

# YOUR MIND IS BIGGER THAN ALL THE SUPERMARKETS IN THE WORLD

0. This is an attempt to present my view on my life and my art, their meaning and how they are connected.

1. As a visual artist working with digital video and stills, and, with an (ex?)-identity as a documentary filmmaker, in this text, I will examine and question my art practice until now.

What is documentary filmmaking? In what sense does the documentary approach differ from art? Is there a difference at all? How has my own work changed since I started at Konstfack? As a starting point I will discuss my work *Your Mind is Bigger than all the Supermarkets in the World*. I will also present some of my influences and texts that has inspired me.

## 2.1 Opinions/Notes

Opinions. It is not easy for me to write this text because I am trying hard not to have so many opinions these days. I am trying to change from "knowing" into being. From having opinions to listening and asking questions. And from what I hear, read or experience, I am trying not to make fixed conclusions. This is also why I have chosen to include many quotes in this text.

To create a collage, rather than coming to conclusions, or proving a thesis.

In Deleuze and Guattari's words; "*seeing the flux of becoming-life*."

*"Instead of thinking in oppositions, binary categories and dualistic conceptions of reality, we should recognize the processuality of the states of beings. Instead of thinking nouns we should be thinking verbs. Taking the example from the audience in the cinema, you are not "the audience" – a static and defined, outlined and frozen object – but you become audience with the film."*<sup>1</sup>

You could say I am also presenting a mixture of a Deleuzian attitude, a contemplative Buddhist way with roots in political social activism, Butler and queer feminism. (And again I am categorizing and that was what I was trying not to do. But how shall I write this text otherwise?)

## 2.2 Background

As a documentary filmmaker I liked to impose my view of the world, using all the manipulations offered by the film media. I worked with reality, documentary material, creating and deciding the happy end from the start, creating a classical dramaturgic structure, and thus guiding the audience's emotions in very specific directions. And with the help of a constant flow of music, rhythmic editing of images, narration, facts and the subjects in the film, I presented reality as I knew it. What I mean is that even before gathering my material, I had a clear and already determined vision of how the film would start, end and what people would feel watching it.

In short I combined all kinds of traditional documentary filmmaking styles to reach my goal of changing people's minds and attitudes to certain social issues; in this case homophobia. (*Don't you Worry, it's Just a Phase / Du ska nog se att det går över* 74 min. 2003)

## 2.3 Documentary

John Grierson, who made the first definition of a documentary film called it a "*creative treatment of reality*"<sup>2</sup> Grierson also believed documentary should educate, or serve social and political purposes, and allow citizens to become meaningfully involved in social change. Joanne Richardson puts it rather critically:

*"In Grierson's liberalist rhetoric, it bespeaks the duty of intellectuals to enlighten the social body. The documentary negates the raw document, subsuming it into an organized, unified perspective capable of imparting a clear and unambiguous meaning for the audience."*<sup>3</sup>

In the early days of filmmaking some of the films were truly experimental, but above all they had this will to reach out to the masses and spread their vision of the world, their ideology, or even their propaganda.

<sup>1</sup>Deleuze and Guattari 1989 in "Cinema And Its Outside Making A Deleuzian Sense of Moving Images" Sebastian Abrahamsson, Cultural Studies and Contemporary Cultural Theory, Lund University Department of Sociology 2005

<sup>2</sup> John Grierson quoted in "What is documentary?" National Film Board of Canada

<sup>3</sup> "Esthetics of Counter-Documentary" Joanne Richardson published: [www.artmargins.com](http://www.artmargins.com)

The films made with Dziga Vertov's "Kino-eye" theory's, Robert Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North*, were early examples of this experimental/informative approach. Later Leni Riefensthal's *Triumph of the Will* was a brilliant and extreme example of how to treat reality in a creative and artistic way in order to change people's minds. A film paid by Hitler and the National Socialist Party, it was a Nazi propaganda film.

Michael Moore, even though his filmmaking isn't experimental, he is still another example of the educational and propagandist approach of the documentary filmmaking tradition.

I really had this view of changing people's minds, their attitudes, by any means, with all the filmmaking skills I could muster. Even though I would not call myself an intellectual, my goal was to make the audience identify with the main characters in the film; three teenage lesbian girls and through their eyes see and feel our homophobic society; in the end making the world a better place for young queer people to live in.

I did do some experimentation in the film *Don't You Worry...* I mixed many styles of storytelling, creating a collage of archival footage, subjective videodiaris, "objective" narrator, self-reflexive meta-film sequences, staged scenes... I didn't want it to be conventional. After all, film is so much more than a narration.

