New Documentary

Stella Bruzzi

SECOND EDITION

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New Documentary provides a contemporary look at documentary and fresh and challenging ways of theorising the non-fiction film. As engaging as the original, this second edition features thorough updates to the existing chapters, as well as a brand new chapter on contemporary cinema release documentaries.

This new edition includes:

- Contemporary films such as *Capturing the Friedmans*, *Être et avoir*, *Farenheit 9/11*, *The Fog of War* and *Touching the Void* as well as more canonical texts such as *Hoop Dreams* and *Shoah*.
- Additional interviews with influential practitioners, such as director Michael Apted and producer Stephen Lambert.
- A comprehensively revised discussion of modern observational documentary, including docusoaps, reality television and formatted documentaries.
- The work of documentary filmmakers such as Nicholas Barker, Errol Morris, Nick Broomfield, Molly Dineen and Michael Moore and the work of Avant-Garde filmmakers such as Chris Marker and Patrick Keiller.
- Gender identity, queer theory, performance, race and spectatorship.

Bruzzi shows how theories of documentary filmmaking can be applied to contemporary texts and genres, and discusses the relationship between recent, innovative examples of the genre and the more established canon of documentary.

Stella Bruzzi is Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick. Her previous publications include the co-edited collection *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis* (2000, with Pamela Church Gibson) and *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (1997). Her most recent publication is *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood* (2005).

1 The event
Archive and newsreel

Documentary is persistently treated as a representational mode of filmmaking, although at its core is the notion of film as record. In its examination of documentary's purported struggle for objectivity, this opening chapter will be concerned with the relationship between film as record and as representation, centred on the idea – or ideal – of an original unadulterated truth; although many of the films to be cited also contain a voice-over, this analysis will focus on the use of newsreel and other raw or accidental footage and archive. The material to be considered will be the Zapruder footage of the assassination of President Kennedy, the compilation films of Emile de Antonio and *The Atomic Café*.

The crux of the problem when considering the potential differences between film as record and as representation, is the relationship between the human and the mechanical eye. Dziga Vertov posited a relationship between the eye and the kino-eye (the latter he referred to as the 'factory of facts' [Michelson 1984: 59]), espousing the idea that cinema's primary function was to show what the human eye could see but not record:

> In fact, the film is only the sum of the facts recorded on film, or, if you like, not merely the sum, but the product, a 'higher mathematics' of facts. Each item of each factor is a separate little document, the documents have been joined with one another so that, on the one hand, the film would consist only of those linkages between signifying pieces that coincide with the visual linkages and so that, on the other hand, these linkages would not require intertitles; the final sum of all these linkages represents, therefore, an organic whole.
>
> (Michelson 1984: 84)

For a compiler of images and a recorder of life, such as Vertov, the recording procedure is always subservient to the facts being committed to film; the mechanical eye is simply capable of showing and clarifying for its audience that which initially stands before the naked eye. The act of filming concretises rather than distorts and is in itself a way of comprehending the world. Later the French documentarist and theorist Jean-Louis Comolli returns to the relationship between

the human eye and its mechanical counterpart, but reaches very different conclusions, believing that, through the advent of photography

> the human eye loses its immemorial privilege; the mechanical eye of the photographic machine now sees *in its place,* and in certain aspects with more sureness. The photograph stands as at once the triumph and the grave of the eye.
>
> (Comolli 1980: 122–3)

Comolli, from a perspective that acknowledges the ambivalence of the mechanical eye, argues that Bazin, for one, is naïve to think that, because the camera records a real event, 'it provides us with an objective and impartial image of that reality' as 'The *represented* is seen via a *representation* which, necessarily, transforms it' (p. 135).

