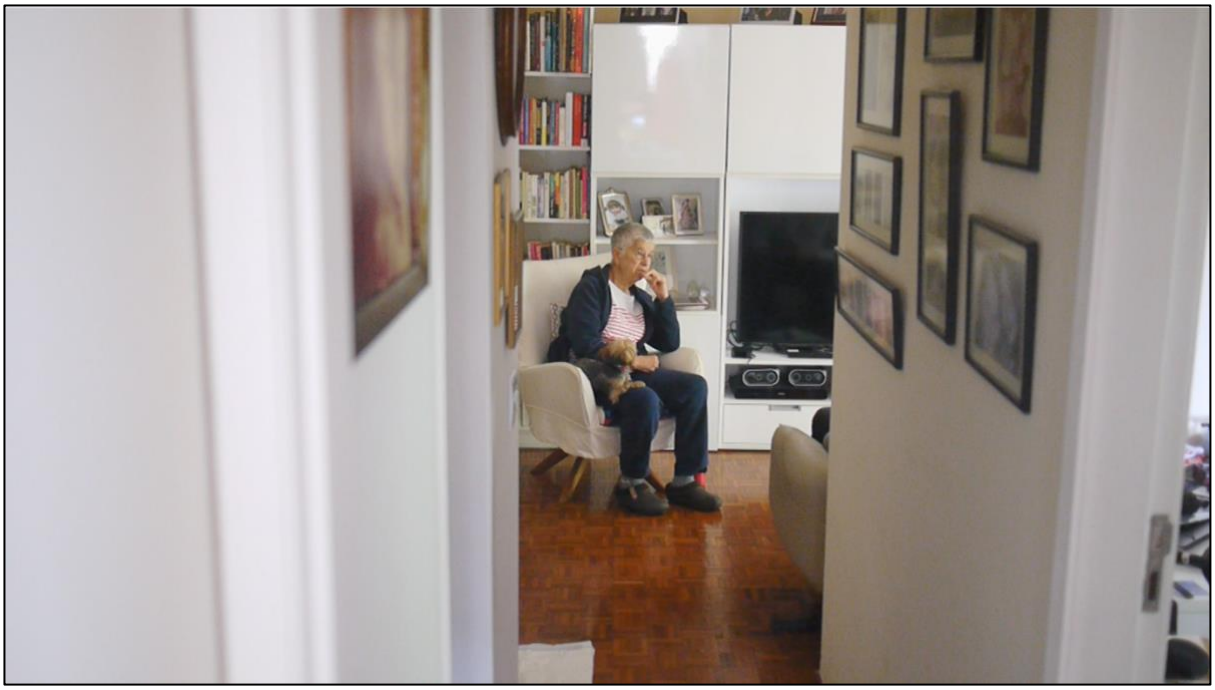

Figure 8: Regina interviewed in her apartment (*WTYM* 00:37:04:03).

Figure 9: Screengrab of Santiago Badariotti Merlo in his apartment in *Santiago* (2007: 01:09:42:20).

The interviews with Regina were filmed by two unmanned cameras.[56] As I was travelling internationally on a shoestring budget, I did not carry a tripod with me, relying instead on two small, flexible GorillaPods made by Joby.[57] These tentacular contraptions have a standard tripod attachment to fit professional cameras, with legs that can be bent around any upright structure such as a lamppost or, in the case of *WTYM*, a hat stand (see figure 5 for a similar setup used in Oeiras, Portugal). I used my hacked GH2 alongside my other, smaller micro-four thirds camera, a Panasonic Lumix GF1, also hacked to enable higher bitrate footage. Each camera was fitted with a different lens, one for a wide angle shot that included the corridor and one closer up to record Regina in a medium long shot. I was limited by the position of the hooks on the hat stand as to what height and angle I could set the camera, resulting in compromises in my composition decisions. I set the focus on both cameras, pressed record, and positioned myself beyond the camera's view, behind a wall, but still within the frame. The sync sound was recorded on the TASCAM DR–05x device with built-in microphones situated between Regina and me in the small living room. Not having a location sound engineer precluded me from using a lapel mic or directional boom microphone. The environmental sounds of loud construction sites, birdsong, and children playing in the park next door were recorded alongside the interviews, making significant audio clean up a necessity in post-production. This was a worthwhile downside to filming Regina in the comfort of her home. Throughout the interviews, I tried to remain an 'active interviewer' (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) focused on

[56] I use the gendered term 'unmanned' to mean lacking a camera operator, although I am partial to the alternative, queer reading of an emasculated or castrated camera as well.
[57] See joby.com for more details.

Regina's words prompted by my questions, letting the conversation flow and following up—or challenging—any aspects that piqued my interest. This meant paying as little attention as possible to the cameras and sound recorder. Both cameras often stopped filming if the values being recorded became too dynamic; a change in lighting or an object rapidly moving across the frame might cause the software to crash. As Laura U. Marks (2015: 251) has pointed out, glitching shows the material base of electronic devices: 'Glitch reminds us of the analog roots of digital information in the disorderly behavior of electrons'.[58] I later learned that flash memory storage cards with faster data-writing capabilities solved this instability, but only after I had recorded the vast majority of the interviews (talk about lacking professionalism!). My thinking at the time was that the risk of a software crash was a small price to pay compared to having a crew crowding the apartment. It also gave me the flexibility to set up a camera whenever our day-to-day conversations turned to something I thought might be relevant to the film. I hold the view that I was only able to access the limited intimacy Regina afforded me because only the two of us were in her living room.[59] Not only did I not have the budget with which to pay professionals, particularly according to such a non-professional schedule; I also reasoned that both Regina and I would perform differently in the presence of strangers. A shift in the experimental arrangement would interfere with the

[58] Marks (2015: 253) later argues that: 'Image breakdown can accurately reproduce the inaccurate workings of memory, especially repression, conflation, and wish fulfillment.' Alternatively, while it enacts a faulty memory of what is before the camera, it also produces an accurate record of the camera software feedback (mal)functions. Compare this to Bazin's (1967: 161) passionate description of the amateurishly shot footage of the Kon Tiki expedition and subsequent film: 'Those fluid and trembling images are as it were the objectivized memory of the actors in the drama.'

[59] The lack of a crew is not generally necessary to achieve an intimate account on camera. Jean Eustache is allowed extraordinary access to his grandmother's storytelling (aided by the bottle of whisky they share on screen) despite having a camera operator and sound recordist present and multiple film reel changes in the remarkable *Número Zéro* (1971).

recording enacted. The glitching cameras and lack of crew result in extended interview periods where I was left with only sound to work with. I was aware of this possibility. I reasoned that I could later construct the edit around the audio material, filling the empty video track with archival photographs, footage shot at the various relevant locations, and animations. I learned this technique on some of my earliest projects as a broadcast documentary editor, producing reenactments to fit around edited audio interviews. As I began to edit the audio, however, I questioned this professional approach. What would it mean to give primacy to the audio without shifting attention to the visual? How might this become another way to question professional practice and experiment with the a/synchronicity of pictures, sounds, timespaces and memory?

Outer Sync: Inter-objective rememberings

> Memories play tricks on you. Sometimes you think it's something and it's something totally different, but your memory tells you that's what it is. And you stick to it.
>
> —Regina Philip (in *We Tattooed Your Mother*, 2024).

In an earlier, ten-minute rough sequence of *WTYM*, I focussed on the fissures between Regina's and my memory of the events leading up to the tattoo parlour in relation to the camera's registration of the day in question. This would lead to an investigation of other historialities diffracting through the shot footage. Indeed, several themes that would eventually be included and expanded upon in the final cut of the film took shape in these early experiments. Both the rough cut and the final edit open with several ways to understand digital, electronic memory. The first shot is an animated textual rendering of

the actual audio metadata from the audio file of the interview I conduct with Regina when she was visiting me in London. It contains data about the audio data: the name and storage location of the file, the format, duration, bitrate (resolution), and so on. The film cuts to a text-based hexadecimal code also contained in the audio file, white text on a black screen. The code is obtained by opening the WAVE audio file in any text editor. Making any changes to this very long, complex series of computational instructions modifies the audio recording itself, usually resulting in audio glitches or an unplayable, damaged file. I include this text as a visual presentation of the set of computational instructions that results in the audio playback we are about to hear. 'Do you want me to say it now?' says Regina. 'Yeah' I respond. 'So turn it on then,' she instructs. 'I'm recording'. While Regina continues to speak, a still image of the TASCAM DR–40 device used to record the conversation appears on screen. It is digitally animated to show the sound levels algorithmically driven by the recorded sonic levels, archived as binary data, of Regina's voice. In other words, all of the data appearing on the screen was generated by a computer graphics package which I designed to mimic the audio recorder's digital interface, using the audio data of Regina's interview to drive the animating audio meters. We might describe this as an indexically driven moment of faux-reflexivity. These early generative experiments with electronic and embodied memory layered the audio recordings through time and space as attempts to non-verbally ask critical questions about temporality, authenticity and objectivity. I wanted to express how notions of indexicality, authenticity and fidelity emerge through complex relations—agential intra-actions and interventionist practices—but that does equate to them being fake. Put another way, a fake image such as a digitally animated image of a recording device, is not necessarily a deception. The difference between

truth and falsehood in a documentary is enacted through mode of address: how a film might attempt to take responsibility for the images and sounds being generated. Pragmatically, these experiments were also attempts to find a productive manner to tell an audiovisual story when the visual element of a sound does not exist. Being limited by a lack of images presented opportunities to experiment with the a/synchronicity of filmic sound and vision in a manner that I might not otherwise have considered.

