2 Trauma, Truth and the Environmental Documentary

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During the first decade of the twenty-first century, a host of environmental issues related to global warming, energy, pollution and our food supply became increasingly urgent even as US president George W. Bush and other world leaders refused to take them seriously. Documentary film-makers responded, and by the end of the decade, the environmental documentary had emerged as the pre-eminent genre in this nonfiction mode, at least in the US and Europe. The 2009 Sundance Film Festival screened six documentaries dealing with environmental issues and was described (mockingly in some cases) as the "green festival" (Cieply n.p.). These included Joe Berlinger's *Crude* (2009), Robert Stone's *Earth Days* (2009), *Dirt! The Movie* (directed by Bill Benenson, Gene Rosow and Eleonore Daily, 2009), Rupert Murray's *The End of the Line* (2009), John Maringouin's *Big River Man* (2009) and Louie Psihoyos's *The Cove* (2009), which would go on to win the Academy Award. This outpouring of top-flight environmental films was not unique to Sundance: A few months earlier, the 2008 Toronto Film Festival had showed Dan Stone's *At the Edge of the World* (2008), about radical members of the anti-whaling movement; Ben Kempas's *Upstream Battle* (2008), about Native Americans fighting to preserve the rivers and their culture of salmon fishing; and *Food, Inc.* (2008), which was nominated for an 2009 Academy Award and was considered by many to be *The Cove*'s major Oscar competition. There was also at least one Disney documentary, *Earth*, which was playing in overseas films festivals in 2007 and 2008 but was released in the US only in April 2009—on Earth Day.

Several aspects of this formation are of concern in this chapter. The first is historical: how to situate this explosion of environmental documentaries in relationship to an earlier history and pre-history. In this regard, Bill Nichols suggestion that documentary practice as a specific formation can be understood from three vantage points is helpful—through (1) the self-understanding of its practitioners, (2) the texts that are the product of that practice and (3) a constituency of viewers (Nichols, *Representing* 17–28). These elements are also at play in the formation of this now widely accepted genre. In this respect, the organizers of environmental film festivals have played a crucial role in its constitution over the last twenty years. We might

see these pioneering figures as active viewers who became members of the community of practitioners, which includes not just film-makers but critics, distributors, scholars and (of course) festival organizers. The dynamic formation of the environmental documentary has depended on the interactions between a rapidly changing documentary practice and a dynamic environmentalism, each with its own complex history.

A second area of investigation concerns the ways in which environmental documentaries are nonfiction instances of what Anil Narine calls eco-trauma cinema. In fact, these documentaries engage "the harm we, as humans, inflict upon our natural surroundings, or the injuries we sustain from nature in its unforgiving iterations." In some respects it has been easier to offer powerful instances of eco-trauma in fiction films such as *Soylent Green* (1973) or *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004). Although climate change, pollution and threats to our food supply may not yet have produced obvious traumas on a worldwide scale, these global crises often occur more locally or selectively as physical traumas to specific ecosystems. Many of the people who appear in environmental documentaries are traumatized by ecological events and devastation. Their lives have been upended, and they feel compelled to speak—to bear witness to their trauma often as a way to begin to take action and also begin the process of recover. As Judith Herman has noted,

> The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation.
>
> (133)

The film-makers capture their testimony, and while they may perform a therapeutic role, they typically have other, broader concerns. They are concerned with the bigger picture and the future implications and trajectories of these local instances. As a result they often rely on experts and public figures who are committed to environmental redress but do so from positions of relative distance and privilege. Certainly film-makers and their traumatized filmed subjects share a common urgency to grapple with the truths of their circumstances, which have been hidden, obscured and denied.

A third area of investigation involves a crucial concern—perhaps even a preoccupation—of documentary tradition: truth value. To what extent and in what ways have truth claims been mobilized in the environmental documentary? If these film-makers have been "crafting truth," to take the title of a recent book on documentary, what are the tropes of truth that have been running through the genre and are evident in particular texts? (See Spence and Navarro 2011.) Certainly truth value is not of equal urgency or evenly applicable to all documentaries. Whether Ross McElwee is a "true" counterpart to General William T. Sherman in *Sherman's March* (1986) is

a topic that is best confronted playfully. Yet for those documentaries that are concerned with environmental crises, which include localized traumas to discrete ecosystems as well as the looming threat of more global calamities such as global warming, the issue of truth has more immediate and profound relevance. Obviously a systematic pursuit of these three concerns would require book-length treatment rather than a brief chapter. So what follows is at best suggestive and inevitably guilty of gaps, oversights and elisions.

EVOKING THE HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTARIES

The rapid emergence of the environmental documentary as one of the paramount nonfiction genres has a long pre-history. Scenes of nature's grandeur such as Niagara Falls were among the earliest motion pictures made for projection and shown in theatres. When such films appeared individually on variety programs, they often evoked landscape painting of the nineteenth century; exhibitors, however, also organized these short films into documentary-like, nonfiction programs—then called illustrated lectures—that dealt with man's relationship to nature. E. Burton Holmes had taken numerous photographs during his visit to Yellowstone National Park in August 1896. When he first delivered his evening-length lantern-slide lecture on this subject in New York City (March 1898), Holmes concluded with "a number of motion pictures . . . showing several of the more noted geysers, the ridiculous, bubbling 'paint pots,' and several of the greater falls of the Yellowstone, which called forth warm applause" (Holmes n.p.). The park itself stood in critical relationship to the rapacious exploitation of nature and its natural resources, the foul water and air, the devastated landscapes that resulted from rapid industrialization. These programs probably offered a temporary escape from instances of local ecological trauma rather than a perspective from which to analyze them. They might assure people that pristine nature still existed for potential access and even that some kind of balance between the pristine and industrial development (the sublime and the practical) was in effect.

Holmes's "travel lectures," which survive in book form, can be too quickly dismissed as mere travelogues. In some ways they bear strong resemblance to recent documentaries in which "the documentarist readily becomes an autobiographical essayist who ponders the state of the world on a minimal budget, less interested in simply showing us the world then encouraging us to rethink it" (Romney qtd. in Chanan 12). His *The Yellowstone National Park* mobilized tropes of truth that merit closer analysis. First his photographic images offered a more accurate and detailed view of this wildlife preserve than had been generally available, because magazine and newspapers still largely used lithographic processes for their illustrations. Likewise, his films were more "truthful" than a range of static images

in that they could show geysers and other natural spectacles in motion—rather than (at best) suggest such motion. And while photographic images of the park were not unfamiliar, Holmes provided a remarkably elaborated view of the park—a more complete and therefore in some sense more truthful view of the world's first national park—in comparison to other representations. He had also experienced Yellowstone National Park first-hand, which gave his program rhetorical authority. Still difficult to reach by modern means of transportation, the park remained largely hidden to the outside world. Holmes was thus presenting his audience with a world that otherwise remained comparatively unknown and hidden (at one point during his travels through the park, Holmes used a raft to reach a more remote area). Similar kinds of conservationist programs—generally on national parks (often fully integrated slides and films but eventually entirely film)—were frequently offered over the next two decades.