The underpinning issue is whether or not the intervention of the filmmaker and, therefore, the human eye renders irretrievable the original meaning of the events being recorded. Linda Williams, like many other recent writers on documentary, detects a loss of faith 'in the ability of the camera to reflect objective truths of some fundamental social referent', a loss which she goes on to say 'seems to point, nihilistically ... to the brute and cynical disregard of ultimate truths' (Williams 1993: 10). Later Williams comments that 'It has become an axiom of the new documentary that films cannot reveal the truth of events, but only the ideologies and consciousness that construct competing truths – the fictional master narratives by which we make sense of events' (p. 13), so doubting entirely that the image-document itself can mean anything without accompanying narrativisation and contextualisation. The problem with Williams' analysis is that it expediently singles out examples (such as *The Thin Blue Line* and *Shoah)* rooted in memory and eye-witness testimony, films that intentionally lack or exclude images of the events under scrutiny, thus making a plausible case for a 'final truth' (p. 15) to be dislodged in favour of a series of subjective truths.

Whilst not advocating the collapse of reality and representation, what this chapter will attempt is an analysis of film as record from an alternative perspective, namely that documentary has always implicitly acknowledged that the 'document' at its heart is open to reassessment, reappropriation and even manipulation without these processes necessarily obscuring or rendering irretrievable the document's original meaning, context or content. This relationship between form, the spectator and the document is crucial. Dai Vaughan argues that:

> The photograph – once we are sure that it *is* a photograph – cannot lie. But it can be falsely labelled … If we accept that documentary is best defined as a way of perceiving images, we cannot evade the implication that it is blind to the falsity of labels. Documentary will be consequent upon what it appears to show, rather than upon what it necessarily does show; and the relationship between the two is a matter for the filmmakers' ethics,

> inaccessible to the viewer. Yet the assumptions which the viewer makes about this relationship, on the basis of signals intended or unintended, will inform his perception of the film. To make a documentary is therefore to persuade the viewer that what appears to be *is*.
>
> (Vaughan 1999: 59)

The document (here Vaughan's document is a photograph) is not empty of meaning, although it can be devoid of interpretation; and interpretation, within a documentary, is the filmmaker's most significant explanatory tool and one which, according to Vaughan, is used to inform the way in which a document is in turn interpreted or understood by the viewer.

The fundamental issue of documentary film is the way in which we are invited to access the 'document' or 'record' through representation or interpretation, to the extent that a piece of archive material becomes a mutable rather than a fixed point of reference. Talking about a television documentary that allegedly used footage of one event to represent another event for which no cine footage exists, Vaughan asks 'How ought we to designate such a sequence?' (Vaughan 1999: 85). Vaughan argues that if the footage's 'true provenance' is not given (footage allegedly of the Warsaw ghetto uprising of April 1943 was actually of the rising of August–October 1944) then 'we must surely say that its use was documentary but mendacious'. If, conversely, its provenance had been acknowledged then, Vaughan concludes, 'I would defend it as a legitimate fictive usage' (p. 85), for as he had argued earlier: 'What makes a film "documentary" is the way we look at it … To see a film as documentary is to see its meaning as pertinent to the events and objects which passed before the camera: to see it, in a word, as signifying what it appears to record' (pp. 84–5). A filmmaker such as Emile de Antonio does not disregard the documentary source of his films, nor are his films mere formalist exercises that tread the post-modern path of disputing the distinction between the historical/factual and the 'fake' or fictive. The provenance of his archive is not in doubt, even if he invites his viewers to look at the archive in a particular, guided way. Rather his films and those, such as *Atomic Café,* which have been overtly influenced by his 'collage junk' method, play on the complexity of the relationship between historical referent and interpretation; they enact a fundamental doubt concerning the purity of their original source material and its ability to reveal a truth that is valid, lasting and cogent. De Antonio's films do not simply deny or suppress the existence of an independent truth contained within the raw footage they re-edit and comment upon, and it is perhaps this sort of equivocation that problematises the perception of archive's role in documentary.

