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***Filming the organized human***

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THE FILM *BLACK SNOW* DISCUSSED IN THIS PAPER CAN BE VIEWED AT

https://vimeo.com/299841616

https://www.togethertv.com/black-snow

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkUHmpLs37A

As long ago as 1968 Dwight Waldo of the UC Berkeley Institute of Government Studies drew attention to the contributions that novelists had made to the understanding of organization and administration. Waldo argued that the study of management and administration must establish a working relationship with every major province in the realm of human learning”. Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux (1994) drew on Waldo to argue that good novels can make for better management. Pulitzer Prize winning Harvard educationalist and medic Robert Coles (1989) demonstrated the power of storytelling in developing the “moral imagination” of legal and medical professionals who had to make moral and ethical decisions affecting the lives of others. In 2011, Colby et al, in what has come to be known as the Carnegie 2 Report, pointed out that although the landmark “Carnegie 1” (Pierson 1959) had inaugurated the LERCAT paradigm (logical empiricism, rational choice and agency theory) which has dominated the field ever since, the report itself had argued for greater balance that included the humanities, although this steer was never followed amidst the frenzy of economic physics-envy. As Waldo put it, the point was not just to “increase administrative effectiveness, efficiency and economy – the long accepted criteria – but to extend administrative horizons, sharpen administrative vision, and – dare I say it? – increase administrative wisdom.” (Waldo 1994: ix). Some recent calls for the humanities to be reintegrated into management education have fallen into the trap opened up by Carnegie 1 that the management humanities might be constructed as the conscience of the management sciences, sitting on the manager’s right shoulder to steer his poised finger away from the decision-making button that will consign jobs and lives to the darkness. This, of course, is just as much of a fantasy as LERCAT, or *Wall Street*’s “Greed is Good”. Waldo, as I read him, expects more integration – more Kierkegaardian willingness to risk being wrong because you *feel* a decision is morally right. If the humanities are about anything it’s engaging with the mess that it is to be human, which means that the humanities are by definition messy. Humanities *in* crisis? The humanities *are* crisis and the mobility it represents: living with it, and in it. Beyond it? Well, maybe, but don’t expect too much. Critically exploring and reinventing the human? Aren’t we in reality in the midst of doing that on an everyday basis – whilst of course being explored and invented at the same time - when we allow the illusion of doing otherwise to slip?

Grey’s (2003) call for “license to think freely” imagined researchers becoming “more inclusive and contextually sensitive by engaging with the disciplines of the humanities – history, literature, classics, philosophy, religion, law, ethics, languages, the fine and performing arts”. Interestingly, film isn’t singled out here, perhaps because it already has its own corners within the fine arts, the performing arts and even philosophy (with more than a century of cinematic thought) and has engaged with all of the rest on this list. The visual turn in management studies has included some work on film as a mode of humanistic inquiry (Nesteruk 2015); reflections on how digital technologies are changing the face of management education to be more humanistic (Billsberry, J. 2013; Schultz, P. L. and Quinn, A. S. 2014); and how video methods can help participatory work by including a filmmaker in the research team (Hassard et al 2018). Alvarez et al (2004) argued for the utility of bringing movie directors into the classroom, but the development of management researchers and scholars as movie makers themselves remains, at best nascent. Yet if we are serious about bringing the humanities together in our research, this surely is a step we need to take – and our students are already taking it anyway. But can film be more than some sort of meta-representational medium through which the other humanities speak or express themselves? Can film *itself* be research? In *our* field? (Wood et al 2017). We might remind ourselves that the etymological root of “theory” – the ancient Greek *theoria –* had the sense of bearing witness, of travelling to other places to see how things were done and abstracting principles and practices to apply at home. The first theorists were also the first tourists. And had they had cameras, their travel documentaries would have been their theories. In the early 17th century the renaissance sense of theory before Descartes and Bacon was as “the science of *art*”, specifically musical composition, and it did not acquire the more general sense of *explanation* based on observation and reasoning until mid -century.[[1]](#endnote-1)

After all this time we are still, oddly, in the position that, in contrast to “normal science” methods, anyone using film as or in research in organization and management studies has to justify its presence. Between 1990 and 2015, although as many as 56 articles in top-tier management journals were based on research that used video, this was primarily in an objective “witnessing” mode for video observation of interaction rather than filmmaking which more-or-less sidesteps the need for justification as a “theoretical composition” (Christianson 2018). In contrast, Bilsberry (2013) notes that relation to teaching, although such a requirement for legitimation was once the norm (for example, Bell 2008; Champoux, 2001; Comer, 2001; Hunt, 2001; Liedtka, 2001; Scherer & Baker, 1999) it is now incongruous:

“film is accepted as a perfectly normal medium for teaching management and related subjects. In topics where the focus is on individual behaviour, film offers a particularly useful medium as the subtlety and complexity of human action can be studied in minute detail and within context….. gone is the need for such pieces to justify their existence. Just as we don’t expect reviews of new books to justify the role of books in management education, the same is now true of films.” (Bilsberry 2013:300-1)

Indeed, Smith (2009) argues that film should be the primary medium for teaching organizational behaviour. I would not want to go so far as to claim this for the realm of research, but given that what is widely regarded as a seminal paper on visual methods in the field (Meyer et al 2013) deliberately eschews consideration of film there is a demonstrable need for greater balance. Film is perhaps the consummate transdisciplinary method (Shapiro 2013). With the wide availability of affordable good quality equipment, the expanding capabilities of smartphones, and the long history of use of photographic and film in anthropology “one could argue that all ethnography should  incorporate some analysis of audio and visual data” (Veena 2014). Others have argued that film should be an important element in the research portfolio as a means of gathering or eliciting data (Clarke 2014; Wood et al 2016); involving participants in data collection (Hassard et al 2018; Jarrett and Liu 2018; Slutskaya et al 2018; Whiting et al 2018; Zundel et al 2018; or recording and analysing events or behaviour, even experimenting, within a realist or structuralist ontology (Congdon et al 2018; Heath and Luff 2018; Hindmarsh and Llewellyn 2018; LeBaron et al 2018; Waller and Kaplan 2018). Epistemologically film can also be a tool for rendering the elusive explicable or providing “a scaffold for translating embodied, tacit, and aesthetic knowledge into discursive and textual forms” (Toraldo et al 2018). In contrast to these approaches, with over a century of film philosophy to draw upon, cinematic thinking can also critically open up ontological and epistemological dimensions of contemporary methodological debates (Frampton, 2006; Mullarkey 2008, 2009, 2011; Sinnerbrink 2011) and even constitute a way of doing theory non-textually (Herzogenrath, 2017; Linstead 2018; Berkeley et al 2016; Wood and Brown 2011). A more processual approach, “expressing organizational life in a non-linear fashion”, may convey ambiguity, complexity, blurred or conflicted identities, multiple narratives, contrasting perspectives and unresolved moral dilemmas in simultaneity rather than by sequence or consequence (MacDougall 1994; Warren 2008:576). Film may be a response to the contemporary “affective turn” of sensual methodologies in research understanding (MacDougall 2006; Warren 2008) whilst also capturing and critiquing dimensions of power in interaction and giving direct expression to ethical challenges of the encounter with others (Baranbantseva and Lawrence 2015; Shapiro 2013; Sinnerbrink 2015). Film-making is far more than the unedited video recording or “documenting” of action (Höpfl and Letiche 2002; Letiche and Moriceau 2019) and rather than being a representation of reality it is more of a “refraction” of it (Mullarkey 2009) or even a quasi-real “cousin” to it (Frampton 2006)[[2]](#endnote-2). The more we understand the processes and workflows involved the better we might reveal its potentialities across different research settings and lifecycles.

In what follows I will discuss filmmaking in terms of three broad, sequential but not hermetically sealed, phases of activity and the practical and intellectual challenges and possibilities that these present: pre-production, production and post-production. I will discuss as we go how these phases merged in the creation of the film *Black Snow* (Linstead 2017), an output funded by a grant[[3]](#footnote-1) from the UK Heritage Lottery Fundin partnership with the charity People and Mining and the National Union of Mineworkers, the purpose of which was to support a broader commemorative and educational intiative by making a short historical documentary. On December 12/13, 1866, 361 men and boys were killed in an explosion at the Oaks Colliery in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, UK (Harvey 2016; Elliott 2006). Despite being the world's worst industrial loss of life in the 19th century, it remained relatively unremembered until 2015, when a group of ex-miners, trade unionists, and local historians attempted to raise money to erect a memorial for its 150th anniversary. Included in the grant was provision for doctoral-level intern to advise on the diverse range of historical resources the film needed to draw on, including contested accounts of the numbers of dead involved, and divergent versions of the exact cause of the initial explosion. What emerged was a contradictory set of accounts with no definitive version of events – the two official reports laid on Parliament on May 7 1867 largely concurred but favoured different causes (shotfiring, which would have been the responsibility of management, v. a faulty lamp, which would have been the responsibility of the workers), and although Parliament accepted the number of dead as being 361, there was no definitive list of names, and none of the lists that existed verified that total (and those that existed were fraught with error). Remembering the disaster was therefore challenged by a degree of uncertainty as to what exactly was being remembered. This was a practical issue for the memorial, as the volunteers and donors wanted to see a definitive list of names “carved in stone”. But first, they had to attempt to determine what happened, and to whom.

Access was enabled to a range of sources held in local libraries, private collections and the NUM archive, many of which had not been consulted, and a number of documents were made available to the public for the first time as we digitised them in the process of carrying out our research. The film emerged from a process that was both organic and disciplined, artistic and technological, narratively both creative and precise, as a 23 minute documentary that tells three interlocking stories: the story of a historical community devastated by the disaster, struggling to survive; the story of a contemporary community, decimated by the loss of industry, rediscovering itself in the struggle to remember; and the story of a sculptor, struggling to make one last masterpiece, finding that he was also caught up in the historical narrative. It offers an emotional narrative that seeks to explore history as a living phenomenon in the present and gives an account of an extraordinary achievement by ordinary people. Local ex-miners and their families were used to voice historical characters, share their stories, guide us both above and below ground. and even recreate the disaster itself through Virtual Reality footage. As an award-winning research documentary that has received scholarly, industry and public recognition [[4]](#endnote-3) [[5]](#endnote-4) As far as can be determined by methods currently available, its various modes have had around 7 million views/reads/listens to date. Film is taken seriously as research by a broad spectrum of consumers.it can serve as a strong example of how traditional field and archive research techniques and new creative technologies can mutually inform a social product that is more than the sum of its parts that is able to stand alone as a research product.

**Pre-production: Opening Out, Gathering Up and Seeing Through**

Before going further, it is worth commenting briefly on some issues related to the composition of the film. Film is not only a visual method: it is sensually immersive, playing with vision, sound and a sense of place to evoke feeling alongside thought. When the film genre is documentary, it is ironic that film itself does little actual “documenting” of history, and to the extent that it does it often comes close to being unwatchable. Nevertheless, news documentary can catch events unfolding at a particular time, from a particular perspective, and although it can only film one angle at a time, the documentarian can take a range of voices into account. Some documentaries may follow this genre and impose the presence of a narrator, sometimes the documentarian themselves, to act as an interlocutor to elicit testimony or comment on events, fill gaps in testimony, or cover temporal narrative sweeps. They may use an “expert” narrator/presenter to guide analysis. Others, like the classic documentaries of the British School inspired by Grierson, use only what their respondents give to them in “actuality”. Ethnographic documentaries, focusing on the experience of the other, find the latter style more reciprocal, responsible and convincing.

My training is in ethnographic documentary, but in *Black Snow* there is some displacement and extension of the classic “following people around with a camera” mode that characterises ethnographic documentary. There’s less fly-on-the-wall or even fly-in-the soup about the style I adopt than fly-talking-to-other-flies-about-soup, fly-trying-to-create-a-world-that-was-real-for-long-dead-flies and fly-trying-to-make-a-bit-of-art-for-non-flies. The kind of film I try to make is what I have called a critically affective performative text – a text being a weave of different materials, a texture, rather than simply a two-dimensional written text. It is critical in that it explores difference, discrimination, distinction and their consequences in a world imbued with power relations. It is performative because it is an active intervention that tries to move others to change, and to act, to at least to consider new options. And it is affective because it uses affect as the vehicle to energise that movement – it emotes an internal instability that points towards external social reconfiguration. General aesthetic compositional principles – the aesthetics, poetics, ethics and politics of the work - for critically affective performance texts including film are discussed in Linstead (2018), and broader issues of affective ethnography in organization studies are explored in complementarity by Gherardi (2018), so I won’t expand on them here. Ethnographic film is field based and hence empirical, but it also uses artistic processes to achieve the effects it needs in order to enable others not simply to understand the stories it weaves together, but to share in the experience of those stories – it is a form of *empirical art* (Lawrence 2019; see also Wood et al 2018). And it’s worth noting that not all stories lend themselves to such treatment – part of the skill of filmmaking is knowing what *not* to film, and only filming that which is best treated *through* film. As Gagliardi (1990: 31) expressed it:

… what we have “felt” that the natives “feel” can only be given in a way that enables our audience to “feel” and it demands that we use our creative imaginations. The aesthetic experience should be transmitted in ways consonant with its nature.

There are lots of academic documentaries available that exploit audiovisual technologies as a form of representation that can communicate scholarly interventions in new and creative ways. Less often, however, do they consider and make explicit the role of the camera as a primary research tool, and the role of the researcher/filmmaker in navigating this research process. Typically they are films are heavily reliant on interviews, most often are guided and directed by the researcher/director with the intention of leading to answers to specific questions around their research agenda (without this necessarily appearing to be the case). Less confident aspects of the research process, such as self-reflexivity, doubt, open-endedness, and confusion of the researcher/filmmaker are less present. Some filmmakers may follow the style of a Michael Moore and appear in front of the camera, talking to it, and often demonstrating engaging awkwardness and humility in doing so. But issues like doubt, conflict, ambiguity, and being torn between moral alternatives can become apparent through their *immanence* within the film, rather than their *appearance* in it. Doubt can be conveyed through the filmmaker’s art rather than being embodied in the person of a doubter; the effect of the camera can be communicated without the camera being shown or talked about in the film.

It would be misleading however to give the impression that the filmmaker is an auteur who uses a box of tricks to manipulate an audience into feelings that are, at best, a simulation (Wood and Brown 2012). With ethnographic documentary, the filmmaker immerses themselves in the lives of the people being “studied”, research being conducted, when appropriate but certainly not at all times, with camera-in-hand, on-shoulder or tripod. This immersion is vital, and is what differentiates this type of documentary from others. And this simultaneity has led to critics like David Hockney arguing that photography and film cannot be art because they lack the dimension of *time* in the creative process. Art matures, cameras depend on what’s there at the moment and available at the press of a button. But this is to rely on a rather condensed version of the time of production, and to ignore both the extensive interventions now possible in post-production and the importance of patience, vigil, preparation and duration in pre-production. Orientation and participation come first, and in order to “get” the culture it may be necessary not to film for some substantial time – or at least, not to film *activity*. The camera can be found less intrusive by participants if they are used to seeing it around – I personally shoot lots of context, background and atmosphere in the pre-production stages so that the onset of production is less disruptive. But in this time the documentarian is preparing both the scenario and the self – sharpening the eye, giving reign to inquisitiveness, sensing the pre-narrative elements as well as the narrative resources that might be teased into the final weave.

Pre-production is also a matter of *opening out –* showing people who you are, listening to them and their stories, opening up to their feelings, learning how to curate and care for their lives in your art. As you share their vulnerabilities, you become vulnerable too – you hurt when they hurt - and as Ruth Behar (1996) states, you become a vulnerable observer (Barabantseva and Lawrence 2015). Photographer Don McCullin (1994: 96) expands:

Photography for me is not looking, it's feeling. If you can't feel what you're looking at, then you're never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures.

All I would add is that this feeling doesn’t fade – when you are editing, and re-editing, endlessly, or watching the film in screenings, presentations, competition, or even on TV, the integrity of the original reaction persists in its return. You remain vulnerable, and that is, in my view, one source of the art. One reason that it is so important that you feel *with*, rather than bear witness *to*, is that in working with people you can sense their mood and their feelings and devise whatever approaches or strategies you need to, in order to draw them out, but to help and support them as they do come out and become vulnerable, entering what Poulos (2009) calls “hierophanic spaces”. In contrast to Clifford Geertz’s pursuit of “thick description”, Poulos argues for uncovering conditions where the metaphorical ice – and the psychological defence narrative – wears thin, often dangerously so, and the hierophanic space is the zone people enter when something seems about to break through: and sometimes does, right in front of the camera. If you are trying to sense and seduce responses from your fellow participants – for they are your collaborators in a very real sense – emotion and creative responses to that emotion, the boundaries between researcher and subject need to blur. And if they show themselves to be vulnerable before your lens, that’s the greatest honour they can pay you.

Art photographer Tom Wood in a TV documentary relates a discussion of the differences between visual/narrative styles with a documentary photographer. The documentarian who argued that he followed what he perceived to be the story, and if great images emerged from that journey he considered it a bonus. Wood in contrast was arrested by compelling images framing experience, and once these were gathered together he looked for the stories that emerged from the rhythms within them. A documentary filmmaker needs to do both – films are dynamic and although the flow of ethnographic filming challenges you to follow the action, films also need still or dwell images for all sorts of purposes. These include scene setting, thematic linking, and providing arresting punctuation for a change of mood or dramatic turn of events. Satisfying this need is the *gathering-up* aspect of the pre-production stage. You read everything you need to read to prepare for the field, to anticipate stories, to learn about settings; you roam around the area(s) where you might want to film, identifying sites and spots and angles of interest, places that evoke a particular mood, sites of unusual colour; you accumulate as much context as possible – shooting on your phone can give you reference footage to come back and film properly later; and you gather other material – documents, photographs, objects, archive footage – because you are image hungry. The images you collect are an investment – you may not use more than a fraction of them, but they give you editorial options and the ability to follow where your stories might lead. As you accumulate your information, you can start to identify potential story lines, and images that have the power to punctuate those storylines, and you may need to write some elements too (although if you are an academic, beware, because we can turn anything into text and have a fatal tendency to over-elaborate and over-explain – see Veer 2014). We need to learn to think non-verbally, to respond to images rather than depictions, light and sound rather than words.

That done, you can set up a shooting schedule which may be a combination of real-time participant involvement in events, close concentration on specific processes or skills (especially work), dedicated high quality filming of specific settings or contexts, or some quasi-studio interviews. Whilst you need to be very precise in your planning and technical arrangements, and have a clear view of how things might connect and unfold, you also need to be open to new directions and emergent opportunities – films contain a lot of serendipity and improvisation, and are much the better for it. This is what I call *seeing through* – seeing and sensing what’s around, but simultaneously seeing beyond and anticipating the effects certain footage might have on the whole narrative all the way through. Visual “call-backs” can establish rhythm, and an image based rhetoric or line of critique (through juxtaposition, for example). You might end up going down some dead ends, but it’s a price well worth paying. The more research you put in to this phase the better, but it’s not fully sequential – if you see something, shoot it. Always have some sort of camera handy. If you have a pro “shoot and scoot” videocam setup in the back of the car, you’ll never be caught out. Be poised.

**Production: Process, People, Problem-solving and****Making *Black Snow***

What exactly is it that we are aiming to produce when we make a film? The fatal temptation for academics who are steeped in textuality, even those who understand intertextuality, is to make a visual paper – one that relies on text, on verbalization, on rational sequentialist and consequentialist structures, even to the point of replicating an introduction, literature review, methods section, data presentation, analysis and conclusions. Working with a professional producer or cinematographer in the production phase is a good antidote to this, but as ever, experience (and failure) is the best teacher. Some academics take a film-of-the-book/book-of-the-film approach, producing a paper that either supplements the film (such as a critical commentary) or is supplemented by the film (richer data) – this symbiotic relationship has dominated the management and organization studies field for the purposes of research assessment (Berkeley et al 2016; Salovaara and Wood 2019: Wood 2015; Wood and Brown 2011; Wood and Rowlins 2016; Wood et al 2016; 2018). But films can be seen as part of what is termed a/r/tography (A-Art, R-Research,T- Teaching) in which concepts rather than methods are the currency that blends the three activities (Irwin 2013; Irwin et al 2006; Springgay et al 2005;2008) . In contrast to the positive divisions of rationalistic methods

loss, shift, and rupture are foundational concepts or metonyms for a/r/tography. They create openings, they displace meaning, and they allow for slippages. Loss, shift, and rupture create presence through absence, they become tactile, felt, and seen (Springgay et al 2005: 898).

Now loss, shift, rupture and absent presence resonate very closely with what I have been attempting to evoke and engage in my two documentaries, *These Fragments* and *Black Snow* and are integral to the production process. They are elusive and fragile, and can easily be ossified by a process that is too rigid, too structured. Furthermore, they are not something “out there” – they may exist only as a haunting, a sense within a person that needs to be gently drawn out. If cinemas are, as Manet said “haunted houses”, documentary directors are mediums rather than ghost hunters. And whilst a production set up is no séance, it may require a lightness of touch to succeed. Phelan and Rogoff (2001) regard this as a condition of interdisciplinarity, in which they stress the “inter” – it is not a set of cumulated positives, but a space of “being without”. By this they don’t mean to imply lack, or negation, or denial or passivity, or rejection of past efforts or achievements but an active space where it is recognised that existing methodologies are insufficient, whilst resisting the formation of specific criteria for their replacement (that would inevitably also be insufficient). As they put it this “without” (in its dual sense of both not possessing and being outside) or “in-between” terminology “intimates process rather than method and alludes to a condition in which you might find yourself while doing work” (Phelan & Rogoff, 2001:34). In other words, it’s how you act in the production process.

The “in-between” is “the locus for social, cultural and natural transformations: it is not simply a convenient space for movements and realignments but in fact the only place – the place around identities, between identities” (Elizabeth Grosz cited in Springgay et al 2008: xx). With the in-between as its centre of gravity, or rather weightlessness:

A/r/tography is a research methodology that entangles and performs what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) refer to as a rhizome.  A rhizome is an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum.  The rhizome operates by variation, perverse mutation, and flows of intensities that penetrate meaning, […] It is an interstitial space, open and vulnerable where meanings and understandings are interrogated and ruptured.  Building on the concept of the rhizome, a/r/tography radically transforms the idea of theory as an abstract system” (Springgay et al 2008:.xx)

The in-between is exactly where a/r/tography is situated,  “where theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication intentionally unsettles perception and knowing through living inquiry.” (Springgay et al : xxi). Now that unsettling doesn’t have to be shocking or painful for its audience, but its intentionality is to *move* its audience, without necessarily being too directive regarding where the movement should take them (Linstead 2018).

It follows that a film should do what other media cannot – at least, not on their own. A film tells a story, or stories, with light and sound, in different location in a finite amount of time. The proposed length of the film governs the amount and types of preparation needed and may also affect the ambitions the director has for the film. A commercial feature film will commonly be edited to around 104 minutes, but could be anything from 90 – 120, even longer. But if you are hoping to place it in cinemas, don’t make it too short or too long. Very short films of less than 15 minutes will have a better chance of being shown at festivals in combination with other films, but will find it hard to get a TV slot. For TV, 23 minutes will get you into a half hour programme slot giving the broadcaster room for breaks, top and tail announcements etc. Longer features are not only harder to place, but are a real test of every aspect of the filmmaker’s skill: rhythm, timing, variations of scene and light, sound and music need not only to tell the story but keep the audience’s interest for almost two hours. Few people would read a book or an article with their full attention for two hours straight. Budgetary constraints or contractual issues may already have determined which category you are filming in, but there may still be some room for manoeuvre or decisions to make even if broadcast is not the objective – a 24 minute film that should have been 22 minutes drains its own energy and loses impact. Those decisions can be left to post-production, but it is helpful to be aware of the need to maintain discipline within to production to make these processes easier.

From pre-production the director should have developed ideas about the story or stories that are to be focused on, the context or contexts and locations for those stories, practices and processes that feature strongly in those stories, supporting materials and artefacts, people to be interviewed to carry the story along, and any live action/events to be followed. Any ethical issues should have been anticipated and dealt with as far as possible, and any political issues or tensions addressed. However, production is where ethics and politics become live and emergent, and in many ways that is how the filmmaker wants them. Veer (2014) separates the roles into three: the *ethnographer* who collects and analyses data associated with a culture; the *videographer* who collects video data to support that analysis; and the *filmmaker* who creates the story to be communicated to others for knowledge, entertainment or both. Whilst I can see how identifying these roles can be useful, in my practice they are never fully separable. They exist in a fluctuating balance, emerging in mutuality. I’m also reluctant to talk about “data” that are “analysed” – research video recordings might fall into this category, even some documentary work, but there is too much of a tendency to displace the art with a form of science through this rhetoric.

For example, when filming *Black Snow* I discerned three narrative arcs. One was the story of a present community, that had suffered terribly from the politically motivated economic and cultural cleansing of the previous three decades since the 1984-5 Miners’ Strike, from which the scars were still present and some were unhealed. There was the story of a past community, that experienced and survived a cataclysmic disaster, which was quickly suppressed for political reasons and almost forgotten for the best part of 150 years. These were linked by the efforts of the former to memorialise the latter. The third story was the story of an internationally recognised sculptor, who lived locally, at the end of his career, working to create one final masterpiece climaxing with the unveiling of his unusual statue – not of miners, but of a mother and child, the survivors left to carry the community forward. My design was to open the film with a sequence that would introduce the three stories that would interweave through a triple helix structure before standing alongside each other at the end of the film. The use of sound and sound effects would be important to enriching these stories, to enhancing and crfeating tension as would be music at key points, but the idea again was to use music poignantly rather than dramatically, with only naturalistic sound effects used to enhance drama.

The settings we chose would be historical, but necessarily as they are now, supplemented by photographs or illustrations from the press of the time, and we had to create very high quality images of these sources and a number of artefacts, from two public museums and two private archives. This took a great deal of planning and coordination, and sourcing of specialist lighting equipment for some shoots. Even where the source material was less than perfect, if the image was of good quality we could correct flaws in post-production. A historically important banner had a huge rip in it, but we were able to stitch it back together in Photoshop with such success that it now appears on the opening page of the National Union of Mineworkers’ website, and a range of T-shirts.

The story of the present community we could tell with interviews, and a small amount of footage of events (our original shooting plans had to be modified because of ill health) but the story of the past was contained in archives, documents, letters, and press reports. Worse, there was no historical consensus on the facts. A volunteer project was being run by a local council initiative, the Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership, who had received Heritage Lottery Funding to curate a museum exhibition (*When the Oaks Fired*) and wanted to determine the names and roles of the victims, which took over 4000 hours of research into the previously unaccessed registrar’s archives. Historically since the 1980s relations between the NUM, who were supporting the memorial appeal, and the Council were less than cordial and at times fraught but to make the film it was necessary not only to work with both groups but to achive some collaboration. The figure for the number of victims lodged in Parliament in 1867 was 361. This had been arrived at with some difficulty as there was no formal record kept by management of who was down the pit at any one time. But there was no list of names to go with this figure. Several lists were in existence that had appeared in local and even national papers, some being created privately and numbers varied from 344 to 360. Not one had 361. Worse, the lists were replete with duplications and errors. When the DVLP researchers came up with a potential new list of 383 names, and the Council PR department sensationalised it somewhat, the NUM and local mining historians were more than concerned. I was able to provide an intern, a PhD candidate from our Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past, to evaluate the various sources and bring the parties together for a discussion. We came up with a traffic light scheme based on probability and strength of evidence: although there was no definitive list possible, there was much greater clarity than there had been in the past, and I was able to continue with my plans to interview people from both sides in a way that had them sitting alongside each other applauding at the cinema premiere.

That said, we couldn’t interview everyone because of time constraints – we didn’t have the funding to shoot more than six full days, and the interviewees were not always available when the venues were. We could have interviewed more people and for longer, but as it was we had much more material than we could use, in all around 40 hours for a 25 minute film – which is not unusual. It does raise another issue for production – it is important to ensure that there are enough charged batteries for cameras, lights and any condenser microphones, and enough data storage for each day’s shoot. We shot in full HD, around 42Gb a day. Shooting in 4k would have required 6 times as much space, which would have needed a 256Gb card (in fact, 2, because it is advisable to run a live backup in case of failure). The creative process can be severely disrupted if you run out of charge or data capacity.

One objective of the interviews was to use some of the interviewees, who were enthusiasts and experts on mining history, to tell both their own stories and part of the historical story, illuminating technical aspects of the conditions. Several of the interviews were done in the Miners’ Hall, a building that was erected a handful of years after the disaster, and which had a very spiritual, quasi-religious interior, festooned with colourful banners some of which were more than a century old. With the aid of the caretaker, we were able to select as background banners whose colours suited the mood of each interview, even the complexion of the interviewee in some cases. We found a former pit-pony driver amongst the volunteers and filmed him discussing the role of ponies in the pits, whilst feeding a former workhorse in its stable, which was a lead-in to a story, told by a different ex-miner, dressed in 19th century mining gear, of a survivor shielded from certain death by his donkey. Enhanced by the atmosphere, the interviews were often passionate and emotional affairs, and led to what is perhaps the most memorable sequence of the film. Here the sculptor, Graham Ibbeson, has revealed that in the course of making the statue he discovered that on an old print held by the NUM archive there was a woman and child in the identical pose that he had modelled. We emphasised this by filming a full-size resin copy of the statue within the Miners’ Hall, with atmospheric lighting, with the camera rotating around the statue on a tripod rather perilously mounted on a small rolling rack that was normally used to move the statue itself. As Graham is talking, the film fades between the image of the woman on the print to the camera revealing the identical pose as it rotates around the statue.

This sense of otherworldliness is called back in the long end sequence when Graham emotionally talks about his personal emotional investment in the sculpture and the importance of the community and breaks down, unable to continue for a moment. It would have been easy to stop there let him compose himself and re-record, but both Andy Lawrence and I saw in Graham’s eyes that he did not want that to happen. He really was laying himself bare in those moments. As he mastered his emotions, his voice, still on the edge of cracking, brought added power to his words. Repeatedly at showings people comment that they cried with him. But the point is not simply to move people out of pity – he is making an argument about community, as well as art, and this transmits so much more effectively with the emotional content.

In order to bring the voices of the historical community in the archives to life on the screen, I created a slightly poetic script based on extracts from testimony but put into the mouths of characters – two women, two men, and one vicar (who had been the only person to challenge the mine-owners, such was their political power. I chose people I had known for some time, who I knew had the ability to do this (performing and teaching experience) but who had distinctive accents from the area (but that were also themselves different). This lent an added sort of authenticity to the sequences. One of the women I wrote as the voice of the woman in the statue, so that subtly every time she speaks she sutures past and present together. For footage to go under the voices we used a combination of historical images and virtual reality sequences that recreated the pit both above and below ground at the time of the explosion. Illustrate the conditions at the time, we were given permission to do an early morning shoot in the mine at the National Coal Mining Museum for England, where we were able to film a descent and ascent, and a former miner explained to a 12 year old boy (the same age as some of those killed) how the coal was got and what the dangers were. Again tight planning was necessary, as we were only allowed on the pit top at 8 am, had to have our own equipment safety checked, then be issued with underground safety equipment, descend, set up lighting and sound underground, film, crack the setup down and ascend before the public tours began at 10 am. In situations like this, the technical provision must be foolproof.

Even so, once you start the production process people will respond and come up with ideas – sometimes they just say things that you hear and it works its way into your thinking. You should seek their opinions frequently without losing your grip on your vision. The production decisions we made owed a lot to the participants during interviews or other filming – the idea about the miner wearing authentic costume came from the ex-miners themselves; the idea about the ponies came because I bumped into the former pony minder on an earlier visit to film artefacts. He told me he had popped up some carrots for Ernie (the pony) and asked him if he thought he would be allowed to film with the pony. Lots of practical solutions to issues of sound and light insulation came from the volunteers. The inclusion of the voice of the local MP which begins the film came from a conversation with another volunteer who was complaining about a YouTube clip in which the MP got the facts about the disaster wrong. It was in many ways a collective project, even if sometimes an accidental one.

Not everything you plan works out once production starts, but that may be no bad thing. I wanted, as an opening scene, a fly-over of the site of the original explosion. I looked on the internet to see if anyone nearby was doing similar drone work, and found an ex-miner who had done some good quality flyovers close to the site. I contacted him and he offered to do the job for me, we met and got on well, and took a stroll around the site, identifying appropriate lines of flight in order to avoid power and phone lines, or intruding into what were now workspaces on an industrial estate. By the time we had sent the drone up and checked the route, the light was too poor to get the quality footage we needed, so we came back the next day. At this point, the drone refused to get off the ground and has remained inert ever since. However, he told me that he was working on some virtual reality environments for the museum exhibition, and he could create a historical flyover within one of these environments to export as as film footage which I could then edit. We spent some time over a couple of days identifying angles and speeds of approach - adding much more value than my original idea.

**Post-production: editing-as-critique for an affective strategy**

After shooting finishes – or more accurately when you reach a point where you have done enough shooting to make editing meaningful, which could be as early as the first day – you have lots of raw footage, carefully sorted by day of shooting and a series of neatly ordered folders containing all your other material. All this is backed up in three other places. If production is an intensive engagement bodily and relationally, post production, which takes as long as the other two phases and could take longer (actually it could never end!) is intensive for the head – brain, eyes, ears – and heart. You have to get immersed in the material and if it is good enough it will affect and continue to affect you – if a section stops working for you emotionally then it won’t work for others. Quality will always work. But you are also attending to the tiniest of details – frame by frame and syllable by syllable at times. Editing is a form of self-critique and can be very painful, because you have to cut lots of your work, and even some of your best images if they do not work within the flow of the narrative or narratives. In the intense visual environment of film, “clutter” quickly reveals itself - but a collateral benefit was that I became a much better editor of my own textual work

Let’s take a look at the opening sequence of the film to see how this unfolded. The sequence begins with a black screen and a rising vocal background hubbub leading into a flyover of the House of Commons which sets the context before the voice of local MP Dan Jarvis is heard asking a parliamentary question about remembering the Oaks Colliery disaster, on the day of its 150th anniversary. Not only does this economically convey useful information, it signals the importance of the event. Seconds in, we know that there is a political dimension to the disaster, and that it has national significance. The idea for this came from the conversation with an ex-miner I previously mentioned, but the YouTube clip of the MP speaking in Parliament was not of sufficient quality to be usable. However, it was possible to acquire an audio version of good quality of the whole Parliamentary session from the House of Commons website and after a few emails to get a licence to edit and use it in the film. Dan was about three and a quarter hours in. Having edited the audio clip there was one problem – the parliamentary microphones are highly directional and pick up no background noise, so the voice sounds flat and without presence. Now MPs are normally quiet when some is speaking in regard to ordinary business but in order to give the impression of a full house I needed subdued low level background speech. In order to get this I had to search the day’s proceedings to find a vote, or division, at which point members enter the lobby and talk amongst themselves quite loudly. Happily there was one, and selecting a section that had no extraneous noises like bells, gavels, doors or shouts, I was able to add it to a track under Dan’s speech and drop the level to a murmur. The sound still wasn’t full enough so I added another track and moved it along a little to fill the soundholes spaces in the previous track. When I got the right sense of spatiality I left it. I then had to find visuals to accompany the speech, and happily Adobe were willing to sell me some of their stock footage for less than the train fare to London and I was able to edit that to suit my purposes. This took about a day to get right. The result is 30 seconds of finished film.

We then fade the Speaker’s answer to Jarvis, which was not in any sense interesting, and fade in our own footage: some landscape and the headstock of the mine that effectively was the successor to the Oaks Colliery, and is the only headgear still surviving in the area. A piano riff comes in as a black frame with 25 words informs us of the date, time and number of deaths in the first explosion, then a second slide with even fewer words on the second explosion that killed the rescuers, followed by a third that mentions the attempt to create a memorial in 2015. This then shifts to a figure walking over a hill (the former spoil heap of the colliery, about 250 metres from the shafts of the original Oaks) as the words to the song come in. The song is significant to the theme of the film, as it is a song about miners wives, the “women who wait”, one of whom was the subject of the memorial statue. The song was written by a former miner in the 1950s, who gave us permission to rearrange and record it for the film, so it aurally keys in the importance of the feminine to the film. As the figure crosses the hillside the scene morphs into a virtual reality approach to the old Oaks Colliery, a journey now back in time. The voice of the woman in the statue then comes in, with a photographic image of the Oaks miners’ cottages (which still stand) and a VR traverse of the headstock. The female character, based on testimony given at the time, introduces us to the emotional storyline and why the pit was full of men that day – because they were working for their Christmas pay-packet, for their children - who would soon be orphaned. This is the first 1’30” of the film. Although the script elements were written and recorded it was sometimes necessary to cut a sentence here and there to better maintain the pace. The process is one of fitting sound to image and image to sound in the service of the story – maintaining or developing interest, tension, mood, rhythm, contrasts, narrative turns and overall shape. It is hard to estimate the amount of time taken to edit a sequence of this length as there are often repeated adjustments to be made to sound or coloration, and once the first edit of the whole is complete, that is often just a rough or assemble edit which gets repeatedly refined. However, the overall complexity of structure is set by the first edit, and elements raised in the early part of the film will be recalled and echoed in later parts. Essentially the main elements issues and contrasts need to be introduced within the first few minutes, then developed and given more depth in the next phase. New elements, nuances, paradoxes, changes, surprise turns, increasing problems develop in the third phase, and finally some form of resolution, accommodation or final challenge is presented in the concluding part. However, given the unexpected turn of events with Graham’s emotional scene, and the fact that little could meaningfully follow that, there is a delayed emotional spike in the last phase which of course was created in the edit.

Interviews carry the bulk of the information in the film, and no matter how well they are filmed, they are bedevilled by the fact that people do not speak in sentences and often don’t allow themselves enough time to breathe or think. Even though as a director you can relax them and encourage them to pause when they need to, to give you editing space, they will rarely do it. And because pronunciation slides from word to word, especially in dialect, the way a word sounds changes with its context, so edits are not easy. I have spent hours searching and interview for a speaker to provide the right alternative voicing of a simple article like “the” to drop in elsewhere and rescue a whole phrase. Sometimes the feel of a phrase, and whether it is rushed or not, can be changed by the addition of a half syllable or half second here and there. The cumulative effect is on the imperceptible smoothness of the film, where it needs to be smooth, which makes it easier to watch, and makes the dramatic irruptions more effective. A side benefit is that in my non-film interviews I have become a much better and more attentive listener.

A challenge for filming historical events based on archive materials, with no budget to dramatically recreate scenes, is to bring the archive alive, and we were able to use special effects. These are time consuming to produce but can be very effective. They also allow reconfigurations of space and different points of view to be utilised, both within and beyond the typology offered by Mengis et al (2018).[[6]](#endnote-5) Changing senses of space are important in establishing the rhythm of the film through expansions and contractions of vision, intensifications and relaxations of attention, and focalisations of thought. One sequence of scenes takes us underground into a pit of similar age to the Oaks with an example of a face worked in the same way as the Oaks. We shot a steam engine from a similar period that was still in situ but not operational, then made a descent in the modern cage down the original shaft. By adding historical sound effects (edited and combined into a “special” effect by myself) over shots of the engine against the sky, then moving directly into the descent whilst maintaining continuity of sound effects, and shooting through the modern cage to the ancient wall dripping with water, we were able to achieve a consistency with the change of space that viscerally took the viewer inside the experience of the voice over (both the descent and the original script were edited for maximal effect after repeated viewings).The underground semi-lit sequence led into a VR sequence that gave the viewer the eyes of a trapped miner, panicking and looking this way and that for a line of escape as explosions occurred on all sides, picking his way over the bodies of ponies. We then moved above ground to a real-life pony minder with a pony and ended the sequence with a story of a life-saving animal, a sense of both sacrifice and uplift. One four objectives was to bring out the contrasts and conflicts in both evidence and experience, *without* resolving these tensions, staying within the undecided space of the rhizome but emphasising the intellectual challenges by bursts of affective intensity.

Whilst post-production is mostly characterised by late nights in the editing suite, it is important to get other eyes on the film, or sequences from it, as often as possible. The rhizome can be very helpful to the edit. We also arranged a test viewing of the first finished edit with our team of volunteers, which allowed us to judge audience reaction to sequences, and we were fortunate enough to have funding for a “premiere” in a wonderful 1940s restored cinema to a full house of 400 people from the regional mining community. This premiere was in fact a final test screening and was invaluable as we were able to use a questionnaire with the audience to get some qualitative and quantitative feedback. We also knew that we had a cross-section of the community in the audience, and we had already sent viewing copies to a broad demographic of friends, relatives, colleagues and acquaintances, from children to pensioners. Once a final mix is tied down for both sound and vision, it becomes technically much harder to change – scenes overlap and bleed into each other and a small change in one area may require changes in several others. This was particularly true with tech fixes for the virtual reality scenes which required the removal of small green lightning bolts that appeared from time to time as a side effect of movement of the headset when recorded. We needed to know that the content worked with the audience before undertaking the additional work. In the end we did 5 days of raw re-recording in the VR suite which engendered a further 2 weeks of final film editing of special effects and sound. But by this time were knew that it would work as we wanted it to with an audience. And again, I found myself thinking about audiences anew when engaging with my textual work and my teaching.

**Getting out of the theatre and into impact: A rhizomatic conclusion**

After watching a film – and I’m one of those who stays in right till the end watching all the credits (there’s a clue to that in the end credits of *Black Snow* so watch it until the very end) – I’m usually reflective until I stumble out blinking into the light. That won’t happen this week as we’re being shown in a city centre on an outdoor screen as part of a big festival. But the reason I feel that way is because film engages me mentally and corporeally and sets off connections, memories, inspirations, and quandaries that come from and go off in all directions as it becomes *my* film rather than the director’s. This is the working out of the rhizomatic process, and a well-made film is one form which we can continue to draw.

Whilst an academic article may be something we feel compelled to defend, and we humans do have the potential to be defensive about almost anything, very early on in the filmmaking process I realised that film is a gift, something that is made to be given away in a way that an academic article is not. By the time you have been through peer review of your journal paper and have incorporated suggestions that you don’t agree with but feel compelled to courteously thank the anonymous reviewers for, you may not even feel its yours any more. But with film, the connection is all important. Even when the engagement with others is difficult, it is palpably rewarding. It surprises you, It changes your frame. It gives back. You make a difference to people beyond the 23 minutes that you have them in front of the screen, and that process changes you in many ways, sometimes dramatically, sometimes subtly – and yes, you can call it impact.

After post-production you realise there are issues of distribution and getting your film seen by people. Entering festivals is costly, and you get little if any qualitative feedback, but getting selections and even wins is a massive boost for your confidence. However, the success rate is modest for research films as the competition tends to be industry-oriented. Even *Black Snow* has a success rate of only 30-35%. 20% is good, but even 1% is worth it. So you do learn some emotional resilience as part of the process, and it has helps in dealing with journal peer reviewers. In our case we picked up a Best Paper award from an academic conference into the bargain! However, the greatest benefit in getting your film out there by hook or by crook, whether to academic conferences, research seminars, local social clubs, film clubs or political groups is the discussion that you generate about the ideas with people from all walks of life who are thoroughly emotionally engaged – not just by the content and techniques but by the incipience of what is yet to come. Knowing that the film I have made is backed up by research done both before and during the process of production; that it will energise others to do more research in the future; and that it may help contribute to individual and social change in similar communities is a thoroughly humanising process, and one that a field that studies human organization would benefit from embracing wholeheartedly.

Although it might not appear so, especially from a LERCAT perspective, to be doing theory, making film in this way is a form of theorizing – as Bergson might put it, casual organization theory. This offers enormous scope for the rhizomatic integration of a range of humanities into management and organizational thought, without the risk of foreclosing moral or intellectual outcomes.

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1. *theory* (n.)1590s, "conception, mental scheme," from Late Latin *theoria* (Jerome), from Greek *theōria* "contemplation, speculation; a looking at, viewing; a sight, show, spectacle, things looked at," from *theōrein* "to consider, speculate, look at," from *theōros* "spectator," from *thea* "a view" (see theatre) + *horan* "to see," which is possibly from PIE root **\****wer***-** (3) "to perceive."

   Earlier in this sense was *theorical* (n.), late 15c. Sense of "principles or methods of a science or art" (rather than its practice) is first recorded 1610s (as in *music theory*, which is the science of musical composition, apart from practice or performance). Sense of "an intelligible explanation based on observation and reasoning" is from 1630s. (*Online Etymological Dictionary* <https://www.etymonline.com/word/theory> accessed June 7th 2019) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. That doesn’t mean that it categorically does *not* represent reality. Nichols (1991:32) identifies four modes by which documentary can represent reality: expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive. But the real is always shot through with fantasy. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. OH-15-6509 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
4. This includes the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Arts and Humanities Research Council *Research in Film Awards* 2018, held at BAFTA, *Best Research Film* Award. The film has proved more than a scholarly exercise having been featured in dedicated reports in the *Times*, a double page centre spread in the *Daily Mirror*, has a BBC Online page, was covered by BBC TV and ITV news, as well as BBC and Independent Radio, had its own TV run on the *Together Channel*, has been acquired for the *British Film Institute* Archive Collection, has gathered 60 festival selections and awards and was featured in a city centre free to the public open air screening over a week of the internationally renowned *Sheffield Doc/Fest* in 2019. A performance based roadshow featuring it has begun touring and has played the *Edinburgh Fringe,* and the roadshow/soundtrack CD has received and is receiving airplay and reviews. Film is taken seriously as research by a broad spectrum of consumers. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. As far as can be determined by methods currently available, its various modes have had around 7 million views/reads/listens to date. This figure is an estimate compiled from information from industry monitors including [*Audit Bureau of Circulations*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audit_Bureau_of_Circulations_(UK))(ABC) for press; ***Radio Joint Audience Research*** (RAJAR**); and** *Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board* (BARB) for TV. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. Mengis et al (2018) argue that documentary can take four points of view from configurations of camera angle and movement, forming what they call the Panoramic View, the American-Objective View, the Roving Point-of-View, and the Infra-Subjective View. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)