As nonfiction practices developed and changed, subsequent programs became more explicitly part of the documentary tradition. The term "documentary" had become well-established by the mid-1930s. Pare Lorentz's *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937), the latter of which won the Best Documentary Award at the 1938 Venice Film Festival, took on environment issues from a new, more critical perspective. They showed images of the devastated American West—the dust bowl and denuded hillsides—that can be said to offer a counter truth, a critical understanding that was absent from the documentary views of national parks. They showed people victimized by these ecological disasters: their farms turned into wind-swept sand dunes, their homes ravaged by floods. Citizens may be shown, but they did not speak (Winston 269–287). The solution—damming the river to control floods and generate electrical power—concludes the latter film. Such themes also resonated through other American documentaries, such as Willard Van Dyke and Ralph Steiner's *The* City (1939) in which the polluted industrial landscape and the unlivable city are featured. The sorry state of the genre in the post–World War II era is best evidenced by the enthusiasm—evident to this day—for Robert Flaherty's *The Louisiana Story* (1948), which celebrated the drilling for oil in the pristine bayous of the Gulf Coast (Barsam 282–285).

Rachel Carson's ground-breaking bestseller *Silent Spring* (1962), which recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, not only did much to launch the modern environmental movement, it quickly generated *CBS Reports: The Verdict of the Silent Spring of Rachel Carson* (1963) and renewed documentary's commitment to critical perspectives in this area. The scientific reassurances of experts about the safety of DDT and other chemical poisons used to control pests and diseases were challenged, and new truths about their threat to the ecosystem were offered in their place. It was the depth and analysis of Carson's argument that convinced people that she was discussing what chemical corporations and the like were eager to keep hidden from view. Again she offered a counter truth to their easy-going reassurances.

Although it is important to trace a genealogy of the environmental documentary back into the late nineteenth century and then move forward into the mid twentieth century and beyond, these aforementioned achievements did not constitute a distinct, recognizable genre. Some were associated with the social issue documentary; others with the nature or wildlife documentary, which has flourished over the last eighty years. As Jan-Christopher Horak has explained, wildlife documentaries "were perceived to be an expansion of human vision, a means of entering into a world that was invisible to the human eye, an extension of the physical body of the subject, allowing for the creation of pleasure by bringing animals in their natural habitat closer to humans" (459). Almost all of them depict wildlife existing in an unspoiled state of nature, a world that has an ambiguous relationship to the real world of the spectator.

The establishment of a distinct identity for the environmental documentary involved a shift, reformulation and re-articulation as much as (perhaps more than) the appearance of something entirely new. Such an emergence must be understood in relationship to developments in the environmental movement as well as to documentary and moving-image practices. Earth Day, a day that is intended to inspire awareness and appreciation for the earth's natural environment, was launched in 1970; with it came documentaries such as Lincoln P. Brower's *The Flooding River* (1972), which challenged many of the "command and control" approaches to water management offered by Lorentz's *The River*. It differs stylistically as well. Rather than a narration relying on Lorentz's incantations in combination with Virgil Thomson's music, Brower delivers a dry, scientific explanation on camera in a slightly awkward style that forsakes rhetorical flourishes. It focuses on the Connecticut River Valley, offering a geomorphic-based approach to water control.[1] The trauma experienced by this ecosystem was to be abated by tearing down dams rather than building them. Likewise, in Japan Noriaki Tsuchimoto made the 167-minute *Minamata: The Victims and Their World* (1971), which focuses on the residents of Minamata, many of whom were born deformed or suffered damage to their nervous systems due to the consumption of fish containing abnormal amounts of mercury released into the sea by a fertilizer factory (see Marzani 1972).[2]

Documentaries in the 1980s often focused on the impact and dangers of nuclear radiation and waste, with Judy Irving and Chris Beaver's *Dark Circle* (1982) and Robert Stone's *Radio Bikini* (1988) offering two powerful examples. *Dark Circle* premiered at the 1982 New York Film Festival and won the Grand Prize at Sundance in 1983. *Radio Bikini* also won the Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize and was nominated for an Academy Award. Screened at mainstream festivals, these documentaries were seen as films about an American war machine as well as environmental destruction. They were political documentaries in ways in which Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi: Life out of Balance* (1982) was not. *Koyaanisqatsi*, composed of

arresting images of remarkable power, contrasts pristine majestic nature with humanity's violent, devastating abuse of the planet's environment (Figure 2.1). "Koyaanisqatsi," which is a Hopi word meaning "life out of balance," is both the title and the only word that is spoken/chanted in that film. Images of environmental trauma are accompanying by a Philip Glass score.

Environmental film festivals have played a crucial role in the construction of the genre's identity (see de Valck 2007; Stringer 2003; Turan 2003). Although part of a larger film-festival phenomena, their appearance and proliferation coincided with noteworthy events in the environmental movement. Earth Day went international in 1990 and was soon followed by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro—which is often known as the Earth Summit. It is not by chance, then, that the Tokyo Global Environmental Film Festival was launched in 1992, promoting itself as Asia's first international environmental film festival. The Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital (Washington DC), founded in 1993 by Flo Stone, quickly followed, "seeki[ng] to advance public understanding of the environment through the power of film" (DC Environmental Film Festival n.p.). That same year the International Environmental Film Festival (FIMCA) debuted in Barcelona, Spain. The Cine'Eco—International Festival of Environmental Film and Video in Seia, Portugal, has been active since 1995. The Planet in Focus International Environmental Film & Video Festival, based in Toronto, Canada, began in 1999.

Figure 2.1 *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) presents footage of the 1957 nuclear bomb testing in Nevada, known as Operation Plumbbob.