Film as accidental record: 'the Zapruder film'

To test some of the assumptions about film as record and its transmutation into archive it seems appropriate to turn to the most notorious piece of accidental footage: Abraham Zapruder's 22 seconds of 8-mm film showing the assassination of President Kennedy, 22 November 1963, in Dallas, Texas. Several factors

make 'the Zapruder film', as it is commonly known, an interesting example. The film is the work of a very amateur cameraman, a classic piece of home movie footage that Zapruder simply intended as a family record of the President's visit. The discrepancy between quality and magnitude of content and the Zapruder film's accidental nature make it particularly compelling. The home movie fragment almost did not happen as Abraham Zapruder, a local women's clothing manufacturer, had left his Bell and Howell camera at home on the morning of 22 November because of the rain, but had been persuaded by his secretary to go back and fetch it; it also almost looked quite different, as Zapruder found his position on the concrete block just in front of the 'Grassy Knoll'[1] at the last minute. Additionally, as illustrated in the film itself, it is evident that this position gave Zapruder a view of the motorcade that was partially obscured by a large road sign, tantalisingly blotting out certain details of the assassination. In keeping with this accidental quality is Zapruder's own tentativeness when discussing the film before the Warren Commission, commenting humbly, 'I knew I had something, I figured it might be of some help – I didn't know what' (quoted in Wasson 1995: 7). Similarly important is Zapruder's lack of expertise as a camera operator. The silent film jolts in response to the shots and Zapruder finds it difficult to keep Kennedy centre frame: at the crucial moment when the fatal head shot hits him, the President has been allowed to almost slide out of view, leaving the most famous frames of amateur film dominated, almost engulfed, by the lush green grass on the other side of Elm Street. 'Zapruder' became shorthand in American film schools in the years following the assassination for a piece of film of extremely low technical quality whose content was nevertheless of the utmost significance.[2] For Bazin, the apotheosis of the photograph is the similarly artless family snapshot whose documentary equivalent would be the home movie. So it was that students and others sought to emulate the style of the Zapruder footage; as Patricia Zimmerman comments with reference to home movies, 'the American avant-garde has appropriated home-movie style as a formal manifestation of a spontaneous, untampered form of filmmaking' (Zimmerman 1995: 146). The home movie is, virtually by definition, the documentation of the trivial, the personal and the inconsequential, events of interest only to the family group involved. What makes Zapruder's home movie exceptional is that it happens to capture an event that is not private and trivial but public and of huge importance. Footage that by accident rather than design captures material this monumental transgresses the boundaries between the official and unofficial uses of broadcast film, offering an alternative point of view, a perspective that is partly predicated upon the absenting of the film *auteur,* the conscious creator of the images. Zapruder's accidental home movie, like George Holliday's similarly spontaneous video recording of the beating of Rodney King by members of the LAPD in March 1991, became the official text of the events it recorded.

Why is this combination of the accidental, the amateur and the historically significant event so engaging? If one were to devise a method for classifying archive material in accordance with its purity or level of distortion, the Zapruder film would be at the top of the scale. Paul Arthur comments on the 'mutual agree-

ment' between film theorists such as Siegfried Kracauer and Bela Balazs that 'newsreels and documentary reportage in general are "innocent" or "artless" due to their lack of aesthetic reconstruction' (Arthur 1997:2); he goes on to quote Kracauer when positing that 'it is precisely the snap-shot quality of the pictures that makes them appear as authentic documents' (p. 3), concluding that 'the absence of "beauty" yields a greater quotient of "truth"' (p. 3), thereby establishing an inverse ratio between documentary purity and aesthetic value. The Zapruder film, by these criteria, is exemplary in its rawness, innocence and credibility as a piece of non-fiction evidence or documentation. Zapruder, unlike those who copied him, is not consciously manipulating his amateur status, and it is this naïveté that audiences still find compelling, as exemplified by the preponderance of 'the accidental video witnessing of spectacular events' (Ouellette 1995: 41) that dominates the American series *I Witness Video*. Andrew Britton mentions, as if it is a foregone conclusion, that 'there can be no such thing as a representation of the world which does not embody a set of values', so ensuring that the documentary's 'greatest strength is its availability for the purpose of analysis and ideological critique' (Britton 1992: 28). There is no space in this claim for non-fiction images such as the Zapruder film, accidental footage that is not filmed with a conscious or unconscious set of determining values – 'value', in Britton's estimation, being automatically attached to the author/filmmaker as opposed to a film's content. Yet historical documentaries are made up of such non-critical fragments as the Zapruder footage. Within such a context, the film's 'value' is presumed to be that, because of the singular lack of premeditation, intention and authorship, it is able, unproblematically to yield the truth contained within its blurry, hurried images; but therein lies its problem and the factual film's burden of proof.

