



A Shared Pain: archival footage and history as immanent cause

By Benedict Stork

In *In the Year of the Pig* (de Antonio, 1968) begins with a shot of a war monument. Before even the film's title, the black and white image of a statue memorializing a fallen Union soldier at Gettysburg occupies the entirety of the right half of the screen, the stone figure gazing right to left at a black void the title will soon occupy. The film's second (photographic) image, taking up the entire frame, is of another memorial, this one an inscription on the Union Square Monument to Lafayette reading, "As soon as I heard of American independence my heart was enlisted." These images, the first of the film, announce *In the Year of the Pig's* embrace of history, which is at the center of its attempt to intervene in the then ongoing war in Vietnam. Based on this initial description one might think the film is a work of memorialization but here history operates in an ironic mode, playing with the ossification of particular historical moments and figures within specific national contexts.¹ Exceeding the conception of history as either the plain record of the past or an unambiguous teleology of progress, the film foregrounds the complexity of historical time and the importance of history through its ambivalent presentation of these martial memorials. These memorials are positioned to begin denaturalizing the simplistic heroism of American nationalist history through analogy with the Vietnamese anti-colonial struggle.

Given the intertwining of documentary with history through their shared investment in nonfiction and the ex post facto nature of the form, it is important to articulate accounts and conceptions of history that exceed more conventional deployments of the term in documentary studies. A film as overtly, and yet subtly, concerned with history as *In the Year of the Pig* is a particularly apt site for this insofar as its use of images, particularly archival and other previously existing images, evinces, on one hand, an exceptionally rigorous commitment to the historiographic underpinnings of documentary, while on the

¹ For a compelling reading of *In the Year of the Pig's* relation to monumentalism, see Barbara Correll "Rem(a)inders of G(l)ory: Monuments and Bodies in *Glory* and *In the Year of the Pig*" (1991).

other deploying material that points to a different and more expansive understanding of the relations between past and present, stasis and change, cause and effect that constitute history and its presence in documentary. Often in documentary scholarship, though, history functions as a cipher for documentary realism through a particularly narrow relation to the past. As a name for the “real” within documentary, history at once stands in for, but is less tainted by, the thorny problematic of “objectivity” and truth in the representation of reality.

Certainly documentary’s engagement with history—imprecisely yet narrowly defined—remains a key reference for documentary scholarship above almost all other disciplinary affinities. In a germinal statement on documentary’s generic identity, Bill Nichols famously coined the phrase “discourses of sobriety” as an aspirational logic to articulate and differentiate documentary’s epistemological pretensions. Though ultimately documentary’s “kinship” with “[S]cience, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare...” is superficial and doomed, sullied by the moving images that make up its material, history, on the other hand, becomes a touchstone for documentary’s distinction from fiction film (Nichols 5). Yet, it is unclear—beyond another name for the real—what exactly “history” means when summoned in relation to the study of documentary, such as when Nichols substitutes the term “historical world” for the “real world,” or what documentary contributes to our understanding and conception of history.

In what follows, the point is not to offer a corrective to other uses of “history” in relation to documentary but to articulate the ways documentary makes legible a particular notion of history that, exemplified by archival footage in *In the Year of the Pig*, differs from how history is generally understood in both documentary and documentary scholarship. The conception of history that I argue documentary renders visible emerges from the distinction between Bill Nichols’s framing of history as death and its intertextual reference to Fredric Jameson’s characterization of history as pain. While de Antonio’s 1968 anti-Vietnam War film represents documentary’s overt concern for history as an explanatory mode based on the sequence of “real” events, its heavy reliance on pre-existing images is analogous with the historiographic citing of source documents, which

introduce material not reducible to the chain of transitive cause. The conception of history produced in the friction between history as death and history as pain conceives of history as an immanent cause, a folding of cause into effect inscribed on the surface of the image, exceeding, as in specific moments of *In the Year of the Pig*, without undercutting, overt historical arguments. At stake in this identification of history with immanent cause is history's legibility as a common name for the binding force and temporality of the social, which documentary makes uniquely visible.

“History kills”

Shortly after the shots of monuments that this essay (like the film) begins with, *In the Year of the Pig* presents the spectator with a series of archival images of French colonial Vietnam. As we hear Franz Von Suppe's "The Light Cavalry Overture," stitched together from audio fragments of multiple recordings, we see uniformed colonial soldiers marching toward the camera intercut with Vietnamese rickshaw drivers delivering Frenchmen to a café and collecting their fares. The final shots of the sequence present a lone rickshaw man lingering at the café demanding further compensation for his labor, before finally cutting back to the end of the military procession, where colonial officers are carried past the camera by still other foot taxis. No additional information is given and no necessary relationship—temporal, spatial, or otherwise—is established between the different sets of images beyond the mimetic similarity of the footage (black and white, grainy) and its display of colonial labor. That these images are both of the same time and geography is only implied. Though of the past, at least on their surface, the evidentiary value of these images is limited: at best they verify what needs no verification, merely typifying a past state of affairs. This scene operates as an establishing sequence that puts the historical dynamic driving the film in place: the Vietnamese confronting foreign occupiers and resisting the continued exploitation and oppression of Vietnam.