These festivals provided an important platform for films on the environment—but what kinds of films? When asked to name the five most important environmental documentaries of the 1990s, Stone responded, "It is hard to select just five documentary films from 1993–2000. Here are twelve choices—all very different and in no order" (Stone, conversation n.p.). The following puts her choices in chronological order and offers some additional explication:

- *The Island Sea* (1991), directed by Lucille Carra and Brian Cotnoir, fifty-six minutes, available on DVD. According to the film's promotional material, the documentary "re-creates the lyrical vision of old Japan captured by Donald Richie in his classic travel memoir. Richie, one of the foremost Western authorities on Japanese cinema and culture, juxtaposes the ongoing conflict between traditional and modern values with the serene beauty of the area known as the Inland Sea. The result is a rewarding personal journey for the heart, the mind and the senses."
- *The Spirit of Kuna Yala* (1991), directed by Andrew Young and Susan Todd (streaming online only). As Young describes the sixty-minute film, "A lively portrait of the Kuna Indians of Panama as they unite to protect their homeland, Kuna Yala, and the tradition it inspires. Told entirely in the words of the Kunas, the film contrasts a variety of characters who together tell a story of a culture in flux. At a time when our society is struggling with its relationship to nature, *The Spirit of Kuna Yala* reminds us that the timeless wisdom of indigenous peoples has something vital to offer the Western world" (n.p.).
- *Earth and the American Dream* (1992), directed by Bill Couturié. This ninety-minute HBO documentary won two Emmys and screened at the Sundance Film Festival where it received a Special Jury Award for technical excellence. Critic Marjorie Baumgarten of the *Austin Chronicle* remarked, "The dream is over, and Bill Couturié's provocative documentary about America's blithe destruction of its natural resources sounds the wake-up call. This ambitious film takes on the gargantuan topic of our country's cultural and intellectual history. . . . Beginning with the arrival on these shores of Christopher Columbus, the movie examines the modes of thinking that got us into the ecological dead end we find ourselves in today" (n.p.)
- *Anima Mundi* (1992), a twenty-eight-minute short by Godfrey Reggio. This film was commissioned by the Italian jewellery company Bulgari for the World Wide Fund for Nature, which used the film for its Biological Diversity Program. According to celebrated composer, Philip Glass, who scored the film, "the title *Anima Mundi* reproposes a concept which, throughout the history of mankind from ancient times, conjures up a harmonic principle controlling the laws of life on earth in all its various forms and relationships" (n.p.).

- *Yosemite: The Fate of Heaven* (1990), directed by Jon Else, with narration by Robert Redford, fifty-eight minutes. The documentary is currently available only on VHS. According to Steve Blackburn, "This affectionate history of Yosemite, which was 'discovered' in 1851 as U.S. troops hunted down Native Americans, also raises questions about the future of the park—Americans may be loving it to ruin. Three million visitors per year put a strain on the resources of the park service and physically degrade the region. Highlights include reading from the journal of Lafayette Bunnel, a doctor who accompanied the Mariposa Battalion on its 1851 mission" (n.p.)
- *Vampires, Devilbirds and Spirits: Tales of the Calypso Isles* (1994), directed by Nick Upton for the BBC. A fifty-minute episode for season 12 of "Natural World," this "celebration of Caribbean wildlife . . . takes an entertaining look at the myths and legends of Trinidad and Tobago, and many of the creatures on which they are based" (Vampires n.p.).
- *The Last Frog* (1996), directed by Allison Argo. This winner of several awards at wildlife film festivals such Best of Festival at the Missoula International Wildlife Film Festival has become virtually invisible. *The Last Frog* is 25 minutes long, and was never released on DVD (or VHS) by Nat Geo due to its length. As Argo describes the film, "*The Last Frog* is a love letter to the frog—and a strange and unnerving murder mystery. Starring our amphibious friends, the drama is supported by a cast of scientific experts and devotees frantically trying to unravel the disturbing puzzle behind the curious decline of frogs" (n.p.).
- *Microcosmos* (1996), directed by Claude Nuridsany and Marie Perennou, eighty minutes, available on DVD with a companion book by the film-makers: *Microcosmos: The Invisible World of Insects* (1997).
- *The Saltmen of Tibet* (1997), directed by Ulrike Koch, 108 minutes, available on DVD. It is worth noting that this film won best film at a number of modest-sized but respected film festivals and had a small theatrical release. Stephen Holden of the *New York Times* found it to be a "profoundly absorbing study of a small band of nomads trekking across the Tibetan high country with a caravan of 160 yaks, the camera draws back to observe from afar an annual pilgrimage that has been taking place for 2,000 years" (Holden n.p.).
- *Vision Man: An Eskimo Hunter* (1998), directed by William Long and Lars Aby. This 52-minute, Swedish documentary centres on Utuniarsuak Avike, "an 87-year-old native hunter in northwest Greenland who has spent much of his life literally walking on thin ice. Now confined to a small apartment, Avike tells of the life that lies behind him: fishing, dogsledding, coexisting with wolves and walruses and the ritual religious hunting of the polar bear. Director William Long punctuates Avikes's recollections with reenacted scenes that take in the overwhelming and humbling beauty of the Arctic (both above and

under water) and its wildlife. Not only does this vision man share his well-spent life but he also sheds light on a culture steadily eroding in this changing world" ("Vision Man" n.p.). It was shown in the US and recently became available for educational institutions through Alexander Street Press.

- *A Place in the Land* (1998), a thirty-two-minute Oscar-nominated short directed by Charles Guggenheim. This film "examines the history of conservation stewardship in America as it is reflected in this property and through the work of George Perkins Marsh, Frederick Billings, and Laurance S. Rockefeller, successive residents of the estate [i.e. the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park]" ("A Place in the Land" n.p.).
- *Charcoal People* (2000), directed by Nigel Nobel. A sixty-five-minute "documentary about the rural population who earn their living as coal miners, thus helping to keep metallurgic activity going and contributing to the forest devastation in South America" ("Charcoal People" n.p.).