The Zapruder footage very quickly became an object of fetishistic fascination. As film that shows the moment of Kennedy's death, its 'imagery operating as the equivalent of the snuff film', the Zapruder frames bear uneasy comparison with the pornographic ideal of 'going all the way' to the moment of death (Simon 1996: 67). However, the fact that for 12 years the images were only known as single frames published in the Warren Commission Report[3] into the assassination or *Life* magazine, which secured the rights to the Zapruder film on the night of the assassination for $150,000, inevitably rendered them mysterious. By 1975, when the film was first broadcast, the rights had been returned to the Zapruder family, although the original footage now belongs to the US government, which paid the heirs of Abraham Zapruder £10million to keep it in the national archives (a deal that was agreed on the day John Kennedy Jr died in a plane crash). In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, the Zapruder film was thus not available as film, although the surrounding events were: the arrival of the motorcade at Parkland Memorial Hospital, Jackie Kennedy accompanying her husband's coffin on Air Force One's flight back to Washington, the funeral, the arrest and subsequent murder live on television of Lee Harvey Oswald. The absence of the key assassination images was exacerbated by the presence of these surrounding pieces of tape and film and by the knowledge that the Zapruder film was all the

time being examined, re-examined and reenacted by the Warren Commission. Such absence or lack was especially marked when considering the fatal shot to Kennedy's head, as these frames (Nos. 313–15) were deemed too traumatic to show (*Life* omitting them from early publications of the film), or, as occurred in the published Warren Commission Report, were distorted, as two frames (314 and 315) were 'accidentally' reversed, which gave the impression that Kennedy's head was thrust forward by the impact of the bullet, thus supporting their lone gunman theory. When these frames did become readily accessible, the 'involuntary spasm' shown as the bullet hits Kennedy itself 'became the site of an investigatory fetish' (Simon 1996: 68), the Zapruder film's most over-scrutinised images.

Although the Warren Commission said that 'Of all the witnesses to the tragedy, the only unimpeachable one is the *camera* of Abraham Zapruder' (my italics; *Life* Magazine, 25 November 1966, quoted in Simon 1996: 41), its status as evidence is ambiguous: it can show that President Kennedy was assassinated but is unable to show how or by whom, because Zapruder's camera (and it is revealing that the apparatus is singled out for unimpeachability and not the man) is effectively facing the wrong way – at the President and not at who shot him. Other photographic material, taken from the opposite side of Elm Street, which could potentially reveal more about the positions of the assassins – such as Orvill Nix's film and Mary Moorman's photograph – has been allegedly subjected to greater Security Services intervention and violation,[4] although the Warren Commission did omit Zapruder frames 208–11 from its final report, despite the assertion that the first bullet struck Kennedy at frame 210 (Simon 1996: 40).

If documentary putatively aspires to discover the least distortive means of representing reality, then is not footage such as the Zapruder film exemplary of its aim? It is devoid of imposed narrative, authorial intervention, editing and discernible bias and yet its contents are of such momentous significance that it remains arguably the most important piece of raw footage ever shot. The Zapruder film as a piece of historical evidence has severe limitations. Despite its value as explicit raw footage, the truth that its frames can reveal is restricted to verisimilitude of image to subject; the non-fictional image's mimetic power cannot stretch to offering a context or an explanation for the crude events on the screen, thus proposing two levels of truth: the factual images we see and the truth to be extrapolated from them. Or is that 'truths'? One of the consistently complicating aspects of the Zapruder film is that it has been both 'unimpeachable' and 'constantly open to multiple interpretations' (Simon 1996: 43), an open series of images that can be used to 'prove' a multitude of conflicting or divergent theories about the assassination. This is the footage's burden of proof: that, as an authentic record, it functions as incontrovertible 'evidence', whilst as a text incapable of revealing conclusively who killed President Kennedy it functions as an inconclusive representation. What the Zapruder film demonstrates, is an irresistible desire (on the part of theorists and probably practitioners as well) for manipulation, narrativisation or conscious intervention, despite the avowed detes-