Flusser (1990) optimistically saw the invention of electronic media as a site for creative experimentation capable of eventually disavowing the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, to be replaced by a complex intersubjectivity. Flusser (1990: 398) traces the beginning of 'recorded history' to the invention of the alphabet from which a 'cultural memory was established, the library, that permitted cumulative storage of acquired information'. The library, Flusser proposes, is 'a superhuman memory that transcends individuals'. The role of the library, however, becomes inverted: rather than serving humanity with the information it stores, humanity becomes enslaved by a transcendental, divine and immortal cultural memory. The totalising history housed within the library becomes the objective world to which we are subjected. Flusser claims this inverted thinking in 'Western values' emerges from both a Platonic notion of perfect forms and a Talmudic conception of otherness as God's image. Knowledge, in the Platonic sense, is less about acquisition and more about remembering what has been lost. In the Talmudic sense, the library is a place for dialogue, for encountering and communing with 'the other', which Flusser connects to 'that which is entirely different for us (*JHVH* 'Jehovah')'. The recognition of absolute alterity enables a divinely transhuman memory that renders 'the other' immortal. Jibing with Badiou's critique of Lévinas, Flusser claims (1990: 398) that the other in this

scenario ultimately stands in for 'the image of God, and through that image we may contemplate God in all possible splendor'. In other words, this outright distinction of ourselves from one another and from nature, Flusser argues, is a conjuring of the divine; a god trick. For Flusser, this othering combined with an aspiration to messianic transcendental knowledge, a 'soul' or 'spirit' separate from the lesser materiality of the body, leads us to think of ourselves as separate from or even opposed to nature, with disastrous results. When an element of human cognition is abstracted into a machinic recording process, Flusser reasons, we gain critical distance from our mechanised thinking of cultural memory through our creative engagement with electronic memory. We cannot but realise that memory, including history, is processual, not transcendental, and formed in networked relations within which we are constitutively embedded. 'If intersubjectivity becomes the fundamental category of thinking and action,' he concludes (1990: 399), 'then science will be seen as a kind of art (as an intersubjective fiction), and art will be seen as a kind of science (as an intersubjective source of knowledge)'.

I began experimenting with the a/synchronous combination of sound and various images with this blending of subjectivity and objectivity in mind. Rather than beginning with a more conventional introduction such as an image of Regina's face in sync with the words she is speaking (images that were not recorded), the digital audio device playing back the audio is the first 'body' that we see performing Regina's voice. By focussing on the electronic device as the source from which Regina's voice emerges, the film entangles her words within the electronic remembering that the film is generating. The recording device becomes *quasi*-subjectified in the context of relations

between sound, image, movement and a familiar mode of address, which we can attune to Vivian Sobchack's (2004: 316) 'interobjectivity':

> as intersubjectivity is a structure of engagement with the *intentional behavior* of other body-objects from which we recognize *what it objectively looks like to be subjective*, so interobjectivity is a structure of engagement with the *materiality* of other body-objects on which we project our sense of *what it subjectively feels like to be objective*.[60]

The images of the sound recorder appear less meaningful than what is being said and how it is being pronounced by Regina's voice, but without a visual referent the audio seems unfixed in space by virtue of being off screen, a literal voice *off*. While we can hear something of the texture of the space where and when the words were recorded, they are somehow undetermined—we hear them differently according to the images with which they are synchronised, and indeed according to the speakers through which we listen to them. As Nichols (1981: 199) reminds us, 'Synchronous sound and images often act to provide specificity as they root the argument in the visual and aural texture of a particular time and place'. The images of the recording device playing back the audio position the filmic present at the time of playback, but the sound recording itself diffracts a second spatiotemporality: the time and space when it was recorded. Filmed images, such as those which address us from their position within the tattoo parlour, are

[60] Epstein understood how film might produce this kind of interobjectivity. Filmic objects—a gun; a door handle; a telephone—become imbued with a human involvement and 'gaze' back at the camera (see Wall-Romana 2013: 31). In other words, for Epstein, we could say, film materialises one enactment of the agential and relational nature of objects.

seductive in conveying documentary presence in a particular space and time. Hearing Regina while watching an artificial visual playback is intended to generate a subtly 'dis/orienting experience of the dis/jointedness of time and space, entanglements of here and there, now and then, that is, a ghostly sense of dis/continuity'. It is also intended to blur the inherence of the subjective/objective divide and question habitual documentary practices. Other than cleaning up some of the ambient noise in the audio, however, I did not perform any manipulation upon the interview recordings. While we see a recording device as we hear the interview audio, I did not choose to make it *sound* like it was being played out of the device's small speaker. While the question of the poor image is often theorised with the usual primacy being given to the optical in audiovisual practices, it is interesting to consider that poor sound does not hold the same revolutionary or anti-commodifying potential as its visual counterpart. Indeed, an oft-repeated maxim I heard as an undergraduate film student and throughout my career states that a film can get away with poor images, but bad sound will ruin it. Hearing poor sound quality makes a film difficult to watch, whereas poor images can make for an enriching experience. When we speak of sound that is technically poor, usually this refers to an excess of background noise—both background and noise implying whatever is not the meaningful focus of the sound recording, often a human voice. It can also relate to the degradation or low resolution of the sound recording itself, although this can potentially perform the authenticity of an archival, historical document out of time (see Fisher 2022: 21 for the effect produced by vinyl crackle used in electronic music). It follows that good sound is a recording that excludes most of its milieu and conceals the recording medium, reducing that world to whatever is being meaningfully focussed upon. In other words, it is sound that is shaped by the design and

positioning of a microphone and sound recording apparatus, as well as the inevitable diffraction of sound waves as they travel through a microphone's apertures. The tattoo parlour shoot suffered from sound recording that included so much of the ambient sound (captured by a faulty microphone) that I considered it unusable. Following various experiments, such as getting rid of the sound completely and using only audio from the subsequent interviews and voice-over recordings, I accidentally stumbled upon an extremely productive technique for diffraction: dubbing.

Remembering Voices: Dubbing as Diffraction

> Words change depending on who speaks them; there is no cure.
>
> —Maggie Nelson (2015: 9).

To produce the film *The Arbor* (2010), director Clio Barnard carried out a series of audio interviews with the children of British playwright Andrea Dunbar. These interviews become the basis for the documentary, lip synced by professional actors who directly address the camera, perfectly enunciating the recorded words down the barrel of the lens. Cecília Mello (2016: 122) argues that the audio interviews are 'the main vehicle for memory in the film'. The lip-syncing actors set an emphatic, yet empathetic opposition to the sounds. For Mello (2016: 124), the technique embraces the tensions between artifice and realism implicit in the documentary crafting of recorded testimony: 'Real words by real people acquire different faces, bodies and movements, and with them a different value'. Mello draws out the complexity developed by the film's intermedial approach that 'is of an at once theatrical anti-naturalist nature akin to Brecht's Epic theatre techniques and, paradoxically, of a heightened level of intimacy,

which seems to draw the spectator in closer to the stories being recalled'. The dubbing technique used in *WTYM* reverses the formula so that the words enunciated by filmed bodies emerge from my own recognisably different embodied voice in the soundtrack. I came upon this technique intuitively. In one of the early epistolary sections I wrote, I recorded myself repeating words Regina had said on camera, 'my grandchildren are beautiful, and this tattoo is not beautiful like they are' and positioned them alongside the video images. To my surprise, they were in near perfect sync, most likely due to a habit formed by my repeated listening of the original recording. I decided to try recording a longer section. Eventually, I had loosely dubbed almost all the unusable dialogue from a long rough edit cobbled together from the footage recorded in the tattoo parlour, performing accents, breathing patterns and cadences to the best of my ability as a non-professional voice actor.

As Mello points out, there is something intimate and empathetic in performing someone else's words to fit their lips (or vice-versa in the case of *The Arbor*). To record in sync, one must concentrate on how the words are pronounced as much of the resonant meaning contained in the words emerge through their specific embodied inflection. Barthes (1977: 182) calls the specificity of a voice its *grain*: 'the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue; perhaps the letter, almost certainly *significance*', a significance which, Barthes is careful to point out, is indefinable. Barthes (1977: 188) clarifies: 'The 'grain' is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs'. The 'mother tongue' is a signification of the flesh rather than a logocentric matter, producing an interesting resonance with the exploration of first and second languages in *WTYM*. While Barthes is writing in the context of vocal talent in the recorded performance of music, the 'grain' might also be applied to a

speaking voice. In the context of this thesis, I am suggesting that the 'grain' of the voice is a case of material-discursivity that exceeds fixed frameworks of intelligibility through its embodied specificity. Regina's voice is specific to her embodied circumstances, and her use of language is accented according to her unique lived experiences. My voice is also specifically embodied and accented, and yet our shared genetics ensure a certain entanglement. The 'grain', for Barthes (1977: 181), is 'the very precise space […] of *the encounter between a language and a voice*'. Indeed, when we shift from English to Regina's mother tongue, Brazilian Portuguese, her voice emanates from the same body with a drastic shift in significance. When I speak the words that Regina enunciates, the encounter between language and voice is multiplied—diffracted—into a dis/continuous, queering, intimate intersubjective encounter. It also makes clear how matter and meaning are deeply intertwined. I attempted to immerse this encounter in the space by adding ambient sound to the sequence: room tone, a squawking television in the background, the sound of passing traffic outside the shop. The idea here is to immerse the dubbed dialogue into the pro-filmic space, to 'root the argument in the visual and aural texture of a particular time and place' as per Nichols. Viewers have described the uncanny dissonance of sync sound becoming naturalised, before slips in lip sync function as a reminder of the technique at play. Certainly, the lip sync is nowhere near as seamless—professional—as in *The Arbor*. In this way, I suggest that the experimentation with dubbed sequences in *WTYM* re-generate the poor images of the original tattoo parlour shoot with clean audio that makes the sequences watchable and intelligible, simultaneously blurring the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity. Dubbing in this way also highlighted the tension of individual identity and genealogy, and how diffraction might be a productive

way to understand this irresolvable dissonance and become, to borrow from Flusser, ‘an intersubjective source of knowledge’.