Stone added that, "It is important to think about TV documentaries during those years including the great increase in wildlife programming led by the BBC and the influence of IMAX" (Stone n.p.).[3]

Although these documentaries often hint at the more radical and politically engaged environmental documentaries that were to come, perhaps only *Earth and the American Dream* directly addresses issues on a scale and in a manner that have become relatively familiar. Although released the year of the Environmental Summit, Couturié's effort was not always appreciated. Ken Tucker of *Entertainment Weekly* dismissed the film-maker as a "tree-hugger" and found the documentary to be "sincere but boring, a warning that comes off as condescending" (Tucker n.p.). It was, however, the first documentary to win an Environmental Media Award. Most of the other documentaries seem quite traditional by comparison. At least two (*Yosemite: The Fate of Heaven* and *A Place in the Land*) are about national parks in a manner that goes back to Burton Holmes's late-nineteenth-century programs on Yellowstone. They take a Rooseveltian (Theodore), conservationist approach. Several others are ethnographic in emphasis, focusing on peoples whose traditional lifestyles are under threat if not rapidly disappearing. *Vision Man: An Eskimo Hunter* cannot but recall Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *The Saltmen of Tibet* brings to mind Miriam C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925), whereas *The Spirit of Kuna Yala* seems in the tradition of Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds* (1965). Others, *An Inland Sea* in particular, participate in the long-standing travel genre. Many are wildlife documentaries—a genre that boasted quite a few film festivals in this period, some of which had been running since the 1970s.[4] Simply put, Stone's list suggests that environmental documentaries of the 1990s were scattered across a number of established genres that could be mobilized to reveal dangers to peoples, habitats and

fauna—pointing towards the larger environmental challenges facing the world. In often small but precise ways, they revealed developments that were largely hidden and sought to foster an informed citizenry in the tradition of John Grierson (1966).

Although the environment was a pressing issue in the 1990s, the most dynamic and important documentary genre in the US during this period proved to be the courtroom documentary with its focus on legal film truth—beginning with Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) and Chris Choy and Rene Tajima's *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1988; see Johnson 1996; Nichols 1996). Their methods and approaches provided a general framework for more than twenty major documentaries, including Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky *Brother's Keeper* (1992) and *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills* (1996), Nick Broomfield's *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1993), Choy's *Shot Heard 'Round the World* (1997), and Morris's own *Mr Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter, Jr.* (1999). It continued into the new century with Jean-Xavier de Lestrade's *Murder on Sunday Morning* (2001) and *The Staircase* (2004), as well as Andrew Jarecki's *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003).

In the first half-decade of the new millennium feature-length documentaries that dealt with environmental issues focused on an array of subjects and used a variety of styles. They included Agnes Varda's *The Gleaners and I* (2000), Judith Helfand and Daniel B. Gold's *Blue Vinyl* (2001), the last of Godfrey Reggio's poetic Qatsi trilogy—*Naqoyqatsi* (2002)—Hubert Sauper's *Darwin's Nightmare* (2004), Morgan Spurlock's *Supersize Me* (2004), Martin Marecek's *The Source* (*Zdroj*, 2005) and Michael Glawogger's *Workingman's Death* (2005).[5] In contrast to many of the 1990s documentaries listed by Flo Stone these were feature length, received extensive critical attention and generally enjoyed theatrical distribution (even if limited and not always in the US). More than those documentaries of the previous decade, they explicitly engaged large-scale aspects of the environmental crisis. Nevertheless, their diversity of subject matter and approach—of semantics and syntax—poses the question: Did they then constitute a coherent genre? (Altman 24). Moreover, attention and perhaps even the genre's maturation were put on hold by a host of documentaries engaging the many urgent issues that followed the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the "war on terror" and the conduct of the Bush administration as exemplified by Robert Greenwald's *Uncovered: The Truth about the Iraq War* (2003), Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and many others.

The full constitution of the environmental documentary as a genre coincided with a second wave of new environmental film festivals around the world. These include EcoCinema, Jerusalem's International Environmental Film Festival; the Green Film Festival in Seoul (South Korea); and the San Francisco Ocean Film Festival: all were established in 2004. The New Zealand–based Real Earth Film Festival was founded in 2005. In 2007 the

Eugene P. Odum School of Ecology at the University of Georgia inaugurated the EcoFocus Film Festival and the Princeton Public Library began the Princeton Environmental Film Festival. The Environmental Film Festival at Yale, affiliated with its School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, began in 2009—as did the Environmental Film Festival of Accra, Ghana. This proliferation certainly reflected the increasing centrality and dynamism of the environmental documentary.

AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH (2006)

Davis Guggenheim's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) was a key film in the genre's solidification and rise to prominence. Flo Stone of the Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital has characterized it as "a decisive moment" for environmental documentary: After its release, "no one asked us anymore what we were trying to do and if anyone would want to come" (Stone, conversation, n.p.). The film bears a striking relationship to Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi*. One might say that "life out of balance" is the "inconvenient truth" of Guggenheim's documentary, although it is one is done as a visual poesis, whereas the other is a discourse-heavy popular science presentation. Like *Koyaanisqatsi*, *An Inconvenient Truth* opens with scenes of pristine nature (in this instance, a river that runs along Al Gore's farm) and soon shifts to a litany of images depicting ecological devastation and eco-trauma (from bodies of people who died in Hurricane Katrina through melted glaciers). Scientists and politicians appear in the film but generally lack a voice, their insights or failings being characterized by Al Gore's narration. If we see people caught up in environmental calamities, they are never given a chance to speak. People's trauma, in the past and in the future, is left to our imagination. In this respect, the sequences of images of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina stand in marked contrast to Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* (also 2006), in which residents speak about the physical and psychological trauma that they, their family and fellow residents have endured [7].

An Inconvenient Truth shared one significant characteristic with many of the Iraq-war documentaries of the same period: not only politically partisan (stock footage clips show Republicans to be climate change deniers), it was designed to intervene in the electoral process. Its counterpart in this regard was Robert Greenwald's *Iraq for Sale: The War Profiteers* (2006). After premiering at Sundance in January, *An Inconvenient Truth* went on to gross over $24 million during its theatrical run from May 24 to November 2, 2006—a period that coincided rather perfectly with the off-year campaign season. It interweaves a biography of former Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic presidential candidate who had lost to George Bush in 2004, and a re-presentation of his frequently given PowerPoint lecture on global warming. At several points the film takes aim at his nemesis—President George W. Bush. Even as *An Inconvenient Truth* helped Democrats wins some seats in the US House of Representatives and Senate, it further polarized the issue of global warming in an already highly charged partisan environment. Certainly the documentary won few converts among Republicans: If anything, the associations of this environmental issue with Al Gore and the Democrats inclined many of them to dismiss global warming.[6]

At the same time, *An Inconvenient Truth* was able to transcend its particular political moment, in part because of the importance of its topic and also through its creative mobilization of certain tropes, certain methods of presenting truth that have been part of the documentary tradition. That the issue of truth was raised by the title is significant in this light. Truth, for Gore, is a scientific truth, based on evidence and tested relations between cause and effect. In particular, rising levels of CO^2 are shown to be major contributors to global warming. People—citizens and politicians—consciously and unconsciously want to avoid these scientific realities. As Gore asserts, "There are good people who are in politics in both parties who hold this at arms length because if they acknowledge it and recognize it, then the moral imperative to make big changes is inescapable." In one section of the film, a young Al Gore is seen questioning a NASA scientist who admits that the final paragraph of what he delivered was not written by him and did not reflect his scientific assessment. This is followed by a section in which statements by a scientist are taken out of a policy document because their conclusions did not conform to the Bush administration's position.

