



Epistemological Considerations of Studying History Through Film with Reference to Indonesia

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Introduction

At less than one and a quarter centuries since its inception, cinema is a recent development. This might explain why the use of film as a primary source for the study of history – a field deeply steeped in the use of text-based sources – has remained at the margins of this discipline. The use of film as a secondary or illustrative source is, however, prevalent.

¹ Historians often urge students to view movies in order to gain a better understanding of the societies that they depict. It would not be uncommon, for example, for a high school or college instructor to assign a viewing of Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982).² Most university students of Middle Eastern politics have viewed Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966).³ Pedagogical trends indicate that when film is used as a tool for the study of the past, examples are typically limited to fiction films, not documentaries. I am making a

¹ See Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), Marnie-Hughes Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Both authors delve deeply into the social phenomenon of history as it exists in society through cinematic retelling. They contend that film tells us as much about the society and era in which it is made as it does about the stories and issues that it attempts to recreate.

² A quick search reveals the World History curriculum for tenth graders at the Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School in New Haven, Connecticut utilizing the film. 'Mohandas Gandhi: The Art of Nonviolence', Unit 98.03.05, <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1998/3/98.03.05.x.html> (Accessed Dec 19, 2016).

³ Recent examples of the use of film in the classroom include 'America and Middle Eastern Wars,' taught by Juan Cole at the University of Michigan (2007) and 'Cities of the Middle East,' offered by Sofian Merabet at The University of Texas at Austin (2011). The introductory undergraduate course on Southeast Asian History at the National University of Singapore includes a screening of the French production *Indochine*, directed by Regis Wargnier. http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/hist/undergrad/undergrad4_5.htm (Accessed April 15, 2015).

broad distinction here between ‘fiction’ films, productions in which actors act out pre-determined scripts with dramatic plotlines, and ‘non-fiction’ films, commonly referred to as ‘documentary’ films. A more nuanced categorization will follow later.

This essay argues for an increase in the use of ‘non-fiction’ film as a primary source for historians and investigates some of the relevant methodological issues, including the current limitations that are encountered in relation to the accurate citing of sources. I will classify and demarcate the various types of ‘non-fiction’ film and consider where they might lie in relation to our investigation of historical source materials. Examples will mostly be drawn from Indonesia, the geographical focus of the author’s research, but the inferences are generally applicable.

Early Non-Fiction: A Lacuna

Unlike historians, who may occasionally consider film as academic subject matter, those that do study the history *of* film have long been exploring the evolution of cinema, a medium whose origins can be traced back to the late 1800s. I am making a distinction here between ‘historians’ (scholars primarily working within the academic field known as History, typically undertaking research within the history departments of universities and colleges) and ‘film historians’ (those working within the discipline usually referred to by the name Film Studies). As in any discipline, Film Studies scholars produce academic articles and monographs on a variety of current issues, in their case in relation to cinema as well as the complex evolution of various film genres. Textbooks on film history – both fiction and non-fiction – are required reading for college students enrolled in Film Studies courses. It is therefore only to be expected that historians, who typically explore text-based environments for their sources, might turn to Film Studies scholars in their search for motion picture sources. Unfortunately, however, even here, they typically find only limited

resources. Film Studies as a discipline has neglected research in relation to early non-fiction film.

The historiography of colonial cinema, for example, a substantial global enterprise in the early twentieth century as empires utilized the new technology to document activities in their colonies, has received weak validation as an area of study. While there have been some important publications since the 1980s, they are still few and far between.⁴ Some of the most revered Film Studies scholars have avoided discussing examples of non-fiction film, colonial or otherwise, that were produced before the 1920s.⁵ As contemporary film scholar Tom Gunning deplores, “After a ceremonial nod to the Lumière brothers, the enormously rich period of nonfiction filmmaking before Flaherty basically remains undiscussed, as if shrouded by a collective amnesia”.⁶ The Lumière brothers began their pioneering film experiments in the late nineteenth century, and Robert Flaherty produced *Nanook of the*

⁴ For a selection of writings on colonial cinema, see: Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmic Indochina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), Pamela Pattynama, *Bitterzoet Indie: Herinneringen en nostalgie in literatuur, foto's en film* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, Bert Bakker, 2014), Luc Vint, *Kongo made in Belgium: Beeld van een kolonie in film en propaganda* (Leuven: Kritak, 1984). Nick Deocampo, *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines* (Manila: The National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2003). Clodualdo Del Mundo, *Native Resistance: Philippine Cinema and Colonialism, 1898-1941* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1991). Peter Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). The sole monograph that looks at colonial cinema in the Dutch East Indies is Janekke van Dijk, Jaap de Jonge, and Nico de Klerk, *J. C. Lamster, een vroege filmer in Nederlands-Indië [J. C. Lamster, an Early Filmmaker in the Dutch East Indies]* (Amsterdam: Kit Publishers, 2010).

⁵ It must be mentioned here that, in addition to the work of Tom Gunning, there have been further contributions to this sub-field since the 1990s, including Charles Musser's *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), Roland Cosandey's *Cinéma sans frontières: 1896 – 1918* (Payot Lausanne, 1995), and Stephen Bottomore's *The “Titanic” and Silent Cinema* (East Sussex: The Projection Box, 2000). All of the above have enlivened scholarship regarding this era of nonfiction filmmaking. Important symposiums, such as ‘Cinema Turns 100’ in New York in 1994, and the Amsterdam Workshop of the same year at the *Nederlands Filmmuseum* focused on this period and produced anthologies of articles. But publications by these authors remain outside the realm of popular textbooks; Barnouw and Heider still dominate college syllabuses. In Gunning's own words, “But even with these contributions, I believe these authors would agree that nonfiction filmmaking remains not only less thoroughly studied than early fiction filmmaking, but also less theorized.” (Citation below).

⁶ Tom Gunning, ‘Before Documentary: Early Nonfiction Films and the ‘View’ Aesthetic’, in *Uncharted Territory: Essays in Early Nonfiction Film*, ed. Daan Hertogs and Nico De Klerk (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997), p. 12.

North in 1922. This constitutes a lacuna of almost three decades in the history of cinema. This omission has created deep limitations for the study of early colonial visual history via motion picture.⁷

During the early years of cinema, directors made ‘films.’ Some had actors in them, while others didn’t. The classification ‘documentary’, found in some of the early catalogues of the French film producing and distributing company Pathé, was used by filmmaker and critic John Grierson as late as 1926 in reference to Robert Flaherty’s second film, *Maona*.⁸ The term was not intended to describe all non-fiction activity, but to distinguish such productions from films made from ‘natural’ materials, such as newsreels and scientific or educational materials. Today, we classify these films collectively as ‘non-fiction’ – productions that are not overtly fictionalized accounts of people’s lives, or that have been produced using actors as intermediaries. A historical reluctance on the part of film historians and archivists to resurrect early non-fiction cinema, combined with the technical complexity associated with viewing and annotating such films, may have kept historians away from film archives. But conditions are rapidly changing. A good example is the recent digitization of early colonial films from the Netherlands East Indies (called Indonesia today).

In 2006, a project titled ‘Images for the Future’ that would involve the

⁷ Representations of still images have been discussed at great length in academic historical literature. In relation to the study of Southeast Asia, recent publications include an anthology of essays, *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia (Objects/Histories)* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2009) ed. Rosalind C. Morris, as well as Paul Bijl’s *Emerging Memory: Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

⁸ Film scholar Nico de Klerk has traced the use of the phrase ‘*scène documentaire*’ to the Francophone regions of Pathé film distribution. Two Belgian handbills of 1911 specify LES FRONTIÈRES DU THIBET and LES SPORTS D’HIVER À CHAMONIX as “*film documentaire de la société éclipsé*” and “*Film documentaire des Établissements Gaumont*”, respectively. See: Nico de Klerk, ‘Sand profit pour eux: Dierenopnamen in vroege commerciële cinema, 1891-1911’, *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, 12, 2 (2009): 83-104.

digitization of archival film material⁸ secured a grant of 154 million euros from the Dutch Fund for the Reinforcement of Economic Structure. This was an effort to create a publicly accessible repository of Dutch media in all its forms from the earliest days of its inception. In this era of instant New Media – proliferating in high definition television broadcasts and on perambulating palm devices – ‘old media’ has, surprisingly, been given a compelling makeover. A sliver of this mammoth archive is the silent colonial propaganda film collection from the Dutch East Indies. Between the celluloid holdings at *Beeld en Geluid* and those at the EYE Institute in Amsterdam, (both beneficiaries of the substantial ‘Images for the Future’ grant), several hundred short films, varying from a few minutes to an hour in duration, are now digitally available for research purposes. Why then, we may wonder, was this rich body of footage from the Dutch East Indies largely ignored by historians? In none of the broad studies of Indonesian cinema do we find mention of a single one of the numerous productions dating from 1912 onward. In his essay *Dark Treasures*, Nico de Klerk writes pointedly about this problem:

Typically, the colonial era, presented as something alien, receives a dismissive treatment in just a couple of pages. Reception and exhibition – which would imply the screening of foreign films, too - are only beginning to be considered. But location hardly is (which is important in this context, as the films shot by Dutch crews contain the oldest extant footage of the Indonesian archipelago).⁹

De Klerk suggests two primary reasons for this oversight and lack of exposure. First, until very recently, these films were not readily available for film historians (and especially scholars from Indonesia) to study, as they were stored at various locations in the Netherlands and were difficult to access.¹⁰ Secondly, there was perhaps a sense of guilt associated with such colonial projects. A filmic expression of the colonial past can swiftly be dismissed as biased, less authentic, and politically problematic.

⁹ De Klerk, ‘Dark Treasures’, p. 437.

¹⁰ Two renowned and well-regarded researchers of Indonesian cinema, Krishna Sen and Salim Said, have to date not yet explored the Dutch East Indies film collection.

Now that this material is easily accessible, what are the considerations for historians situating these early non-fiction films within academic discourse? Do they merit a place in the search for primary sources or does an overwhelming sense of colonial bias still remove them from discussion? This path of inquiry is important, because the advent of new, space-efficient compression technologies means that accessing digital archives is only becoming easier as time goes on. To answer this question, we first need to cover some elementary aspects of film, including its general categories, and establish their usefulness in the interpretation of historical sources. While this exercise will be mostly methodological in nature, it is crucial to our understanding of the precise types of materials that we are discussing.

Categorizing Film, Scrutinizing Footage

In its most elemental form, a film is composed of still frames, individual images akin to still photographs. A continuous succession of these images moves forward in time, making up a shot. Shots are edited together to create sequences. The term ‘footage’ refers to a length of film (or a section of a videotape). The paper equivalent of ‘footage’ would simply be ‘pages’. All films, thus, are an amalgamation of ‘footage’. Footage may refer to scenes in completed films, or they may refer to outtakes of a film – material that ends up on the editing room floor. These extra shots may or may not be archived. The ratio of the amount of pre-edited (or ‘raw’) footage to the length of the completed film tends to be significantly higher for documentary films than for narrative films. Nowadays, with the advent of portable digital technology, it is not unusual for this ratio to be as high as 1:100, or even greater. This trend can be observed even in films dating back to the 1910s and 1920s, but with a smaller differential. It is important to mention this aspect of ‘unused’ footage, because some of the archival footage discussed later in this dissertation is drawn from such sources. The boundary

between non-fiction and fiction film can, of course, be blurred. There are fiction films set in original locations and, therefore, some of the scenes in such films may have actually taken place, for example in the case of footage of an actual riot. Similarly, documentary films very often have a ‘doctored’ aspect to them – subjects may be asked to express themselves in certain ways to reinforce a point that the filmmakers are trying to put across. Currently, the lines between fiction and non-fiction are often undistinguishable. Through the use of technology and artistic skill, it is remarkable the extent to which these genres can fluidly blend into each other, a somewhat worrying development for historians looking for visual ‘evidence’.

In the earliest days of cinema, there existed a form called *actualités* that used composites of single shots of film. A scene was recorded for as long as the camera was able to run without running out of raw stock. Scenes were then edited together with some thematic coherence. They were often edited to fit a particular program, such as the screening of a short before a feature presentation. *Actualités* were primarily descriptive in nature. They were often edited as travelogue films – moving visual postcards of distant places. At times, they showed us the process by which something was manufactured or crafted. These *actualités* evolved into what we define as the ‘documentary’. Today, Tom Gunning considers the evolution of the *actualité* to have happened when filmmakers “embedded its images in a larger argument and used those images as evidence to substantiate or intensify its discourse”.¹¹ In Grierson’s simpler terms, documentaries were, “the creative treatment of actuality”.¹²

The propaganda film originated in the middle of this evolution from *actualité* to documentary. It was the link between the two. However, this very transformation of early non-fiction film – from the Lumière productions at the turn of the twentieth century until Flaherty’s documentary films – is generally overlooked by film historians. *Actualités*, early

¹¹ Gunning, ‘Before Documentary’, p. 21.

¹² Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film* (New York: Hastings House, 1952) p. 70.

travelogues, and propaganda films do not feature much in textbooks. The problems created by the long absence of these early films from academic discourse should not be underestimated. Gunning has identified this as a gaping hole in film history:

The most frequently given reason for this neglect, the belief that this early material remained too raw, too close to reality and bereft of artistic and conceptual shaping (compared to the more ‘cooked documentary’) does not take us very far... The voyeurism implicit in the tourist, the colonialist, the filmmaker and the spectator is laid bare in these films, without the naturalization of dramatic structure of political argument.¹³

What is most relevant to this paper is the investigation of whether any or all of these myriad styles and their interpolated expressions can be legitimate primary sources for historians. I will consider *actualités*, propaganda, as well as documentaries – all hybrids – as subsets of non-fiction film. For the purposes of this study, fiction film will not be conflated with the search for primary materials. While they may provide an excellent resource, studio productions with actors and scripts typically tend to provide little more than secondary illustration.

Non-Fiction Film as Primary Source

Doing History: Research and Writing in the Digital Age defines a primary source as: “Any record contemporary to an event or time period. Primary sources may be written, oral, visual, or physical”.¹⁴ The American Library Association adds an extended temporal caveat: “Original records created at the time historical events occurred or well after events in the form of memoirs and oral histories”.¹⁵ While definitions found in other publications vary

¹³ Gunning, p. 24.

¹⁴ Michael J. Galgano, *Doing History: Research and Writing in the Digital Age*, (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2007), p. 57.

¹⁵ American Library Association, ‘Using Primary Sources on the Web’, <http://www.ala.org/rusa/sections/history/resources/pubs/usingprimarysources>, (Accessed July 5, 2015).

slightly in the criteria that they use in deciding whether or not a source should qualify as ‘primary’, they concur on the importance of the notion of ‘original records.’ Can we, however, consider all components of non-fiction films as being ‘original records’? To be fair, rarely has any film historian made the claim that a documentary film showed ‘the truth’. Even Grierson, who so championed Flaherty, coined the phrase, “a creative treatment of actuality”. Can we evoke a methodology for unpacking those layers of artifice and ‘treatment’ in our attempt to find usable material for historians? For the purposes of this exercise, I will digress momentarily from the silent era in order to develop a more relatable and inclusive type of discussion.

In a standard television documentary, there are often unstaged portions of some aspects of real life unfolding in front of the camera that are verbally described. The narrating track is typically rehearsed and recorded in the studio. Most significantly, narration is usually not carried out in the first person, blurring authorship, with a voice-over artist commonly performing the lines following someone else’s script. The intent behind the production, the conditions under which it was recorded, and the authorship of the narration are often not evident to us, making it difficult for the final work to qualify as an ‘original record,’ a ‘memoir’ or as ‘oral history’. Now, let us consider another style of documentary film, typically seen on television, where a subject answers questions posed by an interviewer. The transcript of such an interview would certainly constitute an example of a ‘primary source,’ as it documents individual elements of an episode – even if created after the event. The people are usually identified, the reasons for their narratives often rather straightforward. All narratives or memoirs, be they written in a diary format or filmed as interviews, can, of course, be further investigated with respect to their veracity and accuracy. Generally speaking, however, this is the sort of material that is acceptable as a primary source.

Another type of primary source would be newsreel footage. This may involve parts of newsreels made for documentary films, propaganda films or any other film dealing with real events. Regardless of the bias contained in any of the programs created from such footage, for the most part, the scenes in of themselves can be considered as primary sources. In the scene below from 27 December 1949, during the twilight era of Dutch rule in the East Indies, the Dutch flag is lowered and the Indonesian flag is raised. The narration may or may not be accurate, and it would be hard to trace its origins. The scene however, is authentic. Viewing the footage, a historian could note the individuals present, their style of clothing, the ceremonial rituals conducted, and a myriad of other details that would be very hard to capture comprehensively in a written account of this event.



Figure 1.1. *Independence of Indonesia*, produced circa 1949¹⁶

Another category of documentary, one that we are most concerned with in this study, is the propaganda film. Many propaganda films, even if manipulated via voice-overs, editing, and other production techniques, often capture real scenes. A good example of this from the former East Indies is the body of Japanese propaganda films produced during World War II. In the sequence below, Japanese-trained Indonesian troops perform drill and General Yamamoto talks about a pan-Asian solidarity movement led by Japan against the allies. We also see Sukarno, who would later become the first President of the Republic, urging Indonesians to help the Japanese in a fight that would “destroy the American and English

¹⁶ *Independence of Indonesia*, Online video, <http://youtu.be/D556RK4t-Zw>, (Accessed Dec 19, 2016)

forces”. While this type of material is certainly propagandistic in the sense that it was produced to motivate Indonesians to join with the Japanese as well as stir up feelings of pan-Asian solidarity, the fact remains that Sukarno did give that particular speech in the film below and the PETA troops did indeed constitute a big part in Indonesian anti-Allied efforts. In that sense, these scenes are authentic and are undeniably primary sources. Today, they provide us with exact transcripts of what Sukarno said in support of the Japanese war campaign.



Figure 1.2. *Berita Film Di Djawa: Disinipoen Medan Perang!*
Produced by Nippon Eigasja Di Djawa, circa 1944¹⁷

With all the shaping, ‘cooking’, and sculpting of footage filmed on location to create a product driven by doctrine, there is inevitably material that is rejected. Just like the field notes of a journalist pursuing a story, or of an anthropologist conducting fieldwork, much of the material that does not quite fit into the larger narrative of the project remains unused. As I have mentioned before, documentary films are often shot with a very high ratio of ‘raw’ footage to ‘used’ footage. Should the raw footage be properly preserved in an archive, it can be invaluable to researchers. What is left out is often as significant as what is included.

I will provide one more example of a primary source - the last ‘non-fiction’—the amateur film. Amateur films or home movies have been part of film archives for almost as long as films have been made in any form, right back to the late nineteenth

¹⁷ *Berita Film Di Djawa: Disinipoen Medan Perang!* Online video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJ-rhWRJD00>, (Accessed Dec 19, 2016).

century. And while we tend to think of archival film mostly in terms of documents concerning the past, we need to remind ourselves that today's footage will become part of tomorrow's archives. The proliferation of low cost camcorders and easy-to-operate smartphones during the past decade has created an enormous quantity of footage reflecting the immediate concerns of various societies. How a coherent repository could be created for them is a growing challenge for both social scientists and visual data engineers. Consider this recent situation: A group of Ahmadi followers (a sect that many conservative Islamist hardliners do not consider to be part of Islam) in Indonesia was attacked by violent Islamic hardliners. The scenes were filmed on a bystander's mobile phone.



Figure 1.3. *"Tremendous attacks on innocent Ahmadis in Indonesia,"* 2011.¹⁸

What was generated and later proliferated on social media was extremely rich primary material. Any historian or social scientist would be able to glean a lot of information about the details of the attack captured via this low-quality but viewable cell phone footage. We have seen many examples of this phenomenon in recent years, including footage from the Arab Spring and videos circulating in the United States exposing alleged examples of police brutality. Any probing social analysis of these events would be difficult to carry out without addressing the existence of such material. Indeed,

¹⁸ *"Tremendous attacks on innocent Ahmadis in Indonesia,"* 2011, Online video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMtwfFmFwN0> (Accessed Dec 19, 2016)

nowadays, it is often the case that amateur-filmed scenes are the main source of primary materials recorded in relation to particular issues or incidents. Considering issues of speed and detail, this comes as no surprise.

I have touched upon possible ways in which non-fictional, documentary footage might be useful to historians. While not all documentaries can be considered examples of primary evidence, we may accept that some of them can, whether they be features, newsreels, visuals with voice-over tracks, or even works of straightforward propaganda. In some form or another, all of the examples above fit the guidelines established earlier, able to be described as, “Any record contemporary to an event or time period.” Even footage contained in a propaganda film, despite its inherent bias, can act as a valid primary source, as it often captures events that actually took place, prior to the distortion of such material through the creative process involved in narration and editing.

A Citation Consideration

While this essay has examined the various rationales that historians could draw upon when deciding to include works of non-fiction in their research and publications, a key issue remains that needs to be addressed urgently concerning methodology of citation. The ways in which films are currently referenced do not guide readers/viewers to specific sections of the films being discussed.

Dutch film historian Julie Noorgegraaf discusses several specific moments in *Mother Dao*, an archival film-based documentary about colonial Indonesia, in her article, ‘Facing Forward with Found Footage: Displacing Colonial Footage in *Mother Dao* and the Work of Fiona Tan.’ Yet, the citation for the film is as follows:

Mother Dao: The Turtlelike, Vincent Monnikendam (Netherlands, 1995). Black and white, Bahasa Indonesia with Dutch subtitles, soundtrack by Jan Dries Groenendijk, 90 minutes.

This existing system assumes that the reader will either not make the effort to see the part of the film being referenced, or if they choose to do so, that they will watch the entire film in order to locate the relevant scenes. Another possibility is that historians expect that the written descriptions of particular scenes are sufficiently representative that there is really no need for the reader to actually *watch* the footage discussed.

It is also possible, however, that this oversight is not due to any lack of desire on the part of researchers for their readers to actually watch the visuals being discussed, but that viewing such material was a rather difficult proposition during the era when these citation rules were being prepared – much more difficult than reading pages from a book. Historians in previous times would probably have viewed films in an auditorium with the help of a projectionist. But the advent of the VCR and then the DVD player changed all that. They included counters which allowed users to cue the film to a particular scene. And now, with the advent of the World Wide Web and digital technology, people may watch these clips on the Internet via hyperlinks – such as those provided in this essay.

There still reside lingering concerns in relation to the accuracy and uniformity of such counters. In a given edition of a book, the words on a page that is referenced never change. Films, however, are available in various formats, as discussed above, and they may be viewed by chapter segment on a DVD or using the time read-out on digital counters. All digital counters do not necessarily align, as some may include the duration of credits or other advertisements at the start of particular films. Nonetheless, suffice it to say that the use of the term *approximately* (perhaps abbreviated to *approx.*) would make it easier for the reader of a printed work to locate the particular film scene that is being discussed. Thus, when discussing the scene at the tobacco factory in *Mother Dao*, Noorgegraaf might cite it as:

Mother Dao: The Turtlelike, Vincent Monnikendam (Netherlands, 1995). Black and white, Bahasa Indonesia with Dutch subtitles, soundtrack by Jan Dries Groenendijk, 90 minutes. At approx. 33-35 mins.

I can only suggest the above method as one that historians might begin to adopt. There may of course be other ways that could be developed in order to ensure a degree of uniformity in this process. The key issue here is that a standardized format for referring to film scenes in historical essays be established and brought into common practice.

Conclusion

Most of the books debating and advocating the use of film in historical discourse tend to include a chapter titled, for example, 'The Documentary,' in which sources that are not fictional are explored. Robert Rosenstone's *Film on History*, *History on Film*, Marnie- Hughes Warrington's *History Goes to the Movies*, and Philip Rosen's *Change Mummified* each have a section devoted to a critical analysis of the documentary form. They discuss the ethics of production, the psychoanalysis of interpretation, the derailing influences of politics, and the perils of commercialization.¹⁹ The trend is to look at the film, or even the genre, as a whole. Many non-fiction films, if considered on the basis of whether their overall purpose was to project a position of inaccurate propaganda, would not rank very highly in terms of their usefulness as primary sources. While Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* may be propagandistic, there are moments in it that are useful as primary sources. Film scenes from the Netherlands East Indies, albeit biased, are far less problematic than Nazi propaganda. This method of search

¹⁹ Marnie-Hughes Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

and analysis is, of course, painstaking; one has to dissect a film into very discrete pieces and then hunt for the useful bits. Such an approach, however, is similar to the standard approach historians employ when dealing with texts, in which they often search for a piece that needs to be closely scrutinized, regardless of the larger context. Why would we not do the same with film? Once the compelling sections in the filmed material have been identified, we could then apply the same rigor to them the as we would when approaching a textual source.

Despite the wealth of filmed material, academic programs (and history departments in particular) have rarely delved into film sources when studying the past. Jane Landman observes that, “Cinema – as a source for writing about history, and as a particularly powerful medium for communicating the past – commands the attention of historians, but is not yet a field in which historians have developed a particularly rigorous or robust set of analytical methods”.²⁰ I suggest a general set of analytical tools to tackle film, in this case specifically non-fiction film, as historical source material. The methodology utilized can be summed up in four steps. First, the identification of films that historians would generally classify as ‘primary sources’. Second, cross-referencing the footage with existing sources, mostly text-based, that help to authenticate and situate the material. Third, a closer review of the films in order to locate possible isolated sections that could be relevant as micro-histories – even if they are incompatible with the theme of the film they are embedded in. Finally, an effort is made to understand commercial, cultural, and political influences on the makers of these films. While these approaches are not unusual or new to the study of history, they have yet to be utilized rigorously for the study of non-fiction film.

²⁰ Jane Landman, Chris Ballard, ‘An Ocean of Images: Film and History in the Pacific’, *The Journal of Pacific History*, 45, 1 (2010): 2.

With the extensive digitization of archival films in recent years, historians have now begun to have far greater access to compelling primary and secondary sources of footage to refer to in their work. These sources can be viewed in convenient formats, such as on DVDs or in the form of digital email files or Internet links. There has also been a proliferation of short ‘new media’ clips in recent years as civilians continue to document their environments, providing a greater depth of coverage than ever before. It would thus behoove historians to tap into these resources in order to augment their research and bring to our attention images and evidence previously unexposed. It will hopefully be just a matter of time before the technology to view film footage weaves itself seamlessly into the publishing formats of historians whose works are steeped in the analysis of the motion picture.

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