tation of such intrusions upon the factual image. The Zapruder footage has, for example, led Heidi Wasson to speculate wildly that the footage 'becomes the threshold to an imaginary and real space where seemingly contradictory rituals are re-enacted' (Wasson 1995: 10). Exemplifying this duality, the Zapruder footage's continuous paradox is that it promises to reveal what will always remain beyond it: the motivation and the cause of the actions it depicts. This has, in turn, led consistently to two impulses, the first being to focus obsessively on the source material itself, to analyse, re-analyse, enhance, digitally re-master Zapruder's original in the vain hope that these images will finally reveal the truth of who killed Kennedy, the second being to use the same sequence of images as the basis for an interpretation of the assassination that invariably requires and incorporates additional, substantiating material, usually drawing from an ever-dwindling number of eyewitnesses and an ever-increasing pool of conspiracy theorists. Although Zapruder's footage is an archetypal example of accidental, reactive and objective film, it has rarely been permitted to exist as such because, as Bill Nichols comments, 'To re-present the event is clearly *not* to explain it' (Nichols 1994: 121).

It is this central inadequacy that has led to a peculiar canonisation of certain emotionally charged pieces of film and video, images that could be termed 'iconic'. Recently the transmutation occurred with the endlessly repeated and equally endlessly inconclusive shots of the mutilated car in which Princess Diana and others were killed in a Paris underpass on 31 August 1997. Although these images could really only tell us that Diana, Dodi Fayed and Henri Paul had died, they were, alongside the hastily edited compilation documentaries that started running on the afternoon of the crash, played again and again as if, miraculously, they would suddenly prove less inconclusive, or indeed that looking at them hard enough would enable us to reverse the events they confirmed. The endlessly repeated images of the second plane plunging into the Twin Towers on 9/11 (2001) has been used as a similarly collective site of national and global trauma, and it is significant that – no doubt because viewers' responses to such images have become so preconditioned – Michael Moore in *Fahrenheit 9/11* chose to represent the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre through an audio track of those moments laid onto black leader, only cutting later to footage of distraught New Yorkers trying to comprehend what is going on. Moore has omitted the iconic archival moments of 9/11. The iconic status afforded the 9/11, Diana and Zapruder footage, is the result of other factors; imbuing the images with significance beyond their importance as mere film or video, they function as the point where diverse and often conflicting mythologising tendencies, emotions and fantasies collide. A comparably hyperbolic and intense language was adopted to describe the deaths of JFK and Diana – 'the day the dream died', 'the end of Camelot' – and the mass outpouring of grief that followed them more than adequately repressed the shortcomings and failings of the individuals struck down. The images of the attacks on New York came to represent the wounding of an entire nation if not the western world. The Zapruder film has become the dominant assassination text, onto which is poured all the subsidiary grief, anger, belief in conspiracy and corruption surrounding the unresolved events it depicts. The

text is simple, its meaning is not; as Roland Barthes observes, 'Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no "substantial" ones' (Barthes 1957: 117).