Truth is normally juxtaposed to lies. Moreover, in an earlier cycle of prominent documentaries, a film's counter truth confronts a state truth, which is shown to be a lie. In *The Thin Blue Line*, Randall Adams is guilty of murder—this is a state truth for which he was to pay with his life. The film shows that this truth is a lie and goes so far as to identify the actual killer, who had gone on to murder again. With *An Inconvenient Truth* there is not so much a state truth as a state doubt. The state, which is to say the then current Republican administration, asserts that the evidence for determining the causes of global warming is inconclusive. These administrations offer other possible explanations (e.g., a cycle of climate variation). In the meantime they suppress and rewrite the statements of scientists working for government agencies and have industry spokesmen run the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The state's reliance on ambiguity and uncertainty is an effective strategy of obscuration. Complexity and ambiguity is normally the domain of liberals. In short, the lack of a clear truth—of scientific certainty—becomes the state endorsed truth. The goal of *An Inconvenient Truth* has been to confront these doubts (the state truth) and show that they do not exist. It is thus important to assert that no peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals deny the reality of global warming. In short, Gore and Guggenheim strive to show that the state's truth of doubt is a lie.

The figurations of truth are not unfamiliar. In the scene discussed earlier, the assessments of a government scientist were removed by an administration lackey, who lacked any scientific qualification. Not the substance but

the act of deletion is revealed, given the light of day. In another scene, Gore works with the military to release state secrets that document the rapid shrinkage of the polar ice caps since 1970. In addition—and this is one of the moments in the film when rhetoric and aesthetic pleasure seem to coincide—the bringing to light of the state secrets is combined with the surfacing of the submarine as it breaks through the ice pack. It is a complex metaphor in that the breaking through of the sub is itself a kind of proof that something is wrong. The submarine's coming into the light contains a certain irony. The cumulative force of these individual revelations is to offer a more complete picture—something closer to the full story, which makes audiences for this film feel that their previous understanding of the issues was incomplete. That is, our former understanding about the state of the environment (what might be considered our personal truth—what is true for us) is felt to have been inadequate and a new, more complete truth emerges. Interestingly, Robin Murray and Joseph Heumann see environmental nostalgia—the eco-memory it evokes—as the key to the film's rhetorical success. This strategy, however, depends on making the audience aware of current trends in climate change—and the difference between then (circa 1970) and now as well as between now and the future (Murray and Heumann n.p.).

For the purveyors of doubt the strategy to contest this documentary is simple—to look for weaknesses (exaggerations, instances of overreaching), mistakes or lies in the facts and arguments that Gore and Guggenheim present in the film. A court case in England provided a significant opening when a judge found nine "errors" in the documentary. These so-called errors are not to say that Gore is wrong but that there is a lack of consensus, and other credible viewpoints exist. A range of opinions exists about what is happening, and Gore in some cases chose some questionable examples. To cite one "error," scientists suggest there are various possible contributing factors to the melting of the glacier on Mt. Kilimanjaro of which global warming is only one. Gore merely chose a bad example because there is much less dispute about global warming's impact on other glaciers and ice masses.

Detractors focused on Gore contention that the earth's water level was in danger of rising twenty feet in the near future, which the judge declared to be unduly alarmist (Figure 2.2). Doubters used this as an opening. H. Sterling Burnett of the National Center for Policy Analysis, which has been heavily funded by ExxonMobil, argues,

> What Gore doesn't say about the threat to the ice sheets is as important as what he does say, however. Ice and snow is accumulating in the interior of Greenland and Antarctica, but decreasing around the edges. A 2005 study in the *Journal of Glaciology* by a NASA scientist concludes that there is a net loss of ice that will result in higher sea levels. But the loss is occurring slowly: 0.05 millimeters on average per year. At that rate, it will take a millennium for the oceans to rise 5 centimeters (roughly 2 inches) and 20,000 years to rise a full meter. More recent research indicates that the pace of melting has increased. But even under the worst case it would take at least several centuries—1,800 years by one calculation—for the scenario painted in the movie to play out, giving humans a considerable amount of time to adapt.
>
> (n.p.)

Many of the methods used to challenge *An Inconvenient Truth* had been previously developed and applied to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Al Gore was now in the Michael Moore position. The goal was to establish Al Gore as an unreliable narrator and re-establish a sense of doubt and uncertainty, which would enable the US to continue dodging this issue. As Nichols notes, to the extent to which a speaker's "good name" has been undermined or destroyed, a documentary lacks credibility and truth value (*Representing* 135).

Gore's position is perhaps close to that of James Hansen, who heads NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. Hansen argues that there is tremendous pressure on scientists from the funding agency to be conservative in their estimates of future climate change. Similar kinds of pressure and selective mining of data provided the cover for Bush's invasion of Iraq. Nonetheless, Hansen writes, "I find it almost inconceivable that 'business as usual' climate change will not result in a rise in sea level measured in meters within a century" (n.p.). Catherine Brahic, an environmental reporter, sought a balanced assessment—a middle ground. For instance, disease is an

Figure 2.2 Al Gore presents this digitally fabricated image of Manhattan suffused with water in *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim 2006).

important factor in the bleaching of coral—global warming is only an indirect factor by contributing to a changing environment that fosters disease. On the other hand, if a significant change in temperature in the oceans does occur, it will bleach the coral reefs. Brahic thus concludes that

> strictly speaking, Gore oversimplified certain points, made a few factual errors and, at times, chose the wrong poster child (Mount Kilimanjaro should have been replaced by any number of Alaskan or Andean glaciers, for instance). It's unfortunate, but it remains the most comprehensive popular documentary on climate change science I have seen.
>
> (n.p.)

The opposition has continued. Julia A. Seymour, an assistant editor and Analyst for the Business & Media Institute of the Media Research Center "analyzed broadcast news coverage of Gore about climate change and mentions of *An Inconvenient Truth*" over a five-year period through the end of April 2011. Among her conclusions were that "the networks shouldn't take his interpretation of global warming science as truth. Rather, they should be skeptical because of [Gore's] very real political agenda" (Seymour n.p.). Any discussion of climate change needed to be "balanced" to include the opinions of climate change sceptics.

An Inconvenient Truth was not the only environmental film at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival: another was Chris Paine's *Who Killed the Electric Car?* (2006). However, Iraq War documentaries were still getting the bulk of attention, including Patricia Foulkrod's *The Ground Truth* and James Longley's *Iraq in Fragments*, which won three awards at the festival. *Who Killed the Electric Car?* reveals the history of the EV1 (Electrical Vehicle) cars in California in the late 1990s and early 2000s—a history that automobile and oil companies have done their best to conceal, even to the point of repossessing and destroying all the EV1s on the road. Moreover, it shows that the California Air Resources Board head Alan Lloyd became director of the California Fuel Cell Partnership a few months before voting down the regulations that had supported the commercial introduction of Electric Vehicles. Hydrogen fuel cells were promoted as the new alternative to gasoline-powered automobiles, generating over a billion dollars in funding and subsidies. If the principle villains in this story are the auto industry and oil companies, the documentary shows a number of scenes that focus on George W. Bush and his administration's contributions to the successful execution of the electric car. In this respect it shares an anti-Bush/anti-Republican agenda with *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Iraq for Sale*. Its theatrical run—opening June 28, 2006, and concluding November 15, 2006—can also be seen as geared toward impacting the off-year elections. Given its box office of over $1.6 million, the film had significant visibility.

The Environmental Media Association, like Flo Stone, sees 2006 as a key turning point in which environmental media contributed to a "new norm," stating,

> In 2006, environmentalism achieved a tipping point. Between the impact of Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and a series of natural disasters, environmentalism went from being the work of activists to an every day concern for regular people. Now more than ever, people are talking—*and doing something*—about the environment. Conserving energy, buying locally and simply thinking more about consumerism overall are some ways people are going green.
>
> ("EMA Awards" n.p.)

Besides the two documentary features already mentioned, HBO offered *Too Hot Not to Handle* (2006), also about climate change. Laurie David, who was one of the producers on both *Too Hot Not to Handle* and *An Inconvenient Truth*, also published *Stop Global Warming: The Solution Is You!* described by one environmental website as "a handy pocket guide to curbing climate change" (Dunn n.p.). In the same year, the National Film Board of Canada offered Jennifer Baichwal's *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006), a documentary portrait of photographer Edward Burtynsky, which "shares Burtynsky's astonishment and concern over the scale, tempo and irreversibility of postmodern humanity's global frenzy of production and consumption" (Baker n.p.). It is a powerful and discerning look at an artist who confronts the world in the midst of a growing environmental crisis (Cammaer 121–130).

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTARIES AS BUSH LEAVES OFFICE

By 2008, a wave of documentaries was engaging many facets of the complex, multifaceted environmental crisis. Irena Salina's *Flow: For Love of Water* premiered at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival and had its theatrical run as a ninety-three-minute feature from March to December 2008, during the electoral campaign season. Its box office was a modest $142,569, and was recut and released on DVD as the eighty-four-minute *Flow: How Did a Handful of Corporations Steal Our Water?* (released December 11, 2008). It was the principal environmental documentary to be released theatrically during the presidential election year—when commercially successful documentaries such as Larry Charles' *Religulous* with Bill Maher, Scorsese's *Shine a Light* with the Rolling Stones, and Stephen Walker and Sally George's *Young@Heart* offered counterpoints to media-saturated, politically charged discourses of election year politics.

Gestures toward partisan party politics, which had turned *An Inconvenient Truth* into a lightning rod, were increasingly avoided by documentary

film-makers and distributors tackling hot-button issues such as the environmental crisis. It is worth noting that Michael Moore released *Sicko* and *Capitalism: A Love Story* in 2007 and 2009, respectively—non-election years. Likewise the other prominent environmental documentary at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival was Josh Tickell's *Field of Fuel*, which won the Audience Award for Documentary. Tickell recut the film and released it theatrical in September 2009 and on DVD in 2010. The normal cycle of festivals and theatrical release may have been one factor, but those environmental documentaries screened at festivals during the closing months of the Bush administration and beyond were not released commercially until Obama was in office—when a new administration would be more sympathetic to the makers' environmental aspirations. Of course, it was not clear who would be president when the films were being made, but these films were not screened in the midst of a political campaign.

This next wave of documentaries, which tend to see corporations more than the government as the likely villains, often focused on specific instances of environmental destruction and the traumatic impact, both physical and psychological, it is having on people. Joe Berlinger's *Crude* investigates an area of once-pristine rainforest in Ecuador that was decimated by oil extraction—an area that has been called an "Amazon Chernobyl" (Mcavoy n.p.). It also engages many of those suffering directly from this disaster as well as organizers and lawyers seeking justice on their behalf. This includes an indigenous woman, who begins the film by singing a song in a high, sweet voice:

> We lived upon the river of rich clear waters.
> With the arrival of the company and their contamination
> my brothers are now dead.
> I am the only survivor of my family.
> The message of my song is to tell the world
> so that the world can know what has been done.
> I worry about the future.
> What will happen to the children?

Members of the Secoya people soon speak about the rainforest that was undamaged before Texaco arrived. Berlinger focuses on a class action suit against Chevron/Texaco, demanding that the company accept moral and financial responsibility for its contribution to this oil-related disaster—which Chevron dismisses as a story made up by con men wanting to enrich themselves. This is the corporate truth that Chevron defends in the court and seeks to make a state truth. As the courtroom battle unfolds, *Crude* gradually reveals the real cost of pumping oil. In this respect, Berlinger continues his focus on legal truths from his series of Paradise Lost documentaries, which focused on the scenarios of murder with the West Memphis Three.

Two environmental documentaries from this period that let traumatized individuals bear witness while mobilizing tropes of truth are *Food, Inc.* and *The Cove*. Testimony as a ritual of healing has been widely noted. As Judith Herman has remarked, "Testimony has both a private dimension, which is confessional and spiritual, and a public aspect, which is political and judicial" (181). Robert Kenner's *Food, Inc.* takes aim at "factory farming" and sees large, impersonal corporations—driven by the goal of ever increasing profits—as the principal culprit. As one voice (who remains unidentified) remarks, "The companies don't want farmers talking. They don't want this story told." One section looks at chicken farming, which increasingly is conducted in large darkened barns. A farmer is eager to show the film-makers how he raises his chickens but Tyson, the corporation for which he works, convinces him not to do so. Tyson wants us—like the chickens—to be in the dark. Many farmers remain silent, but finally one Carole Morison has reached a point where she feels she cannot continue. What she is doing "isn't right" and so she is eager to talk and let the film-makers record what goes on: Despite the heavy use of antibiotics, some chickens die in her barns—and she herself has become allergic to antibiotics. Likewise, the film-makers use night vision cameras to videotape the "harvesting" of chickens, which emphasizes the fact that they need to act surreptitiously to show what was actually happening. They are showing what is behind the corporate image—an unmasking.

Perdue and Tyson try to stonewall the film-makers. Elder Roth, the founder of Beef Products, Inc., took a different approach and let them into his high-tech world of mammoth machinery and centralized control where he shows how his sanitary strategies—the heavy use of ammonia—battles the growing dangers of E. coli in food. Despite Roth's cooperation with the film-makers, the underlying trope in this scene remains strikingly similarities to those involving Perdue. We are shown what the walls of the building obscure—a horrific world of slaughter where food (meat) is produced with indifference to animals and consumers alike. Likewise, in considering the people employed at Smithfield, the film-makers give hidden cameras to the workers so they can capture what takes place inside the processing plant. *Food, Inc.* tries to show the ways in which the individual components are interlinked. If Tyson tries to keep viewers in the dark like its chickens, Smithfield treats its employees the same way it treats its hogs. While *An Inconvenient Truth* seeks to offer a comprehensive, integrated understanding of global warming, *Food, Inc.* does much the same for our food system. However, its methods differ substantially. There is no single voice of reason like Al Gore, although the film-makers have their own narration voice; rather it works primarily by integrating the voices of journalists such as Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan, who have investigated food-related issues, and the people who are being chewed up by the food factory system. Although corporations are able to silence many of those trapped in the system they have done much to create, they are not able to silence everyone.

The experts offer the film-makers authoritative voices that provide facts, contextual understanding and rational argument. The traumatized who finally speak provide the film's emotional rhetoric. But for some who have been traumatized, such as Barbara Kowalcyk, the need to talk and act has turned them into experts. Kowalcyk's six-year-old son died from E. coli infection that came eating contaminated hamburgers. Not only the farmers and those processing food on assembly lines but consumers very much like ourselves are all participating in a system of eco-trauma. The film pursues any number of strategies for revealing the truth of what these corporations don't want us to know about this system.

Louie Psihoyos's *The Cove* focuses on the annual killing of roughly 23,000 dolphins and porpoises in Japan each year—many in a cove in Taiji (a small number of these mammals are actually captured and sent to theme parks). Using some of the same methods for crafting truth, the film argues that exposure—tearing away the veil of secrecy—is the crucial first step towards ending this slaughter. The film-makers then go on a high-tech adventure to capture compelling audio-visual materials of the brutal killing—assembling a team of activists, film-makers and divers whom they compare to the characters in the Hollywood caper film *Oceans Eleven*. Under the cover of darkness they slip into the forbidden area, their actions recorded by night cameras. Members of the team serve as the film's protagonists as they evade the police. Finally we get to see what they captured with their hidden cameras—the casual conversations of the fishermen as well as the dolphin killings. They have outwitted the fishermen just as the fishermen have outwitted the dolphins in order to drive them into their nets. All this would be problematic in various ways—at times it comes a little close to an Osa and Martin Johnson filming expedition in Africa or TV docs with their on-camera animal wranglers. However, Psihoyos provides other components that complicate and arguably rescue the film.

The rhetorical success of *The Cove* depends on the people as well as the animals who are traumatized. One key member of the film crew is dolphin trainer Ric O'Barry, who worked on the TV show *Flipper*. Through his close work with the dolphins O'Barry gradually realized that he was participating in a system that was cruel and corrupt. By training dolphins, he came to recognize their extraordinary intelligence that makes them cognizant beings. He also realized he was participating in their exploitation and death. O'Barry reacted by becoming an outspoken "dolphin defender." The weight and recognition of what he did, compels O'Barry to speak out—and to act.[8] The film concludes first with O'Barry defiantly entering a meeting of the International Whaling Commission and showing scenes of the dolphin slaughter on a large portable video screen, disrupting the commission members self-congratulatory pronouncements of "shortening the time to death." Finally, in a gesture of self-abjection, he stands in the streets of Tokyo with the same video screen showing the images to passing pedestrians.

It is likewise significant that the fishermen and their advocates have been deceiving the Japanese public not only by keeping what they are doing a secret but by selling highly toxic dolphin meat as whale meat from the pure waters off South America. DNA testing—used to exonerate unjustly convicted criminals in the US court system—is mobilized to expose this deceit. Thus the Japanese have been the real victims of this practice given the elevated levels of mercury in their bodies—a form of toxicity that resonates with the Noriaki Tsuchimoto's documentaries of Minamata. In one telling scene, the government spokesman who tries to justify the practice allows the film-makers to clip a piece of his hair. This enables them to diagnose him as suffering from mercury poisoning. The fishermen are not only killing dolphins and harming Japanese gourmands; as consumers of dolphin meat, they are killing themselves and their children.

The environmental documentary continued to flourish in 2010 as two examples received nominations for an Academy Award as Best Feature-Length Documentary: Lucy Walker's *Waste Land* and Josh Fox's *Gasland*. *Gasland* earned the ire of the oil and gas industry, which actively campaigned to prevent the film from winning the Oscar. Fox's ground-breaking investigation of hydraulic fracturing (known as "fracking") and its impact on the environment effectively employs an array of strategies for presenting truths. The film opens with representatives from leading natural gas corporations making statements before the Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals:

> Studies and surveys by GWPC, EPA and IOGCC over the last eleven years have found no real credible threat to underground drinking water from hydraulic fracturing.
>
> Recently, however, there's been concern raised about the methods to tap these valuable resources: Technologies such as the practice of hydraulic fracturing have been characterized as environmentally risky and inadequately regulated. Press reports and websites alleging that six states have documented over one thousand incidents of ground water contamination resulting from the practice of hydraulic fracturing. Such reports are not accurate.
>
> It is my firmly held view as well as that of IOGCC that the subject of hydraulic fracture is adequately regulated by the states and needs no further study.

The remainder of the film effectively offers testimony and visual evidence that contradict these pronouncements in order to present a counter truth. Some of the most compelling is from ordinary Americans who suddenly found that their way of life had been fundamentally disrupted by the effects of fracking. Fox begins his investigation by visiting various residents of Dimock, the ground zero for hydraulic fracturing in Pennsylvania with forty wells. Their water has gone bad: They and their animals were suffering unexplained illnesses and other side effects. They are disoriented, angry and

mostly eager to talk. Later Fox talks to Mike Markham and Marsha Mendenhall of Fort Lupton, Colorado, who set fire to the water coming out of their kitchen faucet. Others can perform the same trick as well. According to one informant, the health of many of these people had been ruined and they can no longer function.

An array of experts such as Weston Wilson of the EPA is burdened by a sense of frustration and guilt that their findings have been suppressed. They are haunted by secrecy and the overweening power of the oil and gas industry. Dr. Theo Colborn, a renowned environmental health analyst who has done some serious investigation, details health effects that include irreversible brain damage. Experts in Fox's documentary such as air quality specialist Dr. Al Armrendariz and environmental scientist Wilma Subra seem deeply disturbed by their findings. They are little different from those ordinary victims—harassed, disempowered, anxious. Fox's mobile camera and disjunctive editing techniques powerfully evoke the disorientation of his traumatized informants, showing his remarkable insights into their dilemmas and despair. In this respect he has found an expressive form that is adequate to his subject matter. It not only reflects the psychological state of the people with whom he speaks but his own deepening sense of nightmare as he traverse the US only to discover that he is actually descending into a kind of hell.

The corporate truth presented to Congress by industry representatives at the beginning of the *Gasland* must either be accepted and made into an ongoing state truth or challenged so that oversight, study and appropriate restrictions can be imposed. Underlying Fox's citizen's investigation was the stonewalling of corporations that refused to be interviewed or did not respond to phone calls—hoping perhaps that the documentary would not appear or have little visibility. When *Gasland* gained visibility and its counter truth gained credibility, the natural gas industry responded by claiming that Fox's documentary was alarmist and misrepresented the impact of drilling in several specific instances—proving its overall undertaking to be deceptive. In one instance, John Hanger, the secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, is quoted saying that the film was "fundamentally dishonest" and "a deliberately false presentation for dramatic effect" ("*Gasland* Debunked" n.p.). But Fox's documentary does not claim to have thoroughly investigated the cause for the many incidents it presents. Rather it refutes the industry's claims that hydraulic fracturing is benevolent and requires no further serious study and oversight.

Although the industry seeks to demonstrate that several key instances in Fox's documentary are inaccurate and part of an overall pattern of deception, their assertions prove questionable or at least not beyond dispute. America's Natural Gas Alliance asserts,

> In the film's signature moment Mike Markham, a landowner, ignites his tap water. The film leaves the viewer with the false impression that the flaming tap water is a result of natural gas drilling. However, according to the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, which tested Markham's water in 2008, there were "no indications of oil & gas related impacts to water well." Instead the investigation found that the methane was "biogenic" in nature, meaning it was naturally occurring and that his water well was drilled into a natural gas pocket.
>
> This is one of several examples where the film veers from the facts.
>
> ("*Gasland* Debunked" n.p.)

The commission concludes that Markham's water problems are unrelated to fracking:

> Dr. Anthony Ingraffea, D.C. Baum Professor of Engineering at Cornell University, whose research has involved fracture mechanics for more than 30 years, has said that drilling and hydraulic fracturing can liberate biogenic natural gas into a fresh water aquifer. That is, just because gas is biogenic does not necessarily indicate that it reached a well by natural means.
>
> (Fox n.p.)

America's Natural Gas Alliance also produced a short video entitled "The Truth about *Gasland*." The piece is filled with shots of happy children and reassuring platitudes.

In confronting the growing environmental crisis, documentary film-makers have been taking on not just individual corporations but whole industries—even groups of industries. They reveal their devastating impact on the environment and often give voice to people suffering from the worst effects of this environmental destruction. These are people who seemingly have little or nothing left to lose—who now speak truth to power because other efforts to ameliorate their situation have failed. By bearing witness they offer both a psycho-analytic and political truth by revealing what has been hidden, suppressed or dismissed. In these films—*An Inconvenient Truth*, *Food, Inc.* and *Gasland* are just prominent examples—the rhetoric of truth has played and will continue to play a crucial role.

POSTSCRIPT

Numerous environmental documentaries have been produced and shown at festivals in the early 2010s, including Josh Fox follow-up *Gasland 2* (2013). An inventory of these films can be found through the websites of various environmental film festivals that continue to flourish. Only one such feature-length documentary, *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front*, received an Oscar nomination in 2011. No such documentaries were nominated in either 2012 or 2013. The genre remains a productive and important one but only one of many presently competing for our attention.

Does this mean that the genre has reached a certain maturity and awaits new approaches or new crisis to regain these forms of prestigious but fickle visibility? Or has the broad citizenry once again come to accept the growing environmental crisis with some combination of denial, small symbolic gestures and/or despairing resignation as they seek distractions in other topics such as Miley Cyrus and twerking?[9]

NOTES

1. The assumption was that mankind can dominate rivers for human good. Thanks to Jim MacBroom, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, for his reflections on these films, which I have incorporated here. See also United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Hydrologic/Geomorphic Assessments," http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/nps/watershed/hydrologic_geomorphic.cfm
2. *Minamata* is now available on DVD from Zakka Films. See http://zakkafilms.com/
3. Stone also added that, "This was also a time when very special animated films about the environment were being made: *The Mighty River* as well as *The Man Who Planted Trees* by Frederic Back and *Turtle World* by Nick Hilligoss."
4. The International Wildlife Film Festival, established in 1977, claims to be "the first juried wildlife film festival in the world" (http://wildlifefilms.org/about/). While wildlife topics and environmental issues can overlap, they obviously differ.
5. If wildlife films are added to the list, one might want to include *March of the Penguins* (2005) and Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* (2005).
6. My analysis suggests that *An Inconvenient Truth* was more divisive than Mark Minster argues in his otherwise productive "The Rhetoric of Ascent in *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Everything's Cool*," in Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. 25–42.
7. Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* (2006) certainly has an environmental component but the documentary engages other issues, of which the most important is probably the long-standing indifference to the lives of African Americans and the poor.
8. This is also the case for another crew member, Hardy Jones. Hardy has a more modest role in this film, which is not entirely surprising given that he is featured in *The Dolphin Defender* (2005), a television documentary done for "Nature" through WNET, which possesses many of the tropes and some of the same personnel of *The Cove*.
9. Miley Cyrus was the most popular search query for 2013 according to Yahoo ("Stars").

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