The Diffracted, Essayistic Self

> When we speak today of a divided subject, it is never to acknowledge his simple contradictions, his double postulations, etc.; it is a *diffraction* which is intended, a dispersion of energy in which there remains neither a central core nor a structure of meaning: I am not contradictory, I am dispersed.
> —Roland Barthes (1995: 143).

> Individuality is a mobile complex, that each of us, more or less consciously, must choose and construct for himself, then rearrange ceaselessly, through a diversity of aspects which, themselves, are far from being simple or permanent, and within the mass of which, when too numerous, the individual succeeds with great difficulty in keeping clear form. Then, so-called *personality becomes a diffuse self, whose polymorphism tends towards the amorphous and dissolves itself in the watery current of motherly depths.*
> — Jean Epstein (translated in Wall-Romana 2013: 95n20, emphasis mine).

> Navels, those everlasting reminders of where it all started.
> — Eloghosa Osunde (2022: 222)

Michael Renov (2004) draws from Barthes’ quote above to briefly suggest that the emergence of a ‘new’ form of essayistic autobiography in film and video, specifically

citing the work of Jonas Mekas, is diffractive. Renov (2004: 118) argues that the heterogeneity of the subject 'exceeds the difference of a stultifying binarism—or, for that matter, Freud's tripartite psychic topography'. For Renov, the essayistic approach of 'new' autobiographical documentaries (now more commonly identified as essay films) is poised in the direction of diffraction, a notion he elaborates no further. However, I believe Renov touches upon an important connection that Epstein understood well. Epstein above identifies subjectivity in corporeal relation to film practice, a move that Wall-Romana (2013: 95) says 'brings together the sea, moving water, and fluidity—here with a figurally maternal dimension—to suggest how the material sensorial register of *photogénie* conjoins visual mobility and coenaesthesis to redefine (queer) individuality'. In my view, essay films often function according to a diffractive mode of address: by juxtaposing fluid subjectivities, concepts, images, sounds, historialities and so forth so that they might be understood diffractively 'through one another' (Barad 2007: 142).

It is little wonder that one of the contested characteristics of the essay film is its personal mode of address (see Rascaroli 2009). Papazian and Eades (2016: 86) have posited that: 'the essay film should be understood not as a genre, but as an overflow, a counter-genre within an industry or system based on classification and genre, or even as a non-genre lying outside the system of classification'. In this sense, we might posit that the essay film is purposefully non-professional; it refutes standardisation.[61] In his

[61] There are of course professional films that might be described as film essays—Adam Curtis' films for the BBC, for instance. I would argue these are not *essayistic* films in the tradition inherited from, among others, Michel de Montaigne (2001). While Curtis' professional essay films weave together archival ephemera to formulate a historical argument through the filmmaker's 'Voice of God commentary' (Nichols 1991: 32), they abide by a certain empirically historicist, dialectical standard (in the Fichtean sense) which avoids essayistic

influential text, Adorno (1984: 164) posits that the literary essay 'thinks in fragments just as reality is fragmented and gains its unity only by moving through the fissures, rather than by smoothing them over'. As theorised by Renov and developed by Lebow (2008; 2012), first-person documentaries addressing the spectator from a situated perspective often tend towards the essayistic, struggling with the dispersion of identity Barthes identifies above, as well as a wider scattering of meaning and matter in the fracturing of grand historical narratives. Adorno suggests that the written essay functions as a form of heretical resistance to all-encompassing, reductive scientific objectivity by way of radical disjunction. The essay moves through fissures while simultaneously resisting the wholeness of totalisation. I propose here, with *WTYM* serving as my example, that identity functions in a similarly diffractive fashion, akin to our sense of reality. In other words, coherence is habitual rather than inherent. Indeed, the coherence of Burch's Institutional Mode of Representation is learned through iterative practices of industrial standardisation and spectatorship. The essay film, amorphous and protean, resists habitual memory and seeks to generate queering moments of *photogénie* using many more available techniques than the four attributed to Jean Epstein who, it bears reminding, was writing in the context of cinema in the 1920s.[62] Counter-intuitively, the essayistic can function as a realist practice that aims not to reflect a conventional understanding of reality, but to acknowledge that every

ambiguity. The critical role of a more non-professional essay film, as Hito Steyerl (2017: 278) sees it, is to 'enable connections between people and objects, which go beyond the flexible and efficient conjunctions typical of post-Fordist capitalism [through] alternative, non-commercial forms of communication'. In his essays, Montaigne claims to state opinions about the measure of his own sight rather than the measure of things: 'la mesure de ma vue, non la mesure des choses' (1965: 107), whereas in my view professional essay films make claims about their subject matter—the measure of things—with empirical certainty.

[62] As per Wall-Romana (2013: 74): 'Epstein considers that there are four fundamentally unique aspects in cinema: accelerated motion, slow motion, rapid editing, and the close-up.'

film practice—or from an agential realist perspective, every practice—generates a new iteration of performative intra-activity.

On the face of it, filmically rupturing the continuum of timespace might sound anathema to Bazin's insistence on the achievement of realism relying on a certain respect for phenomenological coherence. A phenomenological continuum informed only by vision, however, reduces our phenomenology to the purely visual. As I have argued, Bazin's realism hinges on an equilibrium between photography's objectivity and cinema's aesthetic objectivity. Bazin is critical of overdetermination in either direction: actuality is not realism, and neither is a reduction in ambiguity to a singular meaning determined by a film's form. Bazinian realism is the achievement of narrative coherence without forsaking reality's intrinsic ambiguity. However, I argue that an essayistic approach seeks to do the opposite of closing down meaning, aiming to materialise further ambiguities and contingencies on screen. I want to briefly consider Bazin's discomfort with film essayism expressed in his (2017) review of *Letter from Siberia* (1958), published shortly before his death.

Jennifer Stob (2012) has articulated a compelling description of Bazin's (2017: 103–4) mix of admiration and anxiety over Marker's innovative approach, which he terms 'an absolutely new notion of montage that I will call "horizontal," as opposed to traditional montage […]. The montage has been forged from ear to eye'. Drawing on several articles written about Marker, Stob argues that for Bazin, this innovation in montage upends the primacy of the photographic image in cinema. The balance between image and form are disrupted by a third track Bazin claims Marker introduces: the idea. For Bazin, montage is a violence, at times necessary, to the potential of cinema to present a unified spacetime. As Stob points out (2012: 37):

> Bazin's reviews of Marker's films reveal the evolution of a metaphorical model on which he relied in his attempt to come to terms with an innovative coupling of sound and image. From diamond to flint, from fireworks to light's refraction, Bazin's allusions frame his wonderment of the new directions in which Marker pushes the dialectic process on film. At the same time, these metaphors illustrate Bazin's fear of the pictorial ramifications of horizontal montage and divulge the deficiency he perceived within it.

Stob convincingly demonstrates how Bazin, while acknowledging Marker's accomplished technique, is concerned that eventually this form of cinema consumes the ambiguity of the cinematic matter at hand, becoming an exercise in form. Bazin finally settles on a logic to accommodate his wider ontology of cinema, which is to link Marker's work to another literary form: the essay. It is a fool's venture to speculate how Bazin might have deepened his thinking on this mode of filmmaking had he lived to see it flourish. However, given his historical analysis and celebration of cinema's impurity, it follows that his thinking might have developed by considering the links between literary essays and Marker's efforts. In a revised phrase to a reedited version of his review, published five days after his death, Bazin (2017: 103) positions *Letter from Siberia* as 'an essay documented by film'. While Stob concludes that Bazin's 'mistaken' criticism of Marker comes from his unshakeable association of the indexical with reality, I am sidestepping this later semiotic addition to his thinking. What Bazin lacked, in my view, was time to investigate the relationship between cinema and the literary essay. Considering how he carefully outlined the intermedial differences

between film and the novel (1967: 53–75) and the theatre (1967: 76–124), why would he not give the emerging adaptations of the essay form to film the same level of attention?

Even in his lukewarm review, Bazin praises (2017: 105n1) the diffractive approach Marker employs in the famous sequence played three times with three different narrations that project 'three intellectual beams [as in beams of light] onto a single track and receiving their reverberation in return'.[63] The images seen through the filter of the different narrations generate interference; this 'horizontal' approach can be employed to generate more rather than less ambiguity. Bazin states that in *Letter from Siberia*, 'the primary material is intelligence, that its immediate means of expression is language, and that the image only intervenes in the third position, in reference to this verbal intelligence'. What distinguishes Marker's intelligent language in relation to the film's images from, say, the *Why We Fight* series (produced by Frank Capra, 1942–45) is that Marker is commenting on the construction of history through cinema. Indeed, in his essay on Capra's sensationalist American propaganda films, Bazin (1997: 191) comments that:

> With film, we can refer to the facts in flesh and blood, so to speak. Could they bear witness to something else other than themselves? To something else other than the narrative of which they form a part? I think that, far from moving the historical sciences toward more objectivity, the cinema paradoxically gives them the additional power of illusion by its very realism.

[63] This is David Kehr's translation in the footnote of the review, which to me more closely aligns to Bazin's original text. Stob (2012) refers to this metaphor as a 'refraction', however the word reverberation clearly implies diffraction.

Using the heretical essay form in film, Marker is precisely investigating how film images speak to something 'other than themselves', commenting upon the construction of 'the narrative' of which images inevitably form a part. Bazin (1997: 191) again: 'We spontaneously believe in facts, but […] in the end they have only the meaning that the human mind gives to them'. Far from telling spectators what to think, Marker entangles language and images through montage to generate essayistic questions that produce further ambiguity in what the images might mean.

Drawing from Adorno among others, Rascaroli (2017: 8) argues that an essayistic filmmaking mode generates 'in-between spaces that must be accounted for, inasmuch as they are central to the essay film's functioning'. Accounting for fissures, however, can only take place through the juxtaposition of what is *not* absent, which is to say what is apparently already there—what Derrida (1994: 64) calls 'inheritances': 'All the questions on the subject of being or of what is to be (or not to be) are questions of inheritance'. And so *WTYM* attempts to blend together different modes of address that interfere with one another through space and time, continuously. This is why I describe the film as an essayistic first-person documentary, because the essayism is made possible by first establishing some personal contexts. In a sense, this resonates with the difference identified by Butler between subjectivity and identity (see chapter 1 of Brady and Schirato 2011). For Butler, the legibility of a subject within a discursive framework is a prerequisite to assigning or choosing an identity. By constructing our filmic subjectivities in fragments of interviews, narrational exposition and family archives, I am suggesting that not only are the identities of Andrew and Regina generated by moving 'through' the fissures that separate what is historically legible and

all the complications implied, but also entangling the filters of our individual, lived experiences—our habitual and sensory memory—that are tied to our material-discursive subjectivities. A lack of completeness enables identity to iteratively cohere within the constantly shifting dynamism of the world, regardless of how we might try to fix things in place.

The section in *WTYM* where I attempt to interpret Regina's tattoos is a key moment of attempting to move through the fissures of her identity. By combining Regina's testimony of when and why she got each tattoo with some cursory cultural and historical research on the imagery she has chosen to inscribe her skin, the 'mobile complex' of her identity comes to the fore. Indeed, her stories about each tattoo change over the short duration of the film, notably the spider on the back of her neck, originally a reminder never to re-marry, later described as a provocation for those who might be repulsed by the sight of an insect on her body and feel compelled to kill it. Without wanting to delve into psychoanalytical analysis, the juxtaposition of these intentions is meant to imply that these can both be true at different times, but also at the same time. My parents' divorce is a recurring subject for Regina, as is her desire to rebel against the constraints imposed by, as she tells it, her mother Edith. Regina may therefore come across as an unreliable narrator to a spectator expecting a consistent character, but part of what *WTYM* investigates is how her certainty at different times prompts me to question the reliability of my own narration. Nonetheless, there is a difference between the fabrication of so-called alternative facts for the sake of gaining advantage or manipulation and the complexity of material-discursive identities labouring to stabilise the instability of existence at different times. Our motivations are not simply fixed in time and space like marks on a grid; neither are our constantly shifting memories. Yet

coherence and stability are key for the survival of any being, and indeed for political transformation. I do not think I can improve on how Morwenna Griffiths (1995: 180) resolves this apparent paradox:

> It is essential to acknowledge that there exists no unity of the self, no unchanging core of a being. Such a belief is a fancy, and will mislead the self into seeking to establish it. Being true to oneself does not mean seeking after such a core. It means undertaking the difficult business of assessment and transformation within a changing context of self. Authenticity requires re-assessing the changing self, not preserving a sameness.

Identity is also constrained and enabled by the material and the discursive specific to its constant, performative formation and re-formation. Derrida (1994: 18) claims that an 'Inheritance is never a given, it is always a task' in the sense that what is taken for granted is always a re-affirmation—or re-iteration—through radical transformation. He continues:

> An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the injunction to *reaffirm by choosing*. […] One must filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy

> interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause-natural or genetic.

Regina's tattoos again serve as an ideal illustration of this. I try to understand why she has chosen those specific tattoos; what emerges is that they are reaffirming choices of disparate inheritances. The personal history of her progeny; the cultural narratives of star signs, superstitions, religious iconography and global, especially Western tattoo culture.[64] The legacy of Regina's tattoos both call for and defy interpretation, as I find out by attempting to explain them with some superficial (but productive) research. By having Regina's grandchildren Sofia and Finn redraw her tattoos, the film highlights how Regina has gone about the 'task' of individual inheritance in specific ways, yet always entangled with the spectral presence of the tattooists upon each dermal illustration. Regina and I are both haunted by the sifting and filtering of inheritances. I attempt to incorporate these 'in a contradictory fashion around a secret': the intersecting, wave-like tattoo I chose to have inked around my arm. If anything, *WTYM* is precisely an attempt to interfere with 'the different possibles of the same injunction'. We do not find resolution or completeness once the credits roll, but we find productive difference through an intersubjective generation of knowledge.

Interfering with my matrilineal genealogy aims to de-naturalise my relationship with Regina, forcing us to ask questions beyond the performative roles that become second nature to any relationship with 'a level of casual intimacy'. There is no doubt this approach is political in taking a queer, feminist stance: patrilineal histories are often

[64] The ornamentation of the body with tattoos, according to Lars Krutak and Aaron Deter-Wolf (2017: 3), 'has been practiced by cultures around the globe and throughout human history'.

given primacy, with matrilinealities left undocumented. It is worth pointing out that queer temporalities have frequently been theorised in opposition to feminist time embodied by motherhood. Jack Halberstam (2005: 1), for instance, argues that 'Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction'. Other notable queer theorists such as Elizabeth Freeman (2010) and Lee Edelman (2007), have entrenched this oppositional model against the reproductive, generational approach which feminist theory has often employed. I agree that acknowledging the limitations and exclusions of teleological, heterosexist temporal epistemologies is vital.[65] And yet mothers generate a direct biological link to our transgenerational duration; our bodies used to be theirs, and as such we are their embodied futures, complex as this entanglement may be. Motherhood, as Adrienne Rich (1976: 34) reminds us, 'has a history, it has an ideology, it is more fundamental than tribalism or nationalism'. The historical contexts that make motherhood and matrilineality intelligible as concepts are inescapable. Nonetheless, regardless of how they are historically understood, our mothers are also viscerally real and a site of continuous contestation as the ongoing struggle for reproductive health and rights makes evident. To be clear: by no means do I mean to essentialise motherhood, as cautioned against by Mary Ann Doane (1990) and Imogen Tyler (2009), or generational time. Nonetheless, I inevitably write from within my onto-epistemological context, and this includes a generational understanding of motherhood. My goal is to investigate through the patchwork of Regina's unique identity as my mother by also

[65] Sam McBean (2016) has outlined the problematic teleology that notions of queer temporality itself employs in being theorised as an evolution from feminist temporality. McBean illustrates multiple occasions where feminism has employed non-linear, non-generational approaches to time, challenging a reductive oppositional binary between feminism and queer theory.

positioning her as a daughter, attempting to cultivate the intractable notion of her 'as no-one's mother' (Rich 1976: 31). Furthermore, investigating matrilinealities illustrates how, far from entrenching heteronormative generational time, they provide fruitful contexts to elaborate queer temporalities that are simultaneously dis/connected, im/material, and hauntological.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, birth is a primal moment of separation. From a different starting point, Edward Said (2001: 186) reminds us that geographical exile has the potential to enable a 'plurality of vision [that] gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions'. Plurality of vision as outlined by Said resonates with the notion of diffractively reading texts through one another. Mothers cannot but engage a plurality of vision based upon their habitual and sensory memories, and the dissonant experience of the dis/continuous lived experience—duration—of their child who grows ever further a-part from them. Children also experience this on some level: navels, as novelist Eloghosa Osunde points out above, serve as constant reminders of our dis/continuous subjectivities. Part of the tension in *WTYM* is that Regina feels a sense of coherence in her identity that I do not share: our mutual genealogy produces two very different, apparently incompatible outcomes. My sense of identity is dispersed (diffracted) by the various contradictions of my dual national childhood; my queerness; and being an *emigré* for all my adult life. In one interview Regina describes me as a 'mixed-up kid', and tellingly she mixes Portuguese and English to say so—'*você é um* mixed-up kid'. However, Regina is also a 'mixed-up kid' with dual national parents (albeit both raised in the same country), with the added commingling of her mother's fractious conversion from Judaism to Catholicism. What threads together the disparate

parts of the film is a persistent enquiry of the effects of these differences that mix us up; not to untangle them necessarily, but to rework them into a new point of connection.