Even more than the opening shots of monuments, these images begin the film's historiographic trajectory tracking the Vietnamese struggle from its anti-colonial to anti-

neocolonial stages. This series of shots, which de Antonio retrieved from a French Army film archive, show relations of exploitation in French Indo-China of the 1930s, suturing the U.S. war in Vietnam into the narrative of anti-colonial antagonism (Crowdus and Gerogakas 95). In fact, de Antonio explicitly understands this footage as establishing the colonial past that conditions the film's present:

They arrive in front of a café where there is a tall Moroccan with a fez—the scene encapsulates the whole French colonial empire—and when the Vietnamese put their hands out for payment, the Moroccan sends them away like trash. To me, that said everything you could say about colonialism without ever saying a word. If anything shows the primacy of the image over the word, what the image can reveal, it's the image of those rickshaws. It's the equivalent of a couple of chapters of dense writing about the meaning of colonialism. (Quoted in Crowdus and Gerogakas 96)

Once in place, the film immediately launches into an elaboration of this history in order to introduce Ho Chi Minh as, in the words of Republican senator and Nixon campaign chair Thurston B Morton, the “George Washington” of Vietnam. While, as Douglas Kellner and Dan Strieble write, “[d]e Antonio's treatment [of Ho] was unabashedly romantic,” it is also a structuring presence in the film (36). From the images of urban colonial exploitation the film transitions—by way of Philippe Devillers commenting on the necessity of armed revolution—to Professor Paul Mus explaining Ho Chi Minh's deep connection to the land as the lifeblood of the Vietnamese peasantry; Mus's words are overlaid on top of and intercut with images of the Vietnamese countryside. In this way the film situates Ho at the center of its historical narrative, at once verifying his place as virtuosic revolutionary leader, the vanguard of the peasantry, and metonymic representation of Vietnam, while also installing its own historical argument.

Apropos of the logic of these opening scenes from *In the Year of the Pig*, Philip Rosen offers this useful terminological and conceptual parsing of historical epistemology: “By historiography, I mean the text written by the historian.... [B]y history, I mean the object of the text, the ‘real’ pastness it seeks to construct or recount in and for the present,” and, “[B]y historicity, I mean the particular interrelations of the mode of historiography and the types of construction of history related to it” (XI). This tripartite conceptual schema binds historiography and historicity together as constitutive aspects of history, much as Saussure understood the sign as the combined instantiation of signifier and

signified. Regarding the scenes described above, the formal ordering of the archival images and their combination with interview commentary is a historiographic act, while the exposure of colonial exploitation signals its historicity, and the archival status of the moving image artifacts embody “‘real’ pastness.” In many ways it is, as I’ve already suggested, this last aspect of the triad that dominates the invocation of history in documentary discourse, where the “real”—i.e. materially existing—images are the nexus for the controversy surrounding the truth of documentary claims. To some extent, the invocation of history, an already dense and institutionally secure discourse, provides refuge for documentary scholars engaged in the critique of naïve realism and ideology while preserving the unique status of documentary films.

Indeed this is the impetus behind Bill Nichols’s famous turn to history to differentiate the world of documentary from both the “discourses of sobriety” and fiction film.

“Documentary offers access to a shared historical construct,” Nichols writes:

Instead of a world, we are offered access to *the* world. The world is where, at the extreme, issues of life and death are always at hand. History kills. Though our entry to the world is through a series of webs of signification....
[...] *Material practices occur that are not entirely or totally discursive, even if their meanings and social values are.* (109, emphasis in original)²

History is a construction yet it is a construction with deadly consequences; it is part of a “web of signification” but still the hard rocks on which our mortal bodies crash. Could this discourse be any more sober?

In positing history here as the realm of death, a singular, if entirely predictable and inevitably repeated, event in “the world,” the concept is attached to the empirical occurrence of acts and phenomena that can be confirmed or denied, verified or invalidated; is Elvis dead or alive? On the other hand, of course, the world of life and death is also a “shared historical construct,” an accepted fiction, that we all contribute to by giving meanings to death and other grave matters. As Nichols foregrounds, this is the crux of summoning history as a stable ground in place of simple “reality.” The history

² There are certainly many other (both more recent and earlier) references to history in studies of documentary but Nichols’s remarkable text is both paradigmatic and canonical, in many ways establishing the centrality of the concept of history for documentary.

that kills is invariable and inaccessible, perhaps even transcendent, and in itself definitively ahistorical, but history that constructs “meanings and social values” changes. Put differently, history is both what decisively happened and where the never conclusive answers to why and how are produced.

This tension at the heart of Nichols’s “historical world” is part and parcel of the concept itself, as Rosen’s definitions also suggest. When connected to documentary, with its reliance on indexical images, social actors, and cinematic conventions, the ambivalent relationship between the specific event (captured on film or video) and the larger framework of meanings and causal claims becomes especially acute. “History kills” but how and why specifically? We can be sure that the rickshaw drivers, their fares, and the French colonial soldiers re-presented in *In the Year of the Pig* are, or will be, dead but is history the cause simply because of the movement of time? Or, on the other hand, does history kill insofar as it is the march of dominant, oppressive regimes, like the French *gendarmes* and bourgeoisie subjugating these Vietnamese workers? The mortal threat posed by history is not, and cannot be, directly figured in these images since, as is now a thoroughly beaten dead horse, photographic indexicality’s “evidentiary status as real... can guarantee nothing” (Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* 9). Still the documentary image’s status as “real,” especially when associated with the prior existence of archival footage, is bound, via Nichols’s formulation, to the brute fact of death as the ground of history and its “reality.” Unavoidable, yet also unrepresentable, the historical “world is where not only information circulates but also matter and energy:”

Whatever else we may say about the constructed, mediated, semiotic nature of the world in which we live, we must also say that it exceeds representations. This is a brute reality; objects collide, actions occur, forces take their toll. The world, as the domain of the *historically real*, is neither text nor narrative. [...] Documentary directs us toward the world of brute reality even as it also seeks to interpret it.... (Nichols 110, emphasis added)

Thus, the history that kills is positioned as at once documentary’s ground and horizon, leaving reflexive acknowledgment of this paradoxical limit the only recourse for maintaining the privilege of nonfiction against the fantasies of fiction.

Faced with this representational bind, in which history is the privileged but ultimately unreachable object of documentary, the reflexive gesture,³ a staple in Nichols's "performative," "poetic," and "reflexive" modes, at its best, points to this limit in order to situate documentary on this-side of epistemological and ethical problematics. Reflexivity may in fact emblemize the historicity (per Rosen) of much recent documentary work, though not *In the Year of the Pig*, as well as the evaluative dominance of certain film styles. Reflexivity foregrounds the work of the filmmaker in order to disrupt the authoritative rhetoric of conventional, expository documentary, while subjectivity—the now good other of objectivity—emerges as the focal point for approaching the historical world. Michael Renov, writing early in the trajectory of this discourse and as a prominent proponent of reflexivity in documentary, claims, "The works in question [autobiographic film and video] thus undertake a double and mutually defining inscription—of history and the self—that refuses the categorical and the totalizing" (Renov, *Subject Of Documentary* 110). In a move exemplary of the discourse of reflexivity, Renov posits history and the self, here bound together by m-dashes, as constitutive of one another insofar as each, in the wake of critiques of Cartesian subjectivity and master narratives, refuses reduction to a stable and certain form of hegemonic knowledge.

History is an effect of the subject as the subject is an effect of history; thus, to understand history one must traverse the winding path of fragmentary subjectivity and its irreducibility to given categories (even as these categories are deployed as authorizing marks of otherness). As such, history becomes *histories* where the effects of temporal change and formation are felt in the bodies of individual subjects, often in the act of interrogating the construction of their collective belonging within an identity group. Thus the reflexive gesture, whatever its intention, stands for and signals the impossibility of knowing the subjects at the (slipping) center of history and stakes its ethical and political claims on the disruptive act of asserting these lacunae against hegemonic totalizations. While the danger of slipping into a relativistic infinite regress is

³ For examples of commentary on this turn to reflexivity see Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning," (Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, 58-59); Linda Williams, "Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and *The Thin Blue Line*," (Sloniowski and Grant 379-396); and Michael Renov, "Surveying the Self," (Renov, *Subject Of Documentary*, xi-xxiv).

much remarked in critiques of postmodern (and modernist) reflexivity,⁴ perhaps more important with regard to the concept of history is the emphasis on individuation that accompanies the fragmenting of subjectivity. While reflexive gestures undermine the hegemonic reduction of historical experience to the unified march of a particularly hegemonic Western vision of a unified past, the emphasis on singular subjects risks cutting these subjects off from history as common, social field.

Following from this emphasis on reflexive subjectivity, history within documentary increasingly intertwines with memory as an engagement with the past. Brushing against the grain of progressive historicist narratives, memories of past suffering (though occasional pleasures too) are leveraged against a linear history of triumphant and established events.⁵ Historical change is then a matter of bearing witness to the ravages of the past and expanding the framework of experience to reveal the lives and deaths on the constitutive outside of dominant culture and its ready-made accounts of the past. Subjectivity, memory, and trauma are fitting watchwords for the history that kills precisely because they offer insight into the felt injustices produced by Nichols's "shared [hegemonic] historical construct" on the bodies of particular individuals and communities (109). This important and admirable work on the part of filmmakers and scholars produces a notion of history that is polyvalent and indeterminate, lived and felt, individual and communal. Yet, in doing so, there is little, beyond generalized notions of pain and death, injustice and complicity, self and other, that links these diverse histories together. What remains unaddressed here is an underpinning structure holding together the forms of injustice and the memories of traumatic experiences as part of a common social body.

⁴ See, for example, Noel Carroll's "Nonfiction Film and Postmodernist Skepticism" in *Post-Theory* (Bordwell and Carroll 283-306).

⁵ For a recent example of an argument that relies on the distinction between memory and "historical temporality," see Ernst Van Alphen, "Toward a New Historiography: The Aesthetics of Temporality" (Nichols and Renov 59-74).

“History is what hurts”

It is difficult to place the images of rickshaw drivers that open *In the Year of the Pig's* historical argument within this regime of reflexivity constructed through the history that kills. Though de Antonio's film is decidedly leftist and, at certain points, embraces a certain version of Marxist historical materialism, for the most part it excludes the voices of Vietnamese subjects, such as those pictured in these archival images. From this perspective it is ethically suspect insofar as the anti-colonial/neocolonial case is made through, but not by, the represented bodies of colonized subjects. This is precisely *not* an account of history as fragmentary subjective experience, though it is certainly a treatment that connects history to death. But death here, which is certainly a signifier of the real throughout the film, seems to find a compliment in the sense of revolution as historical necessity. Much as the film dwells on the injustices of US intervention and attempts to bring to its American spectators a sense of the historical stakes of this country's neocolonial misadventures, *In the Year of the Pig* also presents the inevitability of this clash and the march toward independence represented by Ho Chi Minh through its cataloguing of Vietnamese victories juxtaposed with Western betrayals; the analogizing of the Vietnamese independence struggle with the American revolution only enhances this effect by associating the ongoing war with the *fait accompli* of that historical event. In this way the film begins from the totalizing perspective—the great battle between the imperial hegemon and the revolutionary figure, i.e. the confrontation between world historical figures—of a more-or-less unified and stable vision of history. From this perspective, then, the film is perhaps closer to Fredric Jameson's sense of history, which Nichols obliquely summons with “History kills,” without quite aligning with it.