### 2.3 Film Art & Cinephilia, Black Box & White Cube. Together as one?

But even though there were many artistic and experimental documentary films in the beginning of the century, this is hardly common now. Susan Sontag writes about cinephilia, and the expectations of what to see and experience on the silver screen in the early days of cinema:

*"for those first audiences, the very transcription of the most banal reality - the Lumière brothers filming "The Arrival of a Train at Ciotat Station" -- was a fantastic experience. Cinema began in wonder, the wonder that reality can be transcribed with such immediacy. All of cinema is an attempt to perpetuate and to reinvent that sense of wonder."*<sup>4</sup>

I loved to go to the movies. My mother took me to there, every Saturday from age 4 or 5... I loved to lose myself in the stories on the silver screen.

*"...you took home the experience of submerging yourself in lives that were not yours. The desire to lose yourself in other people's lives, faces ... the experience of surrender to, of being transported by, what was on the screen. You wanted to be kidnapped by the movie -- and to be kidnapped was to be overwhelmed by the physical presence of the image."*<sup>5</sup>

But then, Sontag says, what happened? According to her cinephilia and the love of cinema as an art form died in the 80's when the industry definitely took over.

*"To be sure, there was always a conflict between cinema as an industry and cinema as an art, cinema as routine and cinema as experiment. But the conflict was not such as to make impossible the making of wonderful films, sometimes within and sometimes outside of mainstream cinema. Now the balance has tipped decisively in favor of cinema as an industry... Cinephilia has no role in the era of hyperindustrial films. For cinephilia cannot help ... from sponsoring the idea of the film as, first of all, a poetic object"*<sup>6</sup>

So what Sontag may be meaning is that cinephilia is the love of cinema as art. The commercial value and the cinema as an industry has killed the need for artistic value in the films, so cinephilia is dead, and dead are also the movies..

As art. So according to Sontag, the audience expect something spectacular, something entertaining, or even something educational, informative when going to the movies – but art? No.

And then again what is art in film? Is it to experience something without necessarily understanding it? To appreciate the film as a "poetic object" without the usual smooth narrative which never loses the viewer, unless the film is just badly made?

Back to the documentary tradition where Bill Nichols in this quote confirm our suspicion that art in the documentary film are of subordinated interest: *"A good documentary stimulates discussion about its subject, not itself"*<sup>7</sup>

What is wrong with making films to educate and enlighten, to make the world a better place? Or to entertain?

Nothing. Of course. Indeed, I think independent documentary filmmakers are more needed than ever in a society where the mass medias are suffering more and more from globalization and capitalist "monopoly" attacks.

Fewer persons or companies own more and more of the media. That is scary. Democracy, if there ever was any, is slipping even further away.

I just hate the economic system. I hate injustice.

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<sup>4-6</sup> "A Century of Cinema" by Susan Sontag 1995

<sup>7</sup> "Introduction to Documentary" Bill Nichols, 2001

Listen to this. I find it inspiring:

*"Our task is to formulate a trap; an ambush that can open the mind to the possibility of pragmatism – for the only alternative available today seems to be a relapse either into a post-modern form of nihilism, or into a medieval fundamentalism akin to the simplified, semi-religious world views that are presently being promoted by powerful militant leaders both in the East and in the West. It is time to develop a new identity model that can invest both art and activism with new meaning and better resonance.*

*Modernism's dualism, which makes possible the entrenched ego, is closer to fascism than to democracy in social contexts. It supports colonialist domination: to talk, to refuse to listen, to dominate. The task for this new identity model is nothing less than a defense of one of the late modernism's most impossible ideals, namely democracy. It is the responsibility of art and political activism to create an identity model that both in terms of method and message articulates a democratic alternative."*<sup>8</sup>

I want to use art as a resistance and celebration at the same time. Art as a resistance? Thomas Hirschhorn:

*"Art itself is a means of Resistance and it does resist because it is Art. That is what is essential. But that is also what is difficult for an Artist; to keep believing in Art's constitutive resistance and not to turn to architecture, design, graphics, or fashion."*<sup>9</sup>

Does he mean resistance to the economic system? To conventions? To anything ?

Of course independent filmmakers cannot stay completely outside the system, neither are they "independent" since it is very much in the hands of financiers and the distribution companies what shall be screened or not, but still they are not paid directly from the big media industries, and there ARE alternative ways of financing and distributing films. (read internet..)

*"The problems with cinema seem to me, more than anything, a cultural failure. Tastes have been corrupted, and it's so rare to see filmmakers who have the aspