

Moving Environments

Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film

Alexa Weik von Mossner, editor



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5

Emotion, Argumentation, and Documentary Traditions

Darwin's Nightmare and The Cove

Belinda Smail

Media attention to the acceleration and consequences of environmental degradation has been increasing over the past two decades. However, the influence of environmentally focused documentary was cemented with the success of *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2006.¹ The cluster of films concerned with environmental advocacy has grown exponentially since this time. Often referred to as “eco-documentaries” in the popular press, this category includes examples exploring a broad range of issues such as food industries, climate change and habitat endangerment, water supply and allocation, sea level rise, diminishing fish stocks, and the oil industry.² These films consistently investigate and publicize the corporate control of natural resources and the impact of industry practices on the environment and/or wildlife and, at times, on the consumer. This cluster of documentaries has emerged in tandem with the resurgent popularity of feature-length documentary and the growing mainstream interest in environmental issues.³

At first glance, this cluster, with its strong focus on critiquing commercial interests and government inaction, shares much with films that are couched in traditions of radical leftist documentary filmmaking. For Jane Gaines, mimetic technologies, such as documentary, “have the power to explosively reproduce, to reproduce the world before us as well as to reproduce its intensities onscreen, and to reproduce them most strategically in the bodies and hearts and minds of viewers.”⁴ It is this aim to politicize, in an “explosive” manner, that motivates a history of political filmmaking. Documentary is unique within this history

due to its capacity to provoke a felt sense of continuity between the world of the viewer and the world of the film, or a "same world sensation."⁵ In this film historical tradition, filmmakers frequently take up a position within a social movement, explicitly locating themselves on one side of the political divide, eschewing the notion of the distanced observer. In her description of those reporting on the labour strikes in the 1930s in the USA, Paula Rabinowitz argues that those who take up the tools of representation necessarily also must forge an allegiance to either side of the battlelines. She aptly describes this as a "sentimental contract": "an either-or situation demands that both reporter and reader must choose sides within a dichotomous class structure. In reportage, documenters serve not only to witness but to intervene."⁶ This mode of filmmaking, one that seeks to participate in social and political transformation, is also one that endeavours to rally and construct a public—a constituency that, however contingently, recognises a need for change. For Helen Hughes, an important aim of the eco-doc is "to visualize the environment as a shared physical and imaginary space ... in ways that promote the popularity of activism and environmental justice."⁷ The eco-doc can be contextualised within a history of documentary filmmaking while also offering its own specific mode of address to the viewer.

This chapter focuses on two documentaries, *Darwin's Nightmare* (2004) directed by Austrian filmmaker Hupert Sauper, and *The Cove* (2009), an American production directed by Louis Psihoyos.⁸ *Darwin's Nightmare* and *The Cove* offer two distinctly different ways of taking up Rabinowitz's positionality. Each functions in different ways to advocate for environmental or ecological politics. Yet they also have much in common. Both concentrate on a specific geographical location and explore the socio-cultural, industrial, and environmental issues emerging from the harvesting of a particular marine species. Both engage the viewer in an unfolding narrative that centres the spectacle of non-human life (the fish and the dolphin) within a delineated geo-cultural location. My interest in these two very visible examples⁹ within this grouping of documentary revolves around how they work at the intersection of paradigms of radical filmmaking and environmental advocacy.

Significantly, both Gaines and Rabinowitz frame their analysis with a nod to the importance of emotion in the work of political documentary. Emotion is inevitably bound up with the motion of political change and underpins the way documentary appeals to and engages with audiences, whether the emotions are hope, pleasure, outrage, or dismay.¹⁰ For this reason, I explore how non-human life, the fish in *Darwin's Nightmare* and the dolphin in *The Cove*, is posed within this emotional address, or sentimental contract. I analyze how it is produced

within the rhetorical argument, formally and narratively. In both cases the image of the non-human is central to the formulation of an emotional political address to viewer. The second feature of these films that I discuss is the issue of looking across cultures in the context of production and reception. In both *Darwin's Nightmare* and *The Cove*, non-Western modernity is perceived as the location of a particular ecological and social problem. I investigate how the desire for knowledge, for a mastery of the world, that documentary so powerfully facilitates might be enabled in the documentaries in terms of this problem. I question how the desire to attribute a rationale for the problem lends itself to narratives that unfold in familiar, and at times ethnocentric, ways.

THE COVE AND DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE: THE NON-HUMAN, EMOTION, AND DOCUMENTARY RHETORIC

Since John Berger's observations in "Why Look at Animals?" (1980), much work has been done on understanding the importance of the image of animals in visual culture.¹¹ In this section I look at how aspects of the two documentaries weave together histories of signification and already familiar ideological formations, including discourses pertaining to food, fish, and humanness. The representation of animals in documentary is bound to other elements that constitute the rhetorical and generic framework of the text, such as voice-over, interviews, and editing. Through the mechanics of argument and aesthetics, the films work to institute particular modes of identification with social actors and with the non-human animals. The notion of identification I draw on here is one specifically facilitated by documentary. As Elizabeth Cowie describes, "documentary informs us of the world, offering us identities in the images and stories of other lives that it presents that become fixed as known and knowable through its account and explanation of the world it shows."¹² Identification in this respect is both rational, requiring knowledge, and emotional, requiring an engagement involving a degree of emotion on the part of the viewer.

The Cove focuses on Tajii, a small fishing town in southern Japan where, between September and March, dolphins are rounded up and harvested for sale as live specimens and for processing as meat. This practice had not been widely publicized and the documentary narrative is posed from the perspective of a handful of activists whose aim it is to reveal the extent of this killing. The most vocal and committed activist is Ric O'Barry and the film tells the story of O'Barry's transformation from the dolphin trainer for the television series *Flyper* in the 1960s to marine advocate in the present day. The film explicitly seeks to alert viewers to not only the killing of large numbers of dolphins in Tajii, but also the negative effects of keeping dolphins in captivity and the Japanese

government's role in facilitating the destruction of the animal. Central to the film is the expedition, undertaken by the small group of activists, including the director, Louis Psihoyos, to covertly gather evidence of the practices of Taiji fishermen.

The film opens with images of slaughtered dolphins being processed at night. These activities are shot with a military-grade thermal imaging camera the activists succeeded in smuggling into the country. The scenes are black and white, much like a photographic negative. This imagery is repeated in two scenes when the group, described at one point in the film as an *Ocean's Eleven*-style ensemble, undertakes to clandestinely film in the cove one night. Their aim is to not only capture the slaughter on film but as Psihoyos states to the camera, "to do something that will make people change." The mission is presented with the immediacy and exhilaration of a Hollywood thriller narrative as the group works to evade the fishermen who have previously responded with hostility to their endeavour.

Alongside this mission to uncover and reveal the activities in Taiji, *The Cove* makes a strong case for the exceptionalism of dolphins. At points in the film they are grouped with other cetaceans, such as whales, but the focus overall is on the special status of dolphins. The discussion of the abilities of dolphins is conveyed through a collage of images and interviews with activists. This collage presents anecdotes of dolphins swimming playfully with divers and surfers and the capacities of dolphin sonar and consciousness. After one nighttime excursion to the cove, one of the divers participating in the covert mission states: "The most horrifying thing about the whole dive that night was that you could hear them communicating and you knew that the next morning that would be the end of it. There would be silence forever." Soon after this O'Barry states in voice-over: "It's not about intelligence. It's about consciousness. They are self-aware like humans are self-aware. That means we look in the mirror and we know exactly what we're looking at. I don't believe that the fishermen here are aware of that." The images in this sequence are taken from stock footage and show dolphins underwater, playfully responding to the camera or to their own image in an underwater mirror. These visuals sit alongside many other montages of stock footage drawn from nature documentaries, aquatic theme parks, and the *Flipper* series. The argument for dolphin exceptionalism is then juxtaposed with the routine destruction of the dolphins in the cove, which comes to be framed as almost homicidal, approaching the horror of human murders.

The visual and auditory evidence of the activities in the cove is central to the documentary. The revelation of these images offers a climax for the group's

clandestine activities. In the footage shown near the end of the film the water of the cove is stained red from the blood of the dolphins as they are killed with spears and hauled into boats. This imagery seems to be some of the little primary footage shot by the filmmakers (as opposed to sourced from elsewhere) that depicts dolphins in the film.

If a central aim of the documentary is to pose the dolphin as a subjective being and establish a form of dolphin consciousness, the argument verbalized by the activists is the primary platform for this. The slaughter of the dolphins is a spectacle, and alone, would do more to discourage identification with the dolphin. Yet it works in tandem with the anecdotal evidence in the voice-overs, as I have said, to present as a massacre of exceptional creatures. In an earlier scene activists watch from the beach as a young dolphin trailing blood, makes its way to the beach before disappearing under the water. A review in *Time Magazine* seems to be describing this moment when stating: "This is like seeing baby seals clubbed to death, except that as adorable as baby seals are, no one has yet made a case for their being potentially smarter than humans, which is exactly what *The Cove* does for dolphins. To watch bleeding dolphins struggle for their last breath, to actually hear their agony, is devastating."¹³ The documentary seeks a recognition in the viewer of the consciousness of the dolphin who is herded into the cove—that they understand the horror they are about to confront.¹⁴

Significantly, *The Cove* encourages an emotional response to not only the dolphin slaughter, but also the practice of consuming dolphin meat. As the documentary acknowledges, very few Japanese people actually eat dolphin meat. Yet sequences show dolphin meat packaged and on supermarket shelves labelled as whale meat and children eating from lunch boxes (with the inference that they are some of those who were required to consume dolphin as part of the Taiji school lunch program). As Emma Roe notes, food comes to be considered edible through a particular and normalizing set of "intimate biomaterial connections between bodies that eat and bodies that are eaten."¹⁵ Another effect of emphasizing dolphin exceptionalism is that the cetacean appears as "too sentient" to be food; the requisite normalizing process is disrupted. The intimate material relation between humans and dolphins in the documentary is not one that facilitates consumption—it is one that fosters an affective or bodily recognition that dolphins are inedible just as humans are inedible. The dolphin meat becomes even less viable as food when it is reported that there are high levels of mercury in the Taiji area that have contaminated the marine life. *The Cove* seeks identification with a world in which dolphins are first and foremost sentient beings, aware of their relations with each other and with humans. It is a subjective being that is too close to human to be food

and is, similarly, too human (and extraordinary) to be killed or harvested in the way that other animals or fish regularly are.