Though it is far from the origin of the conceptualization of history described in the previous section, Nichols's pithy phrase, “history kills,” resonates with this emphasis on the unrepresentability of historical experience but does so, somewhat ironically (as we will see), through an indirect reference to Jameson's conceptualization of history and representational forms. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson claims “History is what hurts” based on a working through of this statement: “history is *not* a text, not a

narrative, master or otherwise, but [...] as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and [that] our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (Jameson 35, emphasis in original). History is here defined negatively as that which is irreducible to the texts (historiography) that represent the past, even if these remain our only access point to history. But for Jameson the issue, as compared to our film and documentary scholars, is not “‘real’ pastness” or the actuality of life and death so much as the past’s conditioning of the present through the diachronic structuring of a synchronic social totality, rather than the linear unfolding of events: in short, the mode of production. In the passage where the phrase “History is what hurts” appears, Jameson’s discussion of history culminates with this affirmative definition:

History is therefore the experience of Necessity, and it is this alone that can forestall its thematization or reification as a mere object of representation or as one master code among many others. [...] Conceived in this sense, History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual and collective praxis.... But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force. (Jameson 102)

While death is certainly a necessity and a limit, Jameson’s equation of history with necessity and limit is quite different from individual mortality insofar as history’s determinations of “individual and collective practice” are the products of contingency, placing history as much in the present as the past. Jameson conceptualizes history as an absent cause, following Althusser, legible only in its necessary effects in the present. As such, history’s relation to time’s irreversible diachronic flow (necessity) is bound to a synchronic structure irreducible to any individual event, institution, or figure (nation, historical actor, etc.). The synchronic register (for Jameson the terrain of “periods”) changes glacially over the *longue durée* and its accompanying effects are felt across the entire social field yet maintain an affective sense of stability. This synchronic dimension of the historical is constituted by the agglomeration and concatenation of events and forces at once holding a period together and driving it to change. History for Jameson and Althusser is an absent cause because its determining effects belong to the entire historical conjuncture—the period, and its relations—rather than direct and transitive causes. History is everywhere and nowhere, at once; there are too many

historical actors and events to pinpoint a single cause for the maintenance of stasis or the movement of change.

“History is what hurts” shares with “History kills” the conviction that history, beyond the irreversibility of time, limits human agency and escapes stable representation. But the pain of history is not the crushing certainty of death so much as the fact of being subject to forces that cannot be *directly* identified or affected. If history is a killer then attention to the past entails tracing back the essential points leading to the moment of death. But if history is the chronic pain of ongoing changes in the body, rife with antagonism between forces seeking to maintain and grow the (social) body’s power and duration, and entropic forces pushing toward its dissolution and replacement by other bodies, then the task of reckoning with the past must move beyond debating particular historical events as reified causes for present conditions. Similarly, the stakes of history cannot be reduced to only tracking the *fait accompli* of tragic deaths (or, for that matter, successful revolutions), revealing (and preserving) memories of oppression, and bearing witness to trauma (as is the tendency in much recent work on documentary). Thus, the little series of archival images of foot taxis from *In the Year of the Pig* is not only a document of two opposed and uneven forces, one dominating the other; it is also a product, an effect, of the complex relations of colonial capitalism, not to mention technological mediation, that are inseparable from the images themselves. Indeed, it is the social totality that Jameson seeks to “apprehend” with history as “absent cause.”

Despite his adroit foregrounding of the complexity entailed in the pain of history, Jameson insists on a single treatment, and cause, for this pain: the Marxist dialectic of class struggle responding to the contradictions inherent in capitalism. On this level history is, as Jameson prefers to render it, History, the field on which the relations of production and classes unfolds in a series of ongoing negations. In response to the overdeterminations of history that Althusser identified with the absent cause, Jameson falls back on “the Marxian injunction of the ‘ultimate determining instance’ of economic organization and tendencies” to articulate and, to some extent, homogenize history as absent cause and name for social totality (Jameson 92). On this front, the history that

exceeds, yet requires, textualization is “ultimately” determined by and reducible to the economic relations that guide the suffering it metes out and the economic base remains a stable articulation of cause and effect regardless of the myriad relations within a given historical conjuncture. In many ways this resonates with *In the Year of the Pig’s* presentation of Vietnamese resistance as it tracks the unfolding revolutionary activity through the figure of Ho Chi Minh and the machinations of imperialist forces, even as Jameson’s conception of history as absent cause expands the field of this struggle to the entire mode of production. The problem with this approach is not the focus on capitalism and the mode of production as the common force articulating history—just as there is nothing necessarily wrong with de Antonio’s historicizing argument focused on Ho as catalytic, anti-colonial figure—but the coherence it grants this force, nearly exempting capitalism from the becoming necessary that is historical contingency. In this sense capitalism becomes an all too present cause.

For this reason it is better to hew closer to the Spinozist terminology of “immanent cause” rather than “absent cause.” Where absence maintains the structure of representation in which historical effects continue to point back to a transcendent point determining events, immanent causality maintains cause and effect as two sides of the same coin; effect and cause are not identical but simultaneous with one another, moving between the two aspects depending on the various relations of force, desire, etc. at work at a given moment. Thus, approaching history as immanent cause is not a matter of identifying the trace of a hidden or missing cause in the past but of recognizing cause itself as it is manifest in a specific effect. History is not, then, the pursuit of an absent past or structure that holds the key to social change and stasis, much less a catalogue of essential personae and recognizable events; instead, history is itself the expression of the painful necessity of over-determination and the coincidence of past, present, and future made differentially evident in particular assemblages of contingent events and forces. History as immanent cause presupposes that human social relations, shaped as they are by fickle discourse and signifying systems, etc., remain part of the same reality as that which exceeds discourse. As such, history does not require any bridge between the social and physical world, nor the unification of material social life in

the name of the determining economic instance, because it presupposes their immanent indiscernibility.

The question posed by history, understood as either absent or immanent cause, is: how does history become legible to those ensconced within it and what are the effects of this legibility? Jameson's answer in *The Political Unconscious*, which is largely consistent with his work in the three decades since, is to privilege narrative's formal capacity to apprehend, or fail to apprehend history (as is the case with postmodern culture, where this failure itself becomes an historical symptom) because narratives display a particular temporal, explanatory logic at the level of form. Hayden White, an essential voice in debates regarding history's relationship to narrative and, thus, an important touchstone in documentary studies' mobilization of history, summarizes narrative's appeal for Jameson:

[Narrative] is privileged because it permits a representation of both synchrony and diachrony, of structural continuities and of the processes by which those continuities are dissolved and reconstituted in the kind of meaning production.... [...] Moreover, in its purely formal properties, the dialectical movement by which a unity of plot is imposed upon the superficial chaos of story elements, narrative serves as a paradigm of the kind of social movement by which a unity of meaning can be imposed upon the chaos of history. (White 157)

As such, where history as death turns documentary toward reflexively engaging a fragmentary and ultimately unrepresentable real, Jameson's emphasis on the "socially symbolic" act of narrative attempts to grapple with history as a pain shared across the social totality, a pain that produces the social itself. This is an essential difference that suggests an alternative sense of documentary's relation to history. On the other hand, Jameson's embrace of narrative, flowing out of the concept of absent causality, focuses on producing a stable, and re-stabilizing, figuration of the mode of production, even at points of overt transition,⁶ thus retaining the logic of representation insofar as the determining structure continues to consolidate cause as separate, and primary, over its effects. This investment in narrative and periodization as a stabilizing theoretical gesture

⁶ Jameson focuses on texts, like the realist novels of the nineteenth century, which emerge at points of historical change in the mode of production and naturalize or denaturalize this transition for the historical present.

makes the legibility of history dependent on Jameson's particular Marxist hermeneutics as a master code for historical necessity. For a number of reasons this yoking of history to narrative misses the important ways documentary, to use Jameson's phrase, "apprehends history" as social totality, at least potentially. This is certainly not because documentary is, as such, non- or anti-narrative, much less because of the claim to non-fiction. In fact, as we will see shortly, documentary utilizes its own textual tactics "by which a unity of meaning can be imposed upon the chaos of history," thus distinctly resembling the "socially symbolic" work of narrative (White 157).

Instead, the ethos of documentary realism, especially as expressed in and through documentary's use of archival and found images⁷, while no guarantee of direct access to history, grants a privileged, if subtle and unconscious, visibility to history as immanent cause. The compulsion to incorporate the world supposedly beyond mere "discourse" and outside "webs of signification," drives documentary to draw on fragments, documents, of events whose value lies precisely in their explicit differentiation from both previous intended use and narrative or rhetorical ordering. Much as any given text may attempt to leverage these materials for the film's argument the weight of non-fiction leans toward foregrounding the limited autonomy of material evidence. This is a central paradox for documentary: the fragments, generally indexical images, that authorize the interpretive, epistemological, and argumentative claims of a film rarely verify, at least unambiguously, these claims. This material—singular and always partial—seems to foreclose the possibility of founding a relationship between documentary and history on immanent cause since the pieces of evidence films deploy to make their cases cannot

⁷ The distinction between archival and found footage is a thorny and lively—as well as, I suspect, intractable—topic of debate in both film studies and art history. Though this essay focuses on archival footage, the conceptualization of their use in documentary vis-à-vis history would, I believe, apply to more properly "found" images. That said, it is worth noting that the porous relation between the two seems to turn, to some extent, on the site of storage—if it is catalogued, it can't be "found"—and the act of acquisition—in which the surprise encounter between filmmaker and image in an undefined search is privileged over images "discovered" through intensive, directed research. As such, the moniker "found footage" seems more readily applied to images used in experimental cinema. See William C. Wees's *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Film* for a germinal account of "found footage" (1993). For a more recent engagement with the question of archival and found footage, see Jaimie Baron's *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (2014).

in themselves encapsulate history; there can be no snapshot of the conjuncture. Yet this is not, as we will see, how history as immanent cause becomes visible in documentary.

“There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism”

The sequence of archival images I have been working through is singularly descriptive rather than analytic. Impressionistic and unabashedly aesthetic, this sequence connects military and economic domination through modernist collage,⁸ while the footage itself, especially compared to iconic images of, for instance, self-immolating monks (which the film also deploys), appears mundane, perhaps even banal and its evidentiary status limited. Yet these images of quotidian imperialism exemplify a rhetorical commonplace in historiography and other historically inclined texts: the anecdotal opening. The anecdote, vis-à-vis “real ‘pastness,’” is ambivalently placed between the sober, evidentiary pole of historical fact and the aesthetic, discursive pole of construction, “mere” rhetoric, and, more generally, “signification.”