With each repeated viewing of the Zapruder film, do we still simply see it for what it is, see the death? This question might seem needlessly obfuscating, but at issue is how we look at any image that is so familiar that we already know it intimately before we begin the process of re-viewing. Iconic documentary material such as this is, in part, forever severed from its historical and narrative contextualisation. The killing of President Kennedy is perpetually reworked in the present; each theory about who killed Kennedy and why urges us to impose a closure on these malleable images, adopting the language of certainty ('who killed Kennedy will be shown here for the first time'[5]) whilst knowing presumably that they will be superseded in due course by a new theory, a new set of certainties. The Zapruder film remains the core text of the Kennedy assassination, 'invisibly back-projected on all the other film evidence' (Simon 1996: 47), and our obsession with it is in no small part due to our ambivalent desire to have it both reveal and keep hidden the truth behind the 'world's greatest murder mystery'.[6] Its iconic and fetishistic status is due to its familiarity and its instability as evidence; Zapruder captures a public death and presents us with a personal viewing experience (a home movie) – as Errol Morris comments, 'we're there ... it's happening before our eyes'.[7] If a piece of archive footage becomes so familiar that a mere allusion to one detail or one frame triggers off a recollection of the whole, then the experience of watching that film is not simply that of observing the representation of an actual event. The Zapruder film has significance beyond the sum of its parts; despite its subject matter, it begins to function like a melodrama, to comfort the viewer almost with its known-ness, its familiarity. Knowing the end ironically frees us to speculate upon alternatives ('what if ?', 'if only'), to reconstruct the sequence just as we see it relentlessly repeating the very events we are trying to suppress. This is particularly the case when it comes to the frames immediately prior to the shot hitting Kennedy's head; the pause (even at real speed) between gun shots always seems implausibly long, Kennedy is slumping into his wife's arms and Zapruder has almost lost him from view when suddenly the right side of his head explodes. In that hiatus between points of intense violence, the impulse is to re-imagine history.

The Zapruder film shows us everything and it shows us nothing; it is explicit but cannot conclusively confirm or deny any version of the assassination. Perhaps, cynically, one could proffer this as the reason for its enduring mystique, that because it will never solve the murder mystery it is a perfect fantasy text. Too often the indissoluble ambivalence of the Zapruder film is forgotten in favour of an 'anything goes' approach to it as a historical document that has no meaning until it has been interpreted or given a story, an attitude that Wasson succumbs to when treating the footage as just another cultural artefact, suggesting that the 'film *qua*, film quickly dissolves, becoming intimately linked to the cultural phenomena which infuse it' (Wasson 1995: 10). This conclusion resembles the inflexible formalism of Hayden White (1987: 76) as he says that 'any historical

object can sustain a number of equally plausible descriptions or narratives'. The essential ambiguity surrounding Zapruder's images hinges on the awareness that their narrativisability does not engulf or entirely obscure their veracity. Nichols is thereby wrong to believe that inconclusive pieces of film record such as Zapruder's leave the event 'up for grabs' (Nichols 1994: 121–2); what is 'up for grabs' is the interpretation of that event. If the footage's realness is merely to be fused with its imaginative potential, then why is the actual Zapruder film so different from and more affecting than its imitators, all of which effectively represent the same event? There have been countless reconstructions of the home movie fragment, from a dream sequence in John Waters' *Eat Your Makeup* (1966) in which Divine parodies Jackie Kennedy reliving the day of the assassination, to the countless more earnest versions made for quasi-factual biopics, to the documentary restagings of the events undertaken (from the Warren Commission onwards) to attempt to establish the facts. One anomaly is that the closer or more faithful the imitation is to the Zapruder original, the more it emphasises its difference from it. An interesting example of a Zapruder reenactment is the accurate reconstruction undertaken for *The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald* (David Greene, 1976), a film made before copies of the Zapruder were widely available. The Zapruder simulation is repeatedly used during the hypothetical trial of the film's title, and those in the courtroom are shocked by what they see. But whilst Oliver Stone's *JFK,* in a comparable courtroom situation, uses the real Zapruder footage digitally enhanced, enlarged and slowed down (thus compelling the cinema spectator to identify directly with the diegetic audience's horror), the reconstruction for *The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald* differs from its prototype in one crucial respect: it omits the blood and gore of the fatal shot to Kennedy's head. This is citation, not replication – a mythologised rendering of the original, brutal snuff movie.