However, *The Cove* does not simply present the dolphin as an object of emotional identification. The recognition of the dolphins' exceptionalism sits alongside the intense identification that the film seeks with the activists and with O'Barry in particular. These are the speaking subjects of the documentary, asking the viewer to see as they see and feel as they feel. Alignment with and immersion in the momentum of the activist movement is a key strategy of *The Cove* and of documentary that seeks social change more broadly. The persuasiveness of the documentary owes much to the onscreen presence of the filmmaker activist and his compatriots. Writing almost thirty years ago, Thomas Waugh described an influential paradigm for radical, "committed" documentary that draws not on the social impact of documentaries (or the change in consciousness in the audience), but rather on the trace of desire that motivates the production of the film. Filmmakers produce radicalizing documentaries when they "work within actively ongoing political struggles; by making films not only about people engaged in these struggles but also with and by them as well."¹⁶ Committed documentary makes explicit its production within or alongside organized social movements. Working towards a more proximate relationship between the filmed and the filmmaker, these works emphasize solidarity. This exemplifies Rabinowitz's notion of the sentimental contract. *The Cove*, asks the viewer to join in solidarity with the interviewees/activists onscreen, to share in the empathy and passion they exude. These individuals provide another avenue through which to "read" the dolphins. In this case it is via the emotional momentum of human endeavour, as the object of activism.

Darwin's Nightmare again positions a marine species at the centre of the narrative. Although the fish, the Nile perch, is ostensibly the focus of the film, it soon becomes clear that the fish is made to objectify a complex network of human interaction and exploitation. This documentary, like *The Cove*, presents a delineated geo-cultural location (the community of Mwanza on the shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania) and explores the social and environmental situation that has emerged in the wake of the introduction of the Nile perch into the lake. An industry has developed around exporting large numbers of this now plentiful fish to Europe and the film gradually exposes the negative consequences of this industrialization. *Darwin's Nightmare* formulates a more layered emotional address to the audience than *The Cove*. The fish takes on a malevolent quality in this documentary, negating any possibility of empathy. The spectacle of the Nile perch poses a materiality that deems it again, inedible but in this case the fish is an object of disgust. Moreover, the unfolding horror

of the situation in this community is transposed onto the image of the corpse of the fish in its many manifestations. In this sense, the fish is an emotional object that is consistently framed as abject, thus again disturbing the viewer's expectations of the representation of fish and food.

The film is made up of observational footage and numerous interviews with various personalities in the communities and industries around the lake such as factory workers and fishermen, homeless children, sex workers, and the Russian pilots who fly the fish to Europe. The picture presented is one of emerging catastrophe. The situation is exposed to the viewer through a gradual unfolding of information offered by these different informants, often at the off-screen prompting of the filmmaker. Interviews consistently feature questions about the cargo the Russian planes bring into Tanzania. Eventually it becomes apparent that the planes are full of illegal arms and munitions that fuel the wars in Africa. The sex workers who are employed by the Russian pilots flying these planes are interviewed and in the course of filming one of them, Eliza, is murdered by a client. AIDS is widespread in the itinerant communities of fishermen on the shores of the lake. The homeless children of families, either impoverished or destroyed by AIDS, battle over scraps of food and get high from the fumes of melting plastic containers used to package the fish. While the fish is at the heart of this decline, the industry it has produced is also a source of survival for many. The fish is variously cast in a number of roles—it is a predator that has destroyed the ancient ecosystem, a catalyst for industrial growth and social decline while, of course, providing food for locals as well as for export.

Significantly, while *Darwin's Nightmare* does not offer images of the casualties in the Congo or Angola,¹⁷ the violence inflicted on the street kids, or the physical effects of the AIDS epidemic, the film does offer sublime imagery of the body (the corpse) of the fish. Early in the documentary we are shown the factory in which the fish is processed. Rather than depicting the fillers neatly prepared for packaging as we see in *The Cove*, the camera concentrates on the leftover waste of bones, heads, and innards as they are swept into bins from a conveyor belt. At a later point in the film we are informed that displaced farmers in surrounding communities buy this waste at low cost. Images show fish parts offloaded by trucks and eventually hung and dried on open-air racks infested with maggots and scavenging birds. Later fish heads will be fried and sold by vendors to the locals. The omnipresent spectacle of the huge fish carcass dominates the second half of film and comes to provide a visual metaphor for the violence and decay verbalized in the interviews.¹⁸

The power of this visual metaphor can be found in the way that the Nile perch is framed as an object of disgust. Sara Ahmed writes, "while disgust *over takes* the body, it also *takes over* the object that apparently gives rise to it."¹⁹ When it generates disgust in the viewer, an object becomes wholly disgusting. As a foodstuff, the fish meat is meant to be eaten. There is an intercorporeal dimension to this as the fish becomes integrated into the human body after it is eaten. However, when it generates disgust, the recognition of this potential intercorporeality then leads to rejection of the object. As Deborah Lupton observes, "meat is linked to violence, aggression, the spilling of blood, pain; it constantly trembles on the border between self/other and purity/contamination. Because it is the product of the death of animals, meat is also more strongly linked than any other food to rottenness and pollution."²⁰ *Darwin's Nightmare* exploits these associations between pollution and flesh to accentuate a contaminating quality in the images of the fish meat and to reject (along with a rejection of the disgust object) the slim benefits of the introduction of the fish. The decline in the film, as the title suggests, registers for the audience a backward social and non-human evolution in which decay is foregrounded. Here it is Tanzanians, rather than dolphins, who are the victims (and speaking subjects) and who must not only subsist in the shadow of the fish industry but also consume the fish "waste."²¹ The perpetrators are less clearly rendered when compared to *The Cove* and are symbolically posed, as I discuss in the next section, through the terms of capitalism and globalization.

Unlike *The Cove*, *Darwin's Nightmare* does not pose the filmmaker, or even the stories represented, as part of an explicit movement for social change. Yet it clearly invites the viewer to recognize a social problem that is the outcome of political and commercial forces. If it is not a "committed documentary" in Waugh's sense, *Darwin's Nightmare* is certainly not a "public education" film in the Greisonian sense. Instead, it emphasizes techniques of direct or observational cinema within its mosaic of styles. Barry Keith Grant describes observational filmmaker Frederick Wiseman's approach in his first film, *Titicut Follies* (1967), as "that of detached observer. Yet the film is also carefully structured to advance its maker's personal sense of moral outrage."²² As Grant observes, Wiseman avoids didacticism while constructing argument through the careful use of editing that serves to produce irony, inversion, evidence, and summation. While not usually considered part of the canon of political filmmaking, Wiseman's work nevertheless appeals to the viewer to engage with the logic of a defined political perspective. Similarly, *Darwin's Nightmare*, rather than explicitly offering argumentative instruction, is *aligned* with an implicit argumentative, subjective position. The filmmaker may not be as unequivocally

driving onscreen events as in *The Cove*, but nor is he a distanced, disinterested observer. The rhetorical impetus of the documentary unfolds in ways that structure a compelling argument. The implications of the introduction of the Nile perch are made known through the many interviews in the film, and through the use of irony and juxtaposition, but it is also *felt* through the imagery of the fish and its polluting malevolence. This spectacle addresses the audience and infers a negative presence and teleology. The "same world sensation"²³ the film invites is centred on this intersection of visual visceral knowledge and knowledge of the social impact and repercussions of the introduction of the fish.

As I have noted, these films contribute to a recent cluster of documentary filmmaking. They present themes related to questions of food, humanness, and the relation between the social and the non-human. Aiming to rally a constituency of viewers, these documentary arguments channel familiar traditions in the documentary endeavour in order to address new questions in relation to environmentalism and ecology. The turn to subjectivity in documentary by the 1990s that Michael Renov describes as "a kind of experiential compass guiding the work toward its goal as embodied knowledge"²⁴ is evident in the highly authored observational slant of *Darwin's Nightmare* and in *The Cove's* emphasis on the actions and passion of the activists. Both films, albeit in different ways, engage the sentimental contract invoked by Rabinowitz. Further, the non-human animal is the object of struggle and persuasion that is also made available to the audience in recognizable ways, primarily through identification with the perspective of the filmmaker-subject.

DOCUMENTARY DESIRE

Just as they share a subjective argumentative structure, the two documentaries in question also concentrate their cameras on non-Western cultures, producing images from an authorial perspective that looks across cultural borders and largely addresses audiences in the Euro-American world. This is not unusual for eco-documentaries, which frequently take up globalizing concerns—they traverse continents to follow environmental issues and questions of food production. However, in both *Darwin's Nightmare* and *The Cove*, non-Western modernity is perceived as the location of a particular problem, whether it is the cultural and nationalistic traditions that perpetuate the slaughter of dolphins or the social impact of the Nile perch that is devastating the community around the lake.

The Cove is an American production directed by Louis Psihoyos and produced by the Oceanic Preservation Society based in Colorado. *Darwin's*

Nightmare is directed by an Austrian, Hupert Sauper, and is a French/Belgian/Austrian co-production. Both films are the work of North American or European filmmakers and have been marketed and distributed largely with European and anglophone audiences in mind. *Darwin's Nightmare* achieved two-thirds of its box office takings in Europe (predominantly in France) and in the former French colonies in North Africa, while *The Cove* found its primary audience in the USA. There are longstanding ethnographic traditions that haunt interpretations of images of Western filmmakers travelling to locations such as Japan and Africa. These representations frequently codify subjects so that, as Bill Nichols points out: "they occupy a time and a space which 'we' must recreate, stage, or represent."²⁵ The two documentaries under consideration depart from this tradition while nevertheless inviting spectatorial desire for particular images and narratives about these sites of "otherness."

Over the decades that cinema studies have been borrowing from the methods of psychoanalysis, discussions of desire and pleasure have been almost taken for granted in the discipline's study of fiction film and securely tied to the unconscious in spectatorship theory. I wish to denaturalize these associations and build on approaches that incorporate desire into an analysis of emotion and documentary. The notion of documentary "epistophilia," a desire for and pleasure in knowledge, is well established in Nichols's work. This is a distinctive form of social engagement that is engendered by documentary, a genre that is associated with a privileged access to the texture and complexity of the social world. Cowie extends this by understanding the way viewers bring different expectations to texts conventionally deemed "factual" or "fictional": "the demand for the distinction these terms imply itself constitutes a *desire* for a certainty of the knowable, of the world as testable, producing a split between the two domains: one of proper, true knowledge and a second domain of improper, untrue fabrications."²⁶ I investigate how the desire for knowledge, for a mastery of the world that documentary so powerfully facilitates, might be enabled in these documentaries.

Important in this respect is the way epistophilia can be coupled with the notion that knowledge is ordered in particular ways that make it recognizable to a constituency of viewers—documentaries make sense of and represent the world through reference to established textual patterns. These recognizable formations frequently do the work of satisfying the desire for knowledge acquisition. In the case of *The Cove*, epistophilia revolves around the visual evidence of a problem (the dolphin slaughter) and the clear presentation of "why and how" this occurs. It seeks a rationalization of the perpetrators' motivations. In the first instance, rhetorical strategies in the film build towards a desire

for what is, as I have noted, eventually captured—footage of the whole cove running red with the blood of the dolphins as they are killed. In the second instance, it is knowledge about which aspect of Japanese society, its people or its culture, is responsible for maintaining what is presented as a barbaric practice.

In her discussion of tolerance, Wendy Brown describes the manner in which no legal Western practice is ever marked as barbaric within Western (dominant) codes of representation. She notes that the effect of this "is to tar the non-West with the brush of the intolerable for harboring certain practices that are not only named barbaric, that is, uncivilized in contrast to our practices, but coerced, that is, unfree compared to our practices. The limits of tolerance are thus equated with the limits of civilization or the threat to civilization."²⁷ Non-Western practices Brown refers to as examples include female genital cutting, widow suttee, or polygamy. The activity of killing dolphins aligns, in many respects, with these practices. Yet, does this "unjust" practice become equated with non-Western (Japanese) society in *The Cove*, which is in turn deemed uncivilized?

Midway through the film O'Barry's voice-over notes that knowledge of the dolphin slaughter and the harvesting of dolphin meat is limited to a relatively small group of people. This is despite the claim by fishermen that consuming dolphin is a traditional practice. Showing interviews with people on Tokyo streets who claim they know nothing about the treatment of dolphins or consumption of dolphin meat, the film is at pains not to present all Japanese as involved in the dolphin harvest. The authorities in Taiji and those on the International Whaling Commission (IWC) representing Japan perpetuate and protect the Japanese right to harvest dolphins. Following a suggestion in the film that this is due to an economic concern with protecting livelihoods, a member of the IWC representing one of the small Caribbean nations bribed by Japan to support their interests offers what is posed as the singular rationale or the "why" of the narrative arc. He states that this activity continues to be supported due to the "remnants of traditional notion of empire" and a nationally felt resistance to succumbing to international will to desist eating cetaceans. Thus, the authorities' ongoing protection of the dolphin and whale meat industries and the dolphin harvest are not posed as the barbaric tradition of a non-Western culture, but rather the Japanese are positioned as passively standing by while those in power perpetuate this practice. O'Barry's voice-over states that Japanese culture abides by the ethos that "the nail that sticks out must be pounded down." This suggests that in Japan dissent and individual autonomy is discouraged. The projection of "uncivilized" behaviour is displaced

as the film locates blame in relation to other cultural factors—mass compliance and traces of a history of imperialism. In sum, while the population is not broadly “barbaric” in Brown’s sense, they are nevertheless posed as stereotypical and intolerable because Japanese culture is somehow at fault.

There are other features of *The Cove’s* rhetorical arc that further support a binarization between the West and the non-West. Japanese individuals are, for the most part, represented by physically and verbally aggressive fishermen, evasive and wary officials, or self-interested representatives on the IWC. While the film is about specifically Japanese activities, it offers only a small number of Japanese individuals the status of speaking subjects. An exception is the two city councillors in Tajiri who protest the use of dolphin meat in the school lunch program (on the grounds that it has high levels of mercury). The councillors speak for less than a minute, with their concerns largely stated in O’Barry’s voice-over. Similarly, the documentary does not seek out interviews with or acknowledge the work of any Japanese environmental activists in Japan or elsewhere. Adding to this, the town of Tajiri is cast as a place of conspiratorial malevolence. This allows for a fluid dualism in which the team of North American activists are impassioned, active, resourceful, and aligned with the best (civilized) interests of the dolphins. They are worthy, renegade outsiders in the town, encouraging a strong identification with their position as outsiders and non-Japanese. *The Cove* weaves a narrative that presents American audiences with a decisive and convincing source of advocacy. It does this through appealing to viewer desire for recognizable stories about the non-Western other. While the film attributes the slaughter and its cover up to a select group, their actions are described with reference to culture and tradition.

In the case of *Darwin’s Nightmare* the desire for knowledge is again focused on exploring a problem in a non-Western culture. However, this documentary does not focus on questioning and gathering evidence about the other’s actions and motivations. Instead, *Darwin’s Nightmare* works to steadily build an intricate picture of what is happening in Mwanza and compels the audience to engage in a process of recognizing the relationships of cause and effect that constitute an expanded portrait of the impact of the fish. It is not clear until some way into the film what the detail of this impact is. The growing recognition encouraged by the film positions the viewing subject as, cumulatively, the subject of knowledge. For Cowie, this positioning encourages an identification with the social actors and this contributes to the pleasurable experience documentary affords.²⁸ In one scene a factory worker, with factory work continuing behind him and while holding a fillet of Nile perch, describes how the fish fillers are too expensive for the ordinary Tanzanian due to the costs

of processing. From off-screen the filmmaker asks him about the newspaper reports concerned with the growing famine in Tanzania. The worker seems to agree that he has seen the reports but looks confused about the jump from one line of questioning to another. This is an observational moment—by the time this scene appears late in the film the viewer is easily able to make the leap that the worker, it seems, cannot.

This exploratory narrative does not pose a hierarchized dichotomy between West and non-West as in *The Cove*. Instead it presents a much broader delineation between the exploited and the exploiter and this is posed loosely as Tanzania (Africa) and Europe. The network of relations that comes to light in the film highlights the ways different groups in Mwanza participate in this system of exploitation. This network includes factory owners and workers, fishermen, the night watchman at the Fisheries Institute, the sex workers, and the Russian pilots. The pilots are, to some degree, placed outside the teleology of decline that the documentary depicts. They are upwardly mobile and seem to be obfuscating the full nature of their cargo. Yet late in the film one pilot admits, with much dismay, that he transports guns into Africa and leaves with export goods for Europe. He observes that the children of Angola receive guns for Christmas, and the children of Europe receive grapes. The pilot laments: “This is business.” Many of those interviewed in the film do not present as clear victims, in part because they are also negotiating the environment in which they find themselves in order to survive and, at times, prosper.

The fact that *Darwin’s Nightmare* is not simply a story of ecological catastrophe is evidenced by the scant attention given to the scene of the introduction of the fish. Primarily, the fish is a visual metaphor for decay and an object that facilitates global trade. The social relationships of cause and effect that are the focus of the film are illustrated across the body of the fish but also across the black bodies and faces of the Tanzanians who are both visual objects of difference and beauty (and at times social decline), and as interview subjects, the source of much of the information conveyed in the film.

While there is no unambiguous perpetrator in *Darwin’s Nightmare* who can be clearly represented onscreen, the film circles around and infers that the source of the problem should be located in global trade and global capitalism. This documentary, with its wide array of interviews with Mwanzan locals, casts the African other as informant, contributing to the tapestry of evidence the film produces. One man, possibly a fisherman, explicitly articulates the hegemonic order at the heart of the documentary when he states that “God unfortunately created the world and he provided limited natural resources. Therefore people scramble for natural resources.... Who is to get and who is

to miss.... Maybe we start viewing the Europeans as stronger than the rest. Because they are the people who own the IMF. They are the people who own the World Bank. They are the people who own the world trade." Tanzania, in this sense, is depicted as caught up in the Western hegemony of global trade. At the heart of this trade is the fish. Significantly, despite the many interrelated issues represented in *Darwin's Nightmare*, the scope of the film is relatively narrow in its focus on the Mwanza community. AIDS, environmental degradation, poverty, and homelessness are all problems facing sub-Saharan Africa more broadly and while the film does not deny that this is the case, it offers a microcosm that localizes all of these issues around the Nile perch.

The Cove's success has been achieved, in part, by elaborating a chain of cause and effect that opposes the activists' agency, integrity, and resourcefulness to the unjust (cultural) actions or passive inaction of the Japanese. In the case of *Darwin's Nightmare*, however, the problems in Mwanza that emanate from the introduction of the fish are attributed to the complex fabric of European capitalism. In this respect, while the Tanzanians participate in and perpetuate the industry that has built up around the fish, the source of this exploitation is located off-screen, a continent away. It is the piecing together of the patchwork of the multifaceted impact of the European-driven industry that addresses audience desire for mastery and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In his discussion of documentary "politicality," John Corner offers an outline that defines the "character of documentary as a form of political discourse" and its capacity to formulate an "explicit address to questions of institutional power (both as structure and process)."²⁹ While *Darwin's Nightmare* and *The Cove* share many features (such as the focus on a marine life form, the setting of a delineated social geographical area) the style of their politicality and the questions they pose are markedly different. One is concerned with animal rights and the plight of the dolphin. It advocates for this animal on the grounds that it is exceptional in the non-human world. The other explores a twinned environmental/social catastrophe, offering a dystopian vision of the Mwanza predicament, and is more concerned with the ecosystem and human rights than animal rights. However, continuing a long tradition of documentary practice, both films invite the viewer to enter into the emotional contract proposed by the argument—through the passion of and empathy for the activists and the dolphin or through the recognition of the web of social crises that accompanies the disgust and horror evoked by the fish carcass.

The Cove has been successful in its aim to publicize and change the treatment of dolphins in Japan.³⁰ In comparison, while *Darwin's Nightmare* was followed by calls for consumer boycotts,³¹ it also met a storm of controversy that revolved around the truth claims of the film. Ruby B. Rich writes that Sauper

has been both praised and reviled, the attacks carried out by proxy writers aligned with foreign-trade interests. The viciousness of the attacks was reminiscent of those on the young Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*, except that Sauper had not re-edited any footage or chronology. He had all his facts courtesy of African-based NGO sources. Most recently, the Tanzanian government has gone after both Sauper and his subjects in Tanzania, who have been punished with firing, arrest, and threatened deportation.³²

Published criticisms of the film were the subject of libel cases in 2008 and 2009.³³ *Darwin's Nightmare* melds observational techniques with an allegorical thematization and it is perhaps this creative treatment of actuality, to borrow Grierson's well-known phrase, that also drew accusations that the film was sensationalist and misleading. Darin Kinsey associates the film with "a new genre of sensationalist and proactive documentary films."³⁴ This claim lacks an appreciation of the histories of documentary referred to above by Gaines and Rabinowitz that pose a long-standing relationship between emotion (and the quest to mobilize viewer sensation) and the documentary project.

In Chapter 6 of this volume Robin Murray and Joseph Heumann suggest that the difference in advocacy outcomes between these two documentaries is due to the ontological status of the arguments presented—*The Cove* is concerned with animal rights while *Darwin's Nightmare* references arguments of organismic ecology. I argue that in evaluating the way these films circulate, consideration should also be given to the *means* by which identification is encouraged or discouraged and the way knowledge is organized. In both instances the films have strong ties to well-established documentary codes and traditions. While they seek recognition of the immediacy of problems facing the environment or the non-human world, and thus are concerned with new objects of debate and education, there is much to be gained by understanding how this emerging cluster of documentary operates within a lineage of documentary practice and critique.

NOTES

- 1 *An Inconvenient Truth*, directed by Davis Guggenheim (Los Angeles: Paramount Classics, 2006), DVD.
- 2 Titles, just to name a few, include: *Food Inc.* (2009), *Crude* (2009), *The 11th Hour* (2007), *Flow: For Love of Water* (2008), *The End of the Line* (2009), *King Corn* (2007), *Life and Debt*

- (2001), *A Crude Awakening* (2006), *Frack Nation* (2013), *The Last Ocean* (2012), *Gasland* (2010), *Green* (2009), *Shark Water* (2006), *Trashed* (2012), *The Hungry Tide* (2011), *The Island President* (2011), and *Climate Refugees* (2010).
- 3 Helen Hughes offers some reasons for the rise of eco-docs in "Humans, Sharks and the Shared Environment in the Contemporary Eco-Doc," *Environmental Education Research* 17, no. 6 (2011): 735–49.
 - 4 Jane Gaines, "The Production of Outrage: The Iraq War and the Radical Documentary Tradition," *Framework* 48, no. 2 (2007): 40.
 - 5 Gaines, "The Production of Outrage," 44.
 - 6 Paula Rabinowitz, "Sentimental Contracts: Dreams and Documents of American Labour," in *Feminism and Documentary*, ed. Janet Walker and Diane Waldman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 43.
 - 7 Hughes, "Humans, Sharks and the Shared Environment," 737.
 - 8 *Darwin's Nightmare*, directed by Hubert Sauper (New York: Homevision, 2004), DVD; *The Cove*, directed by Louis Psihoyos (Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate, 2009), DVD.
 - 9 Notably, both of these films have enjoyed wide distribution. In terms of box office takings alone (without accounting for DVD distribution), *The Cove* has so far earned over US\$1 million internationally and *Darwin's Nightmare* almost US\$3 million according to Box Office Mojo (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com>). These are significant figures for documentary. Both have also received numerous awards, with *Darwin's Nightmare* nominated for an Oscar for Best Documentary Feature in 2006 and *The Cove* winning this award in 2010.
 - 10 This is an argument I establish more fully elsewhere: Belinda Smail, *The Documentary: Politics, Emotion, Culture* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
 - 11 John Berger's "Why Look at Animals?" is the opening chapter of his *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon, 1980). For examples of more recent scholarly work that has explored the importance of the image of animals in visual culture, see Jennifer Fay, "Seeing/Loving Animals: André Bazin's Posthumanism," *Journal of Visual Culture* 7, no. 1 (2008): 41–64; Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002); and Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, eds. *Thinking with Animals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
 - 12 Elizabeth Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 88.
 - 13 Mary Pols, "Rescue at Sea," *Time Magazine*, 10 August 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1913757,00.html>.
 - 14 Akira Lippit observes "language brings consciousness and with it, the consciousness of consciousness and its absence, or death." He goes on to observe, "according to a logic peculiar to Western thought from Epicurus to Heidegger, animals are incapable of a proper death. That is, because animals are said to have no knowledge of death as such, they simply perish without death as death." Akira Mizuta Lippit, "The Death of an Animal," *Film Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2002): 11. Other scholars have made a case for dolphin communication and thus consciousness (Bateson 1972) and animal consciousness (Bergson 1920). *The Cove* errs from Lippit's characterization, especially the final visual climax.
 - 15 Emma Roe, "Things Becoming Food and the Embodied, Material Practices of an Organic Food Consumer," *Sociologia Ruralis* 46, no. 2 (2006): 118.
 - 16 Thomas Waugh, ed., *Show Us Life: Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary* (Meruchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1984), xiv.
 - 17 One aspect of the social fabric *Darwin's Nightmare* represents includes Russian pilots who fly fish fillets as exports to Europe and fly back into Africa importing arms that fuel the conflicts in Angola and the Congo.
 - 18 This is akin to Lippit's analysis of Eisenstein's use of animal slaughter as a metaphor for the brutality of labour relations. However, while for Lippit "Eisenstein's animals intervene at the

- limits of representation, here the death of human beings" (Lippit, "The Death," 14), the fish carcass signifies the limits of documentary representation—historical excess. As Bill Nichols notes in *Representing Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), historical complexity always escapes full representation in documentary. In this sense the decaying fish alludes to what is impossible to portray fully—the detail of the social scene and human experience in Mwanza following the fateful introduction of the fish.
- 19 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 85.
 - 20 Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: Sage, 1996), 117.
 - 21 John Corner offers an insightful reading when noting that the visual design of *Darwin's Nightmare* serves to convey aspects of "politicality." He refers to the way the "recurrent image of giant Russian transport aircraft coming in to land, or taking off, over the lake makes symbolic connection with the 'predatory' in relation to the fish, to Africa-Europe relations and to globalized capitalism." John Corner, "Documenting the Political," *Studies in Documentary Film* 3, no. 2 (2009): 115.
 - 22 Barry Keith Grant, "Ethnography in the First Person: Fredrick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies*," in *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, ed. Barry Keith Grant and Jeanette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 239.
 - 23 Gaines, "The Production of Outrage," 44.
 - 24 Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 178.
 - 25 Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 67.
 - 26 Elizabeth Cowie, *Recording Reality*, 86.
 - 27 Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 191.
 - 28 Cowie, *Recording Reality*, 30–32.
 - 29 Corner, "Documenting the Political," 113–14.
 - 30 For one example of this impact, see Coco Masters, "Japan Gets Its First Chance to See *The Cove*," *Time Magazine*, 16 September 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1923252,00.html>.
 - 31 As Hughes notes, French audiences in particular perceived a need for consumer action in response to the situation in Mwanza. Helen Hughes, "Scrutiny and Documentary: Hubert Sauper's *Darwin's Nightmare*," *Screen* 53, no. 3 (2012): 246–65.
 - 32 Ruby B. Rich, "Documentary Disciplines: An Introduction," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 1 (2006): 112.
 - 33 For an outline of these cases, see Hughes, "Scrutiny and Documentary," 252.
 - 34 Darin Kinsey, "Nightmare or Delusion," *Environmental History* 12 (2007): 322.

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6 Documenting Animal Rights and Environmental Ethics at Sea

Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann

The Academy Award-winning documentary *The Cove* (2009) captures viewers' attention immediately with its opening shots in Taiji, Japan, where its unlikely hero Ric O'Barry discusses the origin of his mission: "Here it is ... the town of Taiji, the little town with a really big secret," he exclaims as he points to a seemingly idyllic village beside the sea. Dolphins are memorialized in the Taiji Whale Museum and exalted by both locals and tourists in pleasure boats shaped like smiling dolphins.¹ But, as O'Barry reveals, "hundreds of thousands of dolphins have died there," and it is his mission to fight for the dolphins' rights and reveal the senseless slaughter to the world.

The Cove and two other documentaries regarding the fishing industry—*Darwin's Nightmare* (2007) and *The End of the Line* (2010)—grapple with issues surrounding fishing for what *New York Times* seafood writer Paul Greenberg calls our "last wild food" in his *Four Fish*.² All three documentaries seek to address what their filmmakers see as environmental catastrophes: dolphin slaughter, biosphere destruction, and massive over-fishing. But only *The Cove* effects the changes it proposes. Whereas *Darwin's Nightmare* and *The End of the Line* reveal little known eco-disasters, *The Cove* goes further. It not only unmasks the slaughter of dolphins that leaders in Taiji work hard to hide, it also provides a call to action that is both heard and followed to successfully slow the carnage in the cove.

We assert that *The Cove* successfully slows the slaughter of dolphins because it draws on the emotional appeal of animal rights arguments in its strong advocacy for the dolphins of Taiji. *Darwin's Nightmare* and *The End of the Line*