According to Joel Fineman:

[T]he anecdote determines the destiny of a specifically historiographic integration of event and context. [...] It reminds us, on the one hand, that the anecdote has something literary [aesthetic] about it.... On the other hand, it reminds us that there is something about the anecdote that exceeds its literary status, and this excess is precisely that which gives the anecdote its pointed, referential access to the real. (Fineman 56)

Bearing the burden often assigned to the presumed indexicality of the image within documentary, the anecdote operates as “the smallest minimal unit of the historiographic fact” (Fineman 57). Like the fragmentary *mise-en-scène* of the colonial past exhibited in these archival images, the anecdote “produces the effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency, by establishing an event as an event within and yet without the framing context of historical successivity...” (Fineman 61). The anecdote asserts its relative autonomy by gesturing outside the text via the grain of its formal construction (for

⁸ This technique is intensified and reiterated on the audio track, which combines various recordings of “The Light Cavalry Overture,” differentiated by abrupt shifts in cadence and tone, into an openly fractured whole.

instance, the inclusion of more detailed descriptive elements, an affected journalistic tone, or purely narrative structure). The anecdote touches the real insofar as it opens onto historical analysis without itself constituting an explicit interpretation, instead functioning as the grain of sand around which the pearl of interpretation forms. The power of the anecdote is not connected to the importance of the represented event; to the contrary, it derives its effects from an excess in the real that escapes sober empiricism: the collective and contingent social complexity that conditions history but is only registered in the extra-evidentiary aesthetic of the anecdote. This aspect of the anecdote is especially relevant to documentary and its use of indexical images, particularly appropriated archival footage,⁹ where the relative impassivity of image capture ensures that a certain aleatory element remains in play regardless of the narrative or interpretive framework it begets. A surplus of details proclaims the image's belonging to the real, at once bearing the specificity of unfolding time while being indeterminately generalizable and expressive.

At the same time, documentary uses of archival footage, as in this example from *In the Year of the Pig*, also resemble another central aspect of written history: the source document. Documents, whether images or sheets of paper from an archive, offer a material contact with events lost to the flow of time. Like the anecdote the essential characteristic of documents is the fact that they enter the historical text from the outside but with the added charge of being, as R.G. Collingwood puts it, "something here and now perceptible" (Collingwood 247). Beyond even the anecdote's attempt to index an external referent, source documents, in one way or the other, have a continuous relationship to the "real past," drawing on the authenticating authority of their relatively autonomous material persistence through time, bridging the gap between the now

⁹ Etymologically the Greek root of anecdote, *anekdota*, referred to unpublished accounts, written but never circulated. In this sense there is an intimate connection between the anecdote and archival, found, or otherwise appropriated footage, as the redeployment of these images is, if nothing else, a *republishing*. Whether they were previously exhibited or not, the archival scenes from *In the Year of the Pig* mark the entrance of these inscriptions into the world beyond the French colonial archive.

absent event and its present interpretation.¹⁰ Where the anecdote bends toward the aesthetic figuration of the real, the source document bears the stamp of evidence on its very body regardless of its specific evidentiary value; before it provides any particular proof, it speaks the indifference of potential evidence.

“If shots as indexical traces of past reality may be treated as documents in the broad sense,” writes Philip Rosen, “documentary can be treated as a conversion from the document” (Rosen 240). Yet documentary’s emergence as a coherent genre or mode of filmmaking is contingent on “controlling documents” by converting “raw” actualities to documentary through “sequenciation”: “...the great assistance sequenciation provides [is] in centralizing and restricting meaning derived from the points at which actual contact with the real is asserted—the realm of the document” (Rosen 243). This operation of “sequenciation” is akin to the unity granted events in narrative insofar as the “rawness” of indexical images is submitted to a structuring, supplementary procedure restricting the image’s meaning in the name of coherent argumentation.

Though he characterizes documentary as “an *aesthetic* of the document,” Rosen never directly addresses the use of actual “actualities” or other borrowed moving images in documentary. Certainly archival and similarly pre-existing images are submitted to the harnessing and directing of meaning performed in the conversions of document to documentary but the attempt to control meaning must allow for an excess that marks these images as documents independent of the film itself; they must remain documents for the documentary. In this sense, the sequence of rickshaw drivers, and other instances of appropriated images in documentary, carry the anecdote’s referential excess in their specific, indexical, details while demanding a formal enfolding to contain and leverage the contingencies opened up by their materiality. Thus, even as Rosen locates documentary’s historiographic character in documentary “sequenciation,” like Jameson privileging the stabilizing logic of text and its articulation of events and causes, the expanse of the historical conjuncture enters documentary through these fragments.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes famously critiques the historian’s idealist and theological investment in source documents as “secularized relics”: “Secularized, the relic no longer has anything sacred about it, except that sacred quality attached to the enigma of what has been, is no more, and yet offers itself as present sign of a dead thing” (Barthes 139-140).

It is precisely the necessity of remaining marked as the outside within the inside that makes these images potent bearers of history as immanent cause. The singular images of colonialism from *In the Year of the Pig* undergo, from one side, subsumption by the formal ordering they launch, with the cross-cutting between the different sites/sights of French Indo-China leading, as detailed earlier, into the film's explicit explanations of Vietnamese resistance and the rise of Ho Chi Minh as revolutionary leader. However, from the side of the images themselves, the details inscribed on these documents—the expressions of dissatisfaction and recognition of exploitation by the rickshaw men, the dismissive gesture of the valet—remain irreducible to the film's argument, though without contradicting them. Walter Benjamin's claim, "There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," famously raises the perspectival problematic of historicism, seemingly embracing a dialectical opposition as well as aligning himself with the reflexive subjectivity emphasized in recent documentary work. But Benjamin's "at the same time" also posits the document as an object holding both barbarism and culture *together*, immanent to one another, as products of history (Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" 392). In this sense, the document is neither barbaric nor civilized, tool of oppression nor liberation, killer nor savior but the very intermingling of antagonistic forces within the complex relations of history as social totality and immanent cause. The aspects of these archival documents of Vietnamese foot taxis that exceed their "sequention" within the film, and which will occupy the next section, need not be set *against* this argumentative and interpretive ordering; rather, they mark the "at the same time" of history itself. If, as Benjamin argues elsewhere, "To write history... means to *cite* history," then the referential overflow of details in archival and other appropriated footage is evidence that through "citation... the historical object in each case is torn from its context" (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 460). This excision from context represents not only the threat of losing context and the fullness of the empirical instant but also the affirmative transmission of the image itself as context and the document as a composition of history. While documentary's inability to reconstruct the wholeness of this lost historical context is much remarked upon, it is precisely documentary's "aesthetic of the document" that makes visible history's binding

together of heterogeneous elements and forces, which are neither clearly cause nor effect but their shifting relation in the past, present, and future that undergirds social totality.

“History is this mode of shared experience where all experiences are equivalent and where the signs of any one experience are capable of expressing all the others.”

Let us return once again to the rickshaw sequence in order to put a more specific point on the argument for documentary’s rendering of history as immanent cause. There are many important historical details within the seven shots I’ve continuously returned to here. Most overt and pressing for the film overall are, as de Antonio himself makes clear, the marks of the colonial system and its organization of the world, pointing the viewer to the once dominant global system of geographic and racial hierarchy whose effects continue to exert themselves both in the film’s present (the U.S. war in Vietnam) and our own. The brutal difference between colonized and colonizer is visible in nearly every frame, acting, per de Antonio’s words, as the “equivalent of a couple of chapters of dense writing about the meaning of colonialism,” and the film’s discourse projects from this stark illustration the historical context out of which the citation is ripped. Restricted to this context, these images speak to a bygone state of affairs now surpassed by subsequent independence struggles, postcolonial geography, and neoliberal globalization, differentiating the past and present in terms of the diachronic chain of events. History would thusly be understood as a directly identifiable object of inquiry and critique (European colonialism) delimited by specific dates and locations, as well as historical personae.

On the other hand, one of the most prominent features of these images and the system they represent is the fact of colonial *labor*, a subject that is strikingly muted in the film. Along with the traces of armed imperial domination, here are expressions of the coercive division of labor interwoven with and policed by colonial power that persists to the present, though not unchanged. Indeed, the post-colonial period, especially

following the collapse of the Soviet empire, is marked by the changing status of labor and, *mutatis mutandis*, production on a global scale, which is acknowledged in debates both within academic and public discourse.¹¹ Far from signaling an overthrow of the division of labor instituted under European colonialism, the ongoing historical shifts of labor and production in contemporary capitalism are reorganizing and intensifying this division. There is neither a single standpoint from which these changes can be identified, no sector of society that remains unchanged, nor a singular cause outside the myriad machinations of global capital in partnership with nation states; these shifts, despite their differences, are felt by all, even as capitalism—notwithstanding its current and continual crises—becomes more entrenched as *the* hegemonic social force articulating these diverse historical effects.

Obviously, if no image, no matter how iconic, can capture the historical conjuncture, no image can index these broad and uneven changes distributed throughout the diversity of the social totality. And at the same time that the vastness of historical context escapes encapsulation within indexical representation, the temporality of historical shifts defy the clarity of sequence. Following Jameson, the mode of production offers the proper historical and conceptual scale for registering these changes. However, unlike Jameson's focus on the dominating, yet ultimately comprehensible, coherence of this overlapping diachronic and synchronic conceptual field, whether "apprehended" by narrative plotting or documentary "sequentionation," the contemporary global reorganization of labor and production—variously referred to as globalization, neoliberalism, late capitalism, or postfordism—requires grappling with the diversity of labor and social practices connected by the logic of surplus-value. The novel technological and organizational forces of contemporary capitalism stand alongside those older forms (land rent, the liberal state, and the factory floor) that persist from various other points in its roughly 500 years of existence. On one hand, capitalism unifies all the differing facets of production and labor in their coexistence; on the other

¹¹ See for instance Paolo Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (2004), as well as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2001). For a popular, non-Marxist account of these changes see Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How it is Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (2014).

hand, capitalism names and bears the stamp of the continual micro-adjustments, displacements, mutations, and conflicts in the social totality which are both the cause and effect of ongoing antagonisms within the mode of production. This is precisely why history as immanent cause, inseparable from its effects, demands thinking of the present not as the outcome and negation of the past but as the concatenation of these temporalities in which the present is already figured in the past, just as the past persists in the present.

Registering history and its shared but diverse, antagonistic, and overlapping constitution of the social depends on attending to the ways effect and cause, past and present, coincide in singular instantiations of history, such as archival images and documents. In this vein we must note that the display of *service* labor in these archival images from *In the Year of the Pig* contrasts significantly with the nearly feudal plantation system, and ongoing, small-scale peasant farming, that typified production at the time these images were captured.¹² Where agricultural production and labor represents, within the logic of the film, the exploitation of traditional, archaic Vietnamese life, the rickshaw drivers are ensconced in the abstract exchange of labor for general equivalent and the antagonism of this structure is inscribed in the images through the minute gestures of recognition and resistance.