In its final form, *WTYM* attempts to de-naturalise our subjectivities and our entangled shared historialities by not simply taking them for granted as *faits accomplis*, but the film does not resolve them (if such a thing were possible). There is another risk, perhaps inescapable on some level, of slipping into a psychoanalytical mode about myself and/or my mother within these pages. As Maria Torok (Abraham and Torok 1994: 176) has put it, 'to stage a word […] constitutes an attempt at exorcism, an attempt, that is, to relieve the unconscious by placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm'. While this could be interpreted as the outcome of the filmic research, it is not the intended function of this text. I have privileged knowledge of Regina's life outside of *WTYM* from our shared experience, but I attempt as much as possible to think of her as Regina the film participant and insist that as a documentary filmmaker I am partly accountable for her construction rather than simply 'describing' her. Indeed, the beginning of the film functions as a kind of prenatal sequence: the point-of-view, slowed down, overly colour saturated shot of my legs underwater show the blurred boundaries of my adult body within a uterine body of water. The quote from Ocean Vuong's autobiographically inspired fiction *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019) superimposes this shot: 'I'm writing you from inside a body that used to be yours. Which is to say, I'm writing as a son'. These two sentences succinctly express the embodied exile implicit in being born. The citation also introduces the film's epistolary register which immediately follows it in the next sequence.

Dead Letters: Ghostly Epistles

> You're right about ‘ghost letters.’ But they are real; they aren't just wearing sheets.
>
> —Franz Kafka (1990: 208).

Kafka's words above, from one of his famous correspondences with Milena Jesenská, is as contextually incomplete in the original letter as it appears here, presented in the collection without the letter he is apparently referring to. Patrick Paul Garlinger (2001: 452) points out that in Kafka's collected letters, the word ghosts reappear ‘in a rather ghost-like fashion: as brief allusions, never discussed at length and often at the end of a letter’. They inadvertently allude to how letters are inherently hauntological: out of time, incomplete, intimate yet remote, dis/connecting.

There are eight loosely related film-letters in *WTYM*, a narrative device that ultimately gives the narrative its coherence across fissures, while at the same time pointing out the haunting presence of indeterminacy from which that continuity emerges. The first serves as a prologue, which I will analyse in some depth below. They all engage with different ways of enacting memory and identity through film. Memory is examined variously as marks left on different bodies; of temporality understood through photography; of geographical locations as sedimented sites of memory and memorialisation; of identity as a fluid, intergenerational memory; of the role language plays in memory; and finally, the inevitable haunting presence of deep memory.

In her foundational text on epistolary literature, Janet Gurkin Altman (1982: 4) posits that a ‘working definition’ of epistolarity is ‘the use of the letter's formal properties to create meaning’. Rascaroli (2017: 144) uses Altman and Naficy as a springboard to illustrate how ‘epistolary narratives shape essayistic meaning, as an example of the range of narrative forms on which the essay film may draw’. As letters are often reflexive, subjective and open-ended in the sense of always awaiting a reply from the future, they are a fitting narrative device for an essayistic approach. Furthermore, Altman (1982: 187) posits that:

> The letter's duality as a self-contained artistic unity and as a unit within a larger configuration make it an apt instrument for fragmentary, elliptical writing and juxtaposition of contrasting discrete units, yet at the same time the very fragmentation inherent in the letter form encourages the creation of a compensating coherence and continuity on new levels.

Not only does this arrange itself neatly with Adorno’s notion of fragments separated by fissures that the essay moves through, but also with diffraction as a ‘juxtaposition of contrasting discrete units’ that at the same time embraces an inherent incompleteness.

Altman clearly lays out some of the thematic potentials for the interpretation of epistolary literature, some of which resonate with how the form is employed in *WTYM*. The letter, Altman (1982: 186) argues, ‘both connects and interferes’. By attempting to bridge spatial and temporal distance, a letter conjures the very gap it means to close, thereby constituting absence as part of its meaning. Altman (1982: 187) continues:

> The letter writer is engaged in the impossible task of making present both events and addressee; to do so he attempts to close the gap between his locus and the addressee's (here/there) and creates the illusion of the present (now) by oscillation between the then of past and future.

Altman is writing about the use of the written letters in literature. Film-letters operate with an even more complex oscillation of presence and distance: we see the images and hear the sounds recorded in the past filtered through the present moment of the audience. The narration and the images are often also dis/jointed: the description within a letter recount something occurring in the past, but images and sync sound produce a filmic present. They are onto-epistemologically dissonant rememberings of the past. Naficy (2001: 102) posits that: 'Exile and epistolarity are constitutively linked because both are driven by distance, separation, absence, and loss and by the desire to bridge the multiple gaps'. While the notion of geographical exile is certainly an underlying theme within *WTYM*, I believe the film engages more productively with the previously mentioned notion of birth as a kind of exile. The epistolary address consistently engages with an 'oscillation between the then of past and future' in relation to my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, and more historialities which exceed the boundaries drawn by the film.

The first letter in *WTYM* introduces Andrew as embodied narrator, Regina as his mother and questioning the status of our shared past. Altman (1982: 4) articulates how epistolarity produces meaning for readers habituated to the form of communication. In film, the meanings are multiplied according to the multiple sensory tracks at work in addition to the words within each letter. The letter form conjures both a writer and a

reader; film-letters enact a speaker and a potential listener intractably entangled with the images alongside the narration, as well as positioning the spectator as a listener (or interloper). In *WTYM*, the performance of the epistolary voice-over establishes an intimate address and an ambiguity about the narrator (in writing 'letters that I don't mean to send') and the addressee (are the letters addressing the narrator's mother, someone fictional, the spectator, or all of the above?), as well as generating a filmic enactment of Regina. Lines from a digital waveform monitor used to read video luminance data in colour grading appear to be from a notepad where fragments of animated handwriting accompany the words being spoken. The waveform, filmed off my computer screen and later superimposed over the footage, measures the brightness in the video signal of the medium closeup of Regina lying on the tattooist's chair that slowly fades in from the background, blurred beyond recognition. In other words, two ways to read the image data filter through one another. After watching a rough cut of the film, one viewer suggested that this sequence reads as medical information, a 'going in' to the body—perhaps an ultrasound—but also of a reflexive system that reveals the tools of filmmaking and inscription of text in a very tactile way. This layering brings to mind Sarah Dillon's neologism (2005: 245) 'palimpsestuousness' to describe the entangled 'logic and structure of the palimpsest'. Dillon (2005: 245) explains how palimpsestuous, a combination of palimpsest and incestuous, stands in for its entangled structure: 'The palimpsest is an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other'. Dillon 'queers' the palimpsest by suggesting that its iterability points to a relational logic that is always contextual and always reinscribed through each new iteration of palimpsestuous analysis rather than an original source from which original

meaning can be traced. *WTYM* self-consciously and continuously attempts to palimpsestuously diffract various bodies (of humans, of water, of land) through the practice of filmmaking. The film continues the prenatal theme from the underwater shot that precedes it, only this time it is Regina's boundaries that begin as graphical engineering data, then blurred image, and then finally shifting into focus. Some viewers commented that they felt that the image of Regina was lifeless; that she had passed away. And, after Barthes, this is in a sense true: photography turns us all into ghosts. The inception of the film is also the film's conception of the boundaries of myself and my mother, and of the uncanny haunting that permeates the proceeding filmic narrative.

The letter introduces two filmic births of sorts, but also a transmission from the future-past; Regina recorded in one of the later interviews appears to beam back to communicate that she agrees with the initial letter speaker—we do not understand each other well (we are disconnected) due to the complexities of mother-son relationships (we are connected). The image is treated to look damaged; poor but not exactly identifiable as any particular format. It is a palimpsest of image treatments and temporalities, duplicated and noisy. Indeed, I hope that it is clear to any viewer that the first letter is one of the last that was written. The recorded image and sounds are from the past of the letter writer but addressed to a future spectator. Time is out of joint.

At first glance, there is a resonance between this section and Mona Hatoum's audiovisual art installation *Measures of Distance* (1988), from which I certainly took visual inspiration. One of many key differences is that in Hatoum's piece, the artist reads out English translations of letters from her mother, while recorded conversations they have in Arabic interfere with the narration. The letters in *WTYM* escape what I would realistically write to Regina, even beyond their narrative role of contextualising

otherwise meaningless images. In that sense, they are entirely fictional—they are not letters I have sent to Regina outside of the film—while remaining nonfictional in their subject matter. The technical problems of *WTYM* become ruminations on the images themselves and their relation to the pro-filmic event and beyond, including our family history and wider philosophical questions; questions which, experience tells me, would likely not be of much interest to Regina. One notable exception might be the letter I read aloud to Regina on camera, adding another layer of complexity to the question of whom the film-letters are meant for. My tone to Regina is conversational in this instance, until it is replaced by the asynchronous temporality of the more intimate address of the voice-over before returning to the sync sound. This is also the only time where Regina gets to respond to one of my epistolary ruminations. This ambiguity of who 'we' are in the film speaks to Lebow's (2012: 22) articulation that first-person cinema is first-person plural and 'implies a dialogue between subjects, rather than insisting on subject/object relations of the traditional documentary'.

What the letters essayistically attempt to do, over and over again, is to diffract Regina and my relational identities through memory. Memory in this case does not only mean what we remember, but also, after Barad, what we 're-member', the Derridean task of reasserting our cultural, national and genetic inheritances as well as the memory that materially inscribes the world. What do we inherit from the landscape? How do we enfold the past through the present, not analogically or externally to a tree or a river or a map, but in entanglement with these entities? What can we learn from observing the world not from an impossible position of absolute exteriority, but by acknowledging that interiority and exteriority do not inhere under even the most cursory investigation? How might acknowledging the instability of the universe give us the tools to enact

change? And, importantly, what role does filmmaking have in enacting reality, and real change? I ask these questions in the film-letters, without expecting a final response from ghosts in the future. At the very least, I hope that *WTYM* might leave the impression that we are all shaped by our cultural contexts, including our mothers, in uncountably specific and material ways, but that this does not lead to any straightforward answers about who we are. What is left to investigate are the effects of that difference.

(In)Conclusion: Exclusions and Open-endings

> Every individual life is a collective history.
>
> —Paul B. Preciado (in *Orlando, My Political Biography*, 2023).

> I always think: if you look, you'll find something.
>
> —Regina Philip (in *We Tattooed Your Mother*, 2024, my translation).

In her statement above, delivered near the end of *WTYM*, Regina once again conjures the spectre of religion. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus Christ (Augustine 1951: 182) declaims: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened'. According to Saint Augustine (Augustine 1951: 182):

> the seeking refers to the finding of truth. […] In this life, however, knowledge consists in knowing the way toward that blessedness, rather than in possessing it. But, when anyone has found the true way, he will arrive at that possession.

This denotes how a representationalist approach inherits its metaphysical ontology from theology: Those who seek shall find truth—but this ultimate truth is only bestowed by God in the next life. In representation, truth is only bestowed by the objectivity of an all-encompassing reality, which is essentially a conception of the world as a metaphysical, divine object to be possessed. *WTYM*—both the film and this text—investigate historialities to generate knowledge about an entangled present rather than a

conclusive, final truth. Nonetheless, if we remove Regina's phrase from its religious context, seeking and finding can also imply a plurality of outcomes rather than a singular truth. Inevitably, the intervention of the search contributes to the answers that are generated. By seeking out what we can say about the past, or indeed what answers the past has about the present, *WTYM* intervenes, in a contained and very personal context, to reconfigure 'what counts as the world'. And yet, as Preciado notes in his first-person documentary, cited above, every life is also a collective history: living and history are ethical matters in that self and other, including those deemed non-human, as well as spatiotemporalities understood as other to the present, are intricately entangled intra-actions that are open to change. Attempting to reconfigure the personal can produce answers that matter for the collective, not in a definitively conclusive manner, but no less transformative as a result.

For Barad (2007: 205), every practice that enacts reality is inevitably tied up in exclusions. Understanding reality as the entangled, mutable aggregate of things-in-phenomena that exclude other possibilities suggests 'an understanding of reality that takes account of the exclusions on which it depends and its openness to future reworkings'. In film, we might speak of the reality imagined beyond the material images and sounds available. Deleuze (1986: 15–16) claims that 'The out-of-field [*hors-champ*] refers to what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present.' I would like to account for an exclusion that haunts *WTYM*. While I reflect on pre-colonial environments and dwellers in the film-letter sections, my family's history is also embedded in the oppression of diasporic African and Indigenous people of colour in Brazil. I screened the film to the AVPhD group organised by academics and students at Goldsmiths College and the University of Westminster. One participant

commented on the absence of black folks in a film largely taking place in Brazil, the last country to abolish the legal enslavement of African and Indigenous people. Taken by surprise, I suggested that Regina's social world is largely devoid of people of colour, to which a fellow Latin American responded that at least some of the people who provided her with services would assuredly be black, which is of course true.[66] I spent much time considering this. I thought deeply about who to include in this film about my relationship with Regina and our shared past. Her cleaner of nearly thirty years, Nilda, is a person of colour of whom I am incredibly fond and who would make for a brilliant documentary character.[67] Like many domestic labourers in Brazil, she travels for hours from her home in the periphery of São Paulo to clean Regina's more centrally located apartment twice a week. Should I have filmed their interactions? How could I responsibly negotiate the inevitable power differential of being the employer's white son and generate a story with the necessary scope to do justice to Nilda's own matrilineal pasts? Thematising these issues would result in a very different film. The last two changes I made in *WTYM*'s post-production allude to these exclusions. First, there is the section where I refer to the family who lived in our house when I was a child, Teresa and her children Joanisa and Jurandir, whose surname my relatives and I cannot remember and who are not documented in our lives, but who remain present in my sensory memory. Second, there is the shot of empty album pages of photographs that were never taken of Edith's employees, which almost certainly included people of

[66] I purposefully do not capitalise the word 'black' after Minna Salami's argument (2021), drawn from Stuart Hall among others, that to do so entrenches the discursive boundaries of racialisation as rigid and ahistorical.

[67] Immediately prior to the submission of this thesis, Regina decided to lay Nilda off for reasons I still do not fully understand. The film excludes what happens after filming stops and as such is always open to future reworkings.

colour. These exclusions on which the story of *WTYM* in part depends speak to wider practices of making racialised domestic workers invisible. Alessandra Soares Brandão and Ramayana Lira de Sousa (2023: 24) argue that denying the relationality between employers and housemaids that emerges after slavery in Brazil is akin to denying 'the relation between coloniality and modernity as well as the intersection of gender and sexuality that constitutes the colonial/modern gender system.' Nilda and all the domestic labourers who were excluded haunt the boundaries drawn by the film. In an agential realist account, every practice of materialisation, in which we must include documentary practice, is inevitably an ethical matter. I have attempted to mitigate for this by cutting in a way that, as Kember and Zylinska (2012: 82) put it: 'does not lose sight of the horizon of duration or foreclose on the creative possibility of life enabled by this horizon.'

Following is a summary of what was included in this research. It aims to condense the logic of this thesis and report how I developed my reasoning in the written work. My reasoning did not come about teleologically as might be inferred from this section; rather it provides the reader with a final overview of my research findings. It summarises how I have answered the three research questions outlined in the introduction: how does agential realism reconfigure notions of objectivity in documentary studies? What are the ethical implications of an agential realist documentary film practice? How can performative agencies enacted by film practices be queered through diffraction?

I began to address these questions by outlining the key notions of agential realism, diffraction and performativity. This included a brief exploration of how Barad's challenge to scientific objectivity based upon ontological representationalism is being

expanded to encompass the fields of Cultural Studies, film and documentary theory. I drew on agential realism to propose that documentary film is generative rather than representative, and an ethical matter in how it participates in defining the reality it generates. This established a framework for integrating the theoretical research with its practical application, *WTYM*.

To position myself within film studies and wider philosophical debates, I considered Barad's questioning of representational ontologies through Bazin's thinking on photographic objectivity. Discoveries in quantum physics and Bohr's complementarity illustrate how scientific measurements—such as the technical images and sounds of film—can never be separated from nature, a distinction taken for granted in the paradigm of representation. To further situate myself within contemporary philosophical debates, I articulated agential realism in relation to the so-called non-human or speculative turn. I argued that no ontology, scientific or philosophical, can hope to fully represent reality by stepping outside of the anthropocentric circle, as proposed by some speculative philosophers. Equally, the totalisation of reality from within it is as wildly improbable as Bazin's total cinema. Nonetheless, submitting that truth cannot be a singular totality does not erase the distinction between truth and falsehood. My answer to the second research question, how agential realism reconfigures documentary objectivity without relying on a paradigm of representation, begins from this assertion of plural truths based on rigorous evidence.

Barad theorises the existence of objectivity within experimental conditions without requiring the world to function according to immutable laws awaiting discovery by scientists and philosophers. A relational, agential approach to objectivity presents an opportunity for documentary film precisely because of the rigorous determinism Bazin

ascribes to photographic instruments. I posited that as a reality generator, filmmaking is an ideal method through which to articulate how agential realism functions. According to Barad, scientific objectivity becomes an ethical matter because it is partly discursive and exclusionary in drawing the boundaries it measures. Agential realism thus generates a framework through which to re-examine the ethical implications of documentary practices, thus addressing the second research question. Barad suggests a diffractive approach which takes account of its own entanglement and open-endedness, an affirmative procedure accounting for implicit exclusions and open to further reworkings. Chapter 1 concludes by defining diffraction as both a cinematic object and tool of investigation, materially implicit in filmmaking practices and identifiable in existing film theory. As a tool of investigation, a diffractive approach attempts to take responsibility for the implicit drawing of boundaries enacted by the filmic encounter by maintaining open-ended horizons. Before delving into the diffractive methodology of *WTYM*, it was necessary to show how the filmmaking apparatus can be understood as a performative, diffractive object of investigation.

I made an important distinction between my reading of Butler's performativity and its current taxonomical theorisation of certain documentary practices termed 'performative'. Taking a non-representational position requires a different approach, one I contend more closely aligns with Butler's intention. Reconsidering performativity in tandem with diffraction provides the tools to subvert or de-naturalise normative frameworks of self, other and documentaries themselves, developing an answer to the third research question: how performative agencies might be queered through diffractive practices. Barad's notion of the agential cut explains how objectivity can be understood in relation to performativity. For instance, errors recorded by the camera in

the first shoot at the tattoo parlour disrupted the performative automatism that I believed I had programmed the camera to record. These mistakes made evident what is often occluded by the rigorous determinism of the apparatus, such as the play between dissonant fluorescent lights and a camera's shutter speed. The rigorous determinism or accuracy of film provides a productive site to seek out the discursivities within scientific measurement. By producing a genealogy of film colour standards, I proposed a nuanced understanding of what it means to speak of accurate colour, and how this compares with the aesthetic meaning materialised by turning footage black-and-white. The deep imbrication of race and gender in the performative materialisation of film colour standards clearly emerge through the historical context from which they are developed. I expanded some of the potential material-discursivities of shifting between colour and black-and-white in *WTYM* by articulating specific meanings I intended in the context of the film, from simplifying complexity to enacting a filmic aura. This logic led me to briefly compare Benjamin's aura, Epstein's *photogénie* and Barthes' *punctum*, arguing that each concept highlights particular effects of difference through the unique diffractive aesthetics made possible by photography and film.

Chapter 3 includes the methodological context of my practice-led response to all three research questions. By filtering practice through theory—and vice-versa—I use this chapter to diffract *WTYM* with a variety of theoretical standpoints, thematising the practical challenges I faced in attempting to implement agential realism as film methodology. Using multiple examples, I illustrated how diffraction as a concept influenced the creative strategies I generated within the film practice. I grouped these strategies within an essayistic methodology applied to first-person documentaries that generate a sense of a diffracted self that is simultaneously coherent and fluidly open to

change. I thus redeployed the essay film as a diffractive method to generate open-ended work. By closely analysing the original shoot as a pensive editor and through a transitional period of essayistic trial and error, I established a practical strategy in approaching subsequent film shoots non-professionally. I suggested that amateurism can be a productive essayistic approach in filmmaking that potentially destabilises—queers—normative frameworks of standardised film practices and apparatuses. In *WTYM*, amateurish dubbing functions as an empathetic method of denaturalising synchronised sounds and images. I proposed further a/synchronous diffractions of images and sound, making use of visual effects and generative artificial intelligence tools to produce complex, fluid inter-subjectivities and inter-objectivities. The epistolary register employed in *WTYM* also generates a hauntological, diffractive, essayistic narrative technique drawn from a rich literary and filmic history. Each one of these practical strategies aimed to answer my third research question in varied ways; the possibilities for further experimentation are far from exhausted.

An agential realist approach assures that the answers provided in this text and in *WTYM* remain open to change, reworking and reiteration. Nonetheless, the enactment of a very personal story through a theoretical approach aimed to provide a unique contribution to practice-as-research as a methodology, combining pragmatism and sophisticated philosophical reasoning. I hope the distinctive patterns of interference generated might prove fruitful in furthering debates about documentaries, objectivity, and realism. Reality includes our ethical entanglement with the universe, in all its manifold, dynamic possibilities. Documentaries can inspire us to rethink the boundaries of reality that we take for granted, reconfiguring what counts as the world.

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Barnard, Clio, dir. 2010. *The Arbor* (UK)

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Eustache, Jean, dir. 1971. *Numéro Zéro* (France)

Flaherty, Frances H. and Robert J. Flaherty, dir. 1926 *Moana*: *A Romance of the Golden Age* (UK)

France, David, dir. 2020. *Welcome to Chechnya* (UK)

Godard, Jean-Luc, dir. 1965. *Alphaville: Une Étrange Aventure de Lemmy Caution*. (France)

Hatoum, Mona, dir. 1988. *Measures of Distance* (UK)

Lebow, Alisa and Cynthia Madansky, dir. 1988. *Treyf* (USA)

Livingston, Jennie, dir. 1990. *Paris Is Burning* (USA)

Marker, Chris, dir. 1958. *Letter From Siberia/Lettre de Sibérie* (France)

Mulvey, Laura and Peter Wollen, dir. 1977. *Riddles of the Sphinx* (UK)

Ozu, Yasujirô, dir. 1953. *Tokyo Story*/*Tôkyô Monogatari* (Japan)

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Salles, João Moreira, dir. 2017. *In the Intense Now/No Intenso Agora* (Brazil)

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Appendix i: Ethics Procedure Forms

ANNEX B

Research Ethics Committee

University of Reading

Project Submission Form – School of Arts & Communication Design

Note All sections of this form should be completed.
Please continue on separate sheets if necessary.

Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor:
Professor Lúcia Nagib
l.nagib@reading.ac.uk

Name/s of Student/s:
Andrew I. Philip
a.i.philip@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Department: *Film, Theatre and Television*

Title of Project: *Towards an agential realist cinema / We tattooed your mother*

Proposed starting date for project: February 2022 (some footage shot prior to PhD commencing)

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT
PLEASE NOTE: *You must include a completed FTT Brief Description of Project form as part of the Ethics Approval process. This should be submitted alongside this FTT Project Submission Form and a completed Information Sheet & Consent Form, as appropriate).*

A non-fiction audiovisual installation and/or film about my mother, her mother, and her grandmother, a transnational matrilineal genealogy that functions as a practical ground of experimentation based on my theoretical application of agential realism to cinematic realism.

DECLARATION

[please read the below statement carefully before submitting – it needs to be signed by both you and your supervisor]

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge I have made known all information relevant to the Research Ethics Committee and I undertake to inform the Committee of any such information which subsequently becomes available whether before or after the research has begun.

I understand that it is a legal requirement that both staff and students undergo Disclosure and Barring Service checks when in a position of trust (for example; when working with children or vulnerable adults)

I confirm that if this project is an interventional study, a list of names and contact details of the subjects in this project will be compiled and that this, together with a copy of the Consent Form, will be retained within the School for as long as necessary.

Version – June 2020

I confirm that I have given due consideration to equality and diversity in the management, design and conduct of the research project.

Signed:

..... Date: 12 January 2022
(Investigator/Supervisor)

Signed:

..... Date: 12 January, 2022
(Student/s)

THE NEXT SIGNAURE IS ADDED WHEN YOUR SUBMISSION IS APPROVED

(Shweta Ghosh - Department Ethics Officer) Date: 18th January, 2022

Version – June 2020

Checklist

The checklist below has been filled out for you. You should not make any changest to the checklist beyond this point without speaking with your supervisor. The information in your Brief Description of Project form and your Information Sheet & Consent Form must align with the below checklist. If it does not, please speak with your supervisor regarding any adaptations that need to be made.

1. This form is signed by my the Department Ethics Officer – THIS SIGNATURE IS ADDED ONCE YOUR SUBMISSION IS APPROVED and the tick box will be filled in to reflect this. ☐

2. The Consent form includes a statement to the effect that the application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct ☒

3. I have made, and explained within this application, arrangements for any confidential material generated by the research to be stored securely within the University and, where appropriate, subsequently disposed of securely. ☒

4. I have made arrangements for expenses to be paid to participants in the research, if any, OR, if not, I have explained why not. ☒

5. EITHER

   (a) The proposed research does not involve the taking of blood samples; ☒

   ~~OR~~

   ~~(b) For anyone whose proximity to the blood samples brings a risk of Hepatitis B, documentary evidence of protection prior to the risk of exposure will be retained by the Head of School or authorized Head of Department.~~ ☐

   ~~Signed:~~

   ~~…… Date……~~
   ~~(Head of School or~~
   ~~authorised Head of Department)~~

6. EITHER

   (a) The proposed research does not involve the storage of human tissue, as defined by the Human Tissue Act 2004; ☒

   ~~OR~~

   ~~(b) I have explained within the application how the requirements of the Human Tissue Act 2004 will be met.~~ ☐

7. EITHER

Version – June 2020

(a) The proposed research will not generate any information about the health of participants; ☒

~~OR~~

~~(b) In the circumstance that any test reveals an abnormal result, I will inform the participant and, with the participant's consent, also inform their GP, providing a copy of those results to each and identifying by name and date of birth;~~ ☐

OR

(c) I have explained within the application why (b) above is not appropriate. ☐

8. EITHER

(a) the proposed research does not involve children under the age of 5; ☒

~~OR~~

~~(b) My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University's insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.~~ ☐

~~Signed:~~

~~..... Date.....~~
~~(Head of School or~~
~~authorised Head of Department)~~

This completed form (**as electronic copy**) and further relevant information (see Sections 5 (b)-(e) of the Notes for Guidance) should be returned to the relevant Department Ethics Officer (Dr Shweta Ghosh: Film (shweta.ghosh@reading.ac.uk), or Prof Teresa Murjas: Theatre (t.s.murjas@reading.ac.uk).

If your project/dissertation is supervised by one of the Ethics Officers, your form will be reviewed by an Ethics Officer who is not your project supervisor.

You will be notified of the decision as quickly as possible, and **you should not proceed with the project until then.**

Version – June 2020

RELEASE AGREEMENT

Whereas, Libby Haslam (the "Producer") is engaged in a project, "Vovi's Tat" – working title – (the "Video"), and

Whereas, I, the undersigned, have agreed to appear in the Video, and

Whereas, I understand that my voice, name, and image will be recorded by various mechanical and electrical means of all descriptions (such recordings, any piece thereof, the contents therein and all reproductions thereof, along with the utilization of my name, shall be collectively referred to herein as the "Released Subject Matter"),

Therefore, in exchange for $1.00, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged and whose sufficiency as consideration I affirm, I hereby freely and without restraint consent to and give unto the Producer and its agents or assigns or anyone authorized by the Producer, (collectively referred to herein as the "Releasees") the unrestrained right in perpetuity to own, utilize, or alter the Released Subject Matter, in any manner the Releasees may see fit and for any purpose whatsoever, all of the foregoing to be without limitation of any kind. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, I hereby authorize the Releasees and grant unto them the unrestrained rights to utilize the Released Subject Matter in connection with the Video's advertising, publicity, public displays, and exhibitions. I hereby stipulate that the Released Subject Matter is the property of the Producer to do with as it will.

I hereby waive to the fullest extent that I may lawfully do so, any causes of action in law or equity I may have or may hereafter acquire against the Releasees or any of them for libel, slander, invasion of privacy, copyright or trademark violation, right of publicity, or false light arising out of or in connection with the utilization by the Releasees or another of the Released Subject Matter.

It is my intention that the above mentioned consideration represents the sole compensation that I am entitled to receive in connection with any and all usages of the Released Subject Matter. I expressly stipulate that the Releasees may utilize the Released Subject Matter or not as they choose in their sole discretion without affecting the validity of this Release. This Release shall be governed by Virginia law.

I hereby certify that I am over the age of ~~eighteen~~ and that I have read, understood, and agreed to the foregoing.

Sarah Dalbec 6/30/10

Print Name

Address:

City, State,

Phone No:

Department of Film, Theatre & Television
University of Reading

Information Sheet and Consent Form

Researchers

This interview is part of the **PhD practical** research of **Andrew Philip** who is studying in the Department of Film, Theatre & Television at the University of Reading. **Professor Lúcia Nagib** has supervised the project, which was devised by **Andrew Philip. Andrew Philip** will conduct the interview.

Aim

The purpose of this interview is to: learn about your childhood, your relationship to your mother, our relationship. To understand the meaning of your tattoos. To clarify some of the circumstances of Edith Neuss' adolescence and conversion to Catholicism, and the effect upon the relationship with her mother Helena (Hencza). Also to learn more about your view of Helena's personality.

Interviewer

The interview will be carried out by: Andrew Philip

Participants

You are invited to participate in this interview because: You knew Edith throughout her life. You will be asked about: Where the family lived, their arrival in Brazil, Helena's work and interests, her religion. Edith's schooling and personality, her conversion to Catholicism and any reactions by her mother. How their relationship developed over time.
You are invited to participate as a volunteer and there is no remuneration for taking part.

Arrangements

The interview will be carried out and documented in the following way: **an audio recording and perhaps a small, unobtrusive camera.**
The interviewer **Andrew Philp** may also take some notes.
If you would like to be sent a summary of your interview materials that will be included in the **We tattooed your mother,** please let **Andrew Philip** know.

Confidentiality

All interview data will be stored on the secure, password-protected storage space provided by the University.
Purely for University records, you must supply your name and address and sign the consent form below. This information will be stored securely by the Department of Film, Theatre & Television for five years.

Ethical review

This application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

Consent

Please use tick box after each statement to confirm it has been read and agreed to.

1. I have read and had explained to me by **Andrew Philip** the accompanying Information Sheet (above) relating to the project on: ***A non-fiction audiovisual installation and/or film about my mother, her mother, and her grandmother.*** ☑
2. I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions I have had have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation. ☑
3. I have had explained to me what information will be collected about me, what it will be used for, who it may be shared with, how it will be kept safe, and my rights in relation to my data. ☑
4. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, and that this will be without detriment. ☑
5. I understand how the data collected from me in this study will be preserved, subject to safeguards and made available in the dissertation/practical project and any related publications/outputs. ☑
6. I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet. ☑

Name: REGINA PHILIP

Signed:

Date: 30/May/2022

For contact details about this research see page 1 above, or email:
Andrew Philip
a.i.philip@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Professor Lúcia Nagib
l.nagib@reading.ac.uk

Department of Film, Theatre & Television
University of Reading

Documentary Release Form

Name and Address of Company/Filmmaker:

Name and address of Contributor:

Date: 30/May/2022

The Name of the Documentary (working title)
We tattooed your mother

I agree to the inclusion of my contribution in this documentary, the nature of which has been explained to me. I understand that my contribution will be edited and there is no guarantee that my contribution will appear in the final film. I agree that my contribution may be used to publicise the documentary.

I understand that this documentary (or part of it) may be distributed in any medium in any part of the world including the Internet.

My contribution has, to the best of my knowledge, been truthful and honest. I have not deliberately sought to conceal any relevant facts from the makers of this film.

Signed

Print name of contributor

Documentary Release Form

Name and Address of Company/Filmmaker:
Andrew I. Philip

Name and address of Contributor (Nome e endereço da contribuinte):

Date: 5 April 2022

The Name of the **Documentary (working title)**
We Tattooed Your Mother

I agree to the inclusion of my contribution in this **documentary**, the nature of which has been explained to me. I understand that my contribution will be edited and there is no guarantee that my contribution will appear in the final film. I agree that my contribution may be used to publicise the **documentary**.

I understand that this **documentary** (or part of it) may be distributed in any medium in any part of the world including the Internet.

My contribution has, to the best of my knowledge, been truthful and honest. I have not deliberately sought to conceal any relevant facts from the makers of this film.

Concordo com a inclusão da minha contribuição neste documentário, cuja natureza me foi explicada. Entendo que minha contribuição será editada e não há garantia de que minha contribuição aparecerá no filme final. Concordo que minha contribuição possa ser usada para divulgar o documentário.

Entendo que este documentário (ou parte dele) pode ser distribuído em qualquer meio em qualquer parte do mundo, incluindo a Internet.

Até onde sei, minha contribuição tem sido verdadeira e honesta. Não procurei deliberadamente ocultar quaisquer fatos relevantes dos criadores deste filme.

Signed / Assinado

Print name of contributor

Documentary Release Form

Name and Address of Company/Filmmaker:
Andrew I. Philip

Name and address of Contributor (Nome e endereço da contribuinte):

Date: 5 April 2022

The Name of the **Documentary (working title)**
We Tattooed Your Mother

I agree to the inclusion of my contribution in this **documentary**, the nature of which has been explained to me. I understand that my contribution will be edited and there is no guarantee that my contribution will appear in the final film. I agree that my contribution may be used to publicise the **documentary**.

I understand that this **documentary** (or part of it) may be distributed in any medium in any part of the world including the Internet.

My contribution has, to the best of my knowledge, been truthful and honest. I have not deliberately sought to conceal any relevant facts from the makers of this film.

Concordo com a inclusão da minha contribuição neste documentário, cuja natureza me foi explicada. Entendo que minha contribuição será editada e não há garantia de que minha contribuição aparecerá no filme final. Concordo que minha contribuição possa ser usada para divulgar o documentário.

Entendo que este documentário (ou parte dele) pode ser distribuído em qualquer meio em qualquer parte do mundo, incluindo a Internet.

Até onde sei, minha contribuição tem sido verdadeira e honesta. Não procurei deliberadamente ocultar quaisquer fatos relevantes dos criadores deste filme.

Department of Film, Theatre & Television
University of Reading

Documentary Release Form

Name and Address of Company/Filmmaker:
Andrew I. Philip

Name and address of Contributor:

Date: 6 June 2024

The Name of the Documentary (working title)
We tattooed your mother

I agree to the inclusion of my contribution in this non-fiction art installation and/or documentary film, the nature of which has been explained to me. I understand that my contribution will be edited and there is no guarantee that my contribution will appear in the final film. I agree that my contribution may be used to publicise the installation / documentary.

I understand that this installation / documentary (or part of it) may be distributed in any medium in any part of the world including the Internet.

My contribution has, to the best of my knowledge, been truthful and honest. I have not deliberately sought to conceal any relevant facts from the makers of this film.

Signed

Print name of contributor

07/06/2024

Department of Film, Theatre & Television
University of Reading

Documentary Release Form

Name and Address of Company/Filmmaker:
Andrew I. Philip

Name and address of Contributor:

Date: 6 June 2024

The Name of the Documentary (working title)
We tattooed your mother

I agree to the inclusion of my contribution in this non-fiction art installation and/or documentary film, the nature of which has been explained to me. I understand that my contribution will be edited and there is no guarantee that my contribution will appear in the final film. I agree that my contribution may be used to publicise the installation / documentary.

I understand that this installation / documentary (or part of it) may be distributed in any medium in any part of the world including the Internet.

My contribution has, to the best of my knowledge, been truthful and honest. I have not deliberately sought to conceal any relevant facts from the makers of this film.

Signed

Print name of contributor

07/06/2024

Department of Film, Theatre & Television
University of Reading

Documentary Release Form

Name and Address of Company/Filmmaker:
Andrew I. Philip

Name and address of Guardian:

Date: 6 June 2024

The Name of the Documentary (working title)
We tattooed your mother

I agree to the inclusion of my children, **Finn Philip Chambers and Sofia Philip Chambers**, in this non-fiction art installation and/or documentary film, the nature of which has been explained to me. I understand that their contribution will be edited and there is no guarantee that their contribution will appear in the final film. I agree that their contribution may be used to publicise the installation / documentary.

I understand that this installation / documentary (or part of it) may be distributed in any medium in any part of the world including the Internet.

The contribution of my children has, to the best of my knowledge, been truthful and honest. My children have not deliberately sought to conceal any relevant facts from the makers of this film.

Signed

Print name of Guardian

Appendix ii: Diffractive phases of *We Tattooed Your Mother*