The ultimate, uncomfortable paradox of the Zapruder film as raw evidence is that the more it is exposed to scrutiny, with frames singled out and details digitally enhanced, the more unstable and inconclusive the images become. The industry of what Don Delillo has termed 'blur analysis'[8] has always flourished, but the results are confusing and frequently fanciful, despite Simon's assertion that

> The film must be slowed down to be legible; its twenty-two seconds go by too fast for its vital content to be adequately studied. As a result, it speaks its own impossibility as film. ... Its status as evidence relies simultaneously on duration and its arrest, film and still frame.
>
> (Simon 1996: 48)

Run at proper speed, the Zapruder footage is brief and incomplete; the action starts and stops convulsively, in mid-action. This indeterminacy is the overriding characteristic of accidental footage, its jolting, fragmentary quality not only producing an unfinished narrative, but also preventing a conscious viewpoint from being imposed on the images by either the person filming or the audience. The

speed with which the assassination occurs is thereby a crucial factor, as Noël Carroll (1996a: 228), intimates: 'Unexpected events can intrude into the viewfinder – e.g., Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination – before there is time for a personal viewpoint to crystallize'.

The paradox remains, however, that it is only when viewed at proper speed that the true impact of Kennedy's death becomes apparent. In his analysis of the trial of the LAPD officers accused of beating Rodney King in March 1991, Bill Nichols suggests that, far from being an elucidating technique, the slowing down of the original George Holliday video tape could be used to distort the facts, as the LAPD defence team demonstrated with their assiduous dissection of the same footage that the prosecution alleged proved their case for police brutality to corroborate their case for acquittal. The defence argument

> appeared to fly in the face of common sense. But it took the *form* of a positivist, scientific interpretation. It did what any good examination of evidence should do: it scrutinised it with care and drew from it (apparent) substantiation for an interpretation that best accounted for what really happened.
>
> (Nichols 1994: 30)

Similar distortions have occurred around the Kennedy assassination. Two examples are the magnifications of a piece of film and a portion of a photograph – Robert Hughes's film showing the Texas School Book Depository and Mary Moorman's photograph showing the Grassy Knoll. Both have been digitally enhanced to the point of allegedly revealing shady figures at a window or crouched behind a picket fence. The evidence, in the enhanced versions, might be convincing, but played at real speed or unmagnified these two records of the assassination day appear inconclusive, the results of a desperate desire to find something plausibly human amidst the play on light and shade. One person's figure is another person's shadow.

The Zapruder film (and Holliday's video of Rodney King) make us perhaps question 'the truth-bearing capacities of film' (Simon 1996: 48). This returns us to the notion that Abraham Zapruder's camera, though able to produce an unfailingly authentic record of the Kennedy assassination, is pointing the wrong way, that the film may just be one of many texts that can be used to explain the assassination, not the only one. Still one of the most compelling investigative films made about the assassination and its aftermath is Emile de Antonio's *Rush to Judgement* (1966) on which he collaborated with lawyer Mark Lane. Lane had written a book of the same name, published on 15 August 1966, that took issue with key areas of the Warren Commission Report, made public on 27 September 1964. Neither the book nor the film attempts to solve the 'murder mystery' of the assassination, but merely to insinuate that the Warren Commission's conclusions are unconvincing and that there are grounds for arguing that there had been a conspiracy to kill Kennedy; hence the adoption in both of an examination/cross-examination structure. As Lane stipulates in the documentary's first

piece to camera, the film will be making 'the case for the defence'. More tantalising than the inconclusiveness of the Zapruder footage is the lack of testimony from Lee Oswald, Oswald having been shot in the basement of the Dallas police headquarters by Jack Ruby on 24 November as he was being escorted to the County Jail. *Rush to Judgement* is the first of several television and film attempts to give Oswald's defence a 'voice'.[9] The majority of the film's interviewees support the theory that Kennedy was shot at least once from the front as seems logical from the movement backwards of the President's head in the Zapruder footage; it is ironic and apposite, therefore, that the majority of de Antonio's witnesses are facing the Grassy Knoll, and so literally looking the other way from Zapruder. With the absence of any archive material of the assassination itself, *Rush to Judgement* is reliant on memory presented, within its prosecutional framework, as testimony. The difference between the Zapruder film and *Rush to Judgement* is the difference between the event and memory, between a filmed representation of a specific truth and the articulation of a set of related, contingent versions. In a film such as *Rush to Judgement* the human eye replaces the mechanical eye as the instrument of accurate or convincing memory; as the photographic evidence yields fewer rather than more certainties, the eye-witnesses interviewed by de Antonio and others usurp its position. The obvious problem with the growing dependency (from the 1960s onwards) on interviews as evidence not (supposedly) overly manipulated by the *auteur*-director, is that what can too easily be revealed is a series of truths (or what individuals take to be truths) not a single, underpinning truth. Just as the Zapruder film remains an inconclusive text, so *Rush to Judgement* ensures that the assassination inquiries are not closed by the appearance of one hastily compiled report, having one interviewee, Penn Jones, state directly to camera at the end of the film:

> I would love to see a computer, faced with the problem of probabilities of the assassination taking place the way it did, with all these strange incidents which took place before and are continuing to take place after the assassination.[10] I think all of us who love our country should be alerted that something is wrong in the land.

The fundamental discrepancy between 'raw' archive material as exemplified by the Zapruder film and a memory/interview-based documentary such as *Rush to Judgement* highlights the source for the growing disillusionment with the notion of image as document. If pieces of unpremeditated archive as ostensibly uncontaminated and artless as Zapruder's or Holliday's home movies can produce contradictory but credible interpretations, then the idea of the 'pure' documentary which theorists have tacitly invoked is itself vulnerable. In *Il Giorno della Civetta* the Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia adopts the artichoke as a metaphor for describing the authorities' pursuit of the Mafia: that no matter how many leaves the police or the judiciary tear away, they never reach its heart, or if they do, its heart proves to be a strangely inconclusive place. Likewise the hounding of the 'pure' documentary; for is it not the case (as with gruesome reality television or

the stop-frame 'blur analysis' to which the Zapruder and Holliday films have both been subjected) that the closer one gets to the document itself, the more aware one becomes of the artifice and the impossibility of a satisfactory relationship between the image and the real? Not that reality television (by which I mean its first incarnation: programmes based on unedited video material frequently of crimes and cop chases [see Dovey 2000]) should be doubted and immediately classified as manipulative fiction, but even the least adulterated image can only reveal so much. The very 'unimpeachability' or stability of the original documents that form the basis for archival non-fiction films is brought into question; the document – though showing a concluded, historical event – is not fixed, but is infinitely accessible through interpretation and recontextualisation, and thus becomes a mutable, not a constant, point of reference. A necessary dialectic is involved between the factual source and its representation that acknowledges the limitations as well as the credibility of the document itself. The Zapruder film is factually accurate, it is not a fake, but it cannot reveal the motive or cause for the actions it shows. The document, though real, is incomplete.

The compilation film and Emile de Antonio

As a consequence of this, archive material has rarely been used unadulterated and unexplained within the context of documentary film, rather it has primarily been deployed in one of two ways: illustratively, as part of a historical exposition to complement other elements such as interviews and voice-over; or critically, as part of a more politicised historical argument or debate. The former usage, as exemplified by series such as *The World at War, The Vietnam War, The Nazis: A Warning From History, The People's Century* or *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution* is straightforward in that it is not asking the spectator to question the archival documents but simply to absorb them as a component of a larger narrative. Within this category of archive-reliant documentary, the origin of the footage is rarely an issue, as the material is used to illustrate general or specific events and is usually explained by a voice-over and interviewees. The alternative political approach to found footage – for which the derivation of such archive is a significant issue and which frequently uses such material dialectically or against the grain – has a long-standing history and is more complex. The 'compilation film' (a documentary constructed almost exclusively out of retrieved archive) was pioneered by Soviet filmmakers Esther Shub and Dziga Vertov in the 1920s, both of whom worked within a revolutionary tradition which believed in political, instructive and inspirational cinema. The importance of Shub particularly was that she applied to non-fiction film (although the Soviets endlessly debated the validity of the fiction/non-fiction divide – see Tretyakov *et al.* 1927) the 'montage of attractions' most readily associated with Sergei Eisenstein, who Shub had worked with. Jay Leyda comments of Shub's films that they

> brought back to life footage that had hitherto been regarded as having, at the most, only the nature of historical fragments. By the juxtaposition of