Once the French colonial passengers disembark, in the second shot of the sequence, the drivers collect their fares but are clearly unsatisfied (Figure 1). As shot four returns to this scene, the marks of dissatisfaction are intensified by the rickshaw men's collective confirmation of the inadequacy of their remuneration; their gathering itself disputing the false equivalence between their labor and the coinage offered (Figure 2). The shot ends with the intervention of the café's valet—presumptively identified as Moroccan by de Antonio based on his headwear—who shoos the malcontents away.

¹² Indeed, as has already been pointed out, the film makes much of the centrality of agriculture to Vietnamese life and anti-colonial resistance through an anecdote told by Professor Paul Mus which links Ho Chi Minh's rise to leadership to his understanding of the relation between land, labor, and the peasantry. As Mus describes Ho Chi Minh's fateful action upon return to Vietnam, the film cuts between the Mus interview and shots of the Vietnamese countryside to illustrate this emphasis on agriculture.

Shot six brings the anecdote to a close with the valet physically expelling the lone hold out (Figure 3). Over the course of these three shots, the spectator witnesses a labor dispute in miniature between workers in the tertiary sector and the colonial bourgeoisie's managerial representative in this forestalled negotiation. An establishing image of colonial domination—white men in suits (and uniforms) served by “natives” for meager wages—the scene is also uncannily resonant with contemporary labor trends in the global North. Out of sync with the productive regime of its own present, this citation of work is, recalling Benjamin, ripped from its initial context and transported to a present where such work, as well as the means of disciplining it, verges on hegemonic. Meanwhile, the global division of labor that enables the shift to a service or affective economy in the so-called “developed world,” transforms post-colonial nations, like Vietnam, into industrial production centers manufacturing both the technological means of managing the flow of capital and the commodities that drive consumption, while also serving as sites of intensive affective labor in the tourism industry.



Fig. 1 *In the Year of the Pig* (de Antonio, 1968) still capture from DVD



Fig. 2 *In the Year of the Pig* (de Antonio, 1968) still capture from DVD



Fig. 3 *In the Year of the Pig* (de Antonio, 1968) still capture from DVD

These details, whose untimely resonances exceed by necessity the film's historical discourse, transport an immanent surplus into the present historical conjuncture, making legible a past that becomes recognizable now, rather than in the moment of the film's intervention. The very persistence that attracts de Antonio to the images and provides an opening for *In the Year of the Pig's* historicization of the Vietnamese struggle, allows the film to continue to function as an expression of history as immanent cause. That is, the same history—name for the overdetermined, painful assemblage of the social totality—that brings together and articulates the persistence of agrarian plantation economies at the height of industrial capitalism also inscribes in these images a prefiguration of the changes constituting the contemporary pain of history. On one hand there is the encapsulation of the colonial relation that de Antonio points to and leverages, suggesting the sort of stability and coherence that Jameson argues must be apprehended in historical representations; and, on the other hand, there is the out of place specificity of the type of labor depicted here that leans toward a reconfiguration of these very relations insofar as this form of work approaches, according to many prominent commentators, hegemonic status in the contemporary incarnation of global capitalism. And at the heart of this concatenation of labor and exploitation folded between past and present, are the signs of struggle and resistance, which take the form of a collective recognition and expression of the ongoing antagonisms animating the movement of history without rendering any outcomes inevitable.

Jacques Rancière writes, responding to Godard's monumental *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, "History is this mode of shared experience where all experiences are equivalent and where the signs of any one experience are capable of expressing all the others" (176). Though not explicitly theorizing history as immanent cause, Rancière's statement articulates the relation between the concepts of immanent causality and the mode of production at the core of history. Historical time and change are neither merely matters of recording the irreversible unfurling of transitive cause, nor the memorialization of "what happened"—whether in celebration or mourning—but the expression of the co-presence of past, present, and contingent future, where the "signs of any one experience are capable of expressing all others" because they are the effects of history.

Felt across the social totality, these “signs,” the recognitions of exploitation marked by a refusal to accept labor’s assigned value, are founded on the differential relations that proliferate within the whole yet remain common. Fodder for *In the Year of the Pig*’s anti-(neo)colonial critique, these images of rickshaw drivers are also documents that, by standing out in relief from this context, carry the coordinates of history’s overlapping of experiences in the variegated social field held tenuously together by the mode of production. The experience expressed here is *not reducible* to any other but is *bound* to all others by belonging to history and bearing its marks, such that the work and exploitation of these foot taxis resonates with that of the Uber driver caught in the unfolding, yet precariously continuous, mutations of capitalism.

History hurts in these images not only because it is testament to the innumerable deaths of colonial and neocolonial violence (undeniably an outcome of history) but also because history saturates life, connecting the most remote experiences to each other in complex and diffuse ways that frustrate clear and unambiguous responses. It is through the traces of the ongoing encounters and struggles of its subjects that documentary, beyond its resemblance to historiography’s explanatory ordering of the “real past,” expresses history as immanent cause and the irreducible complexity of social totality. Documentaries, like *In the Year of the Pig*, insist on contact with the real in the form of indexical images that cannot help but take in and reproduce the immanent presence of history not as an individuating force of victim and victor, but as collective inscriptions of suffering and resistance that express a common belonging to an unstable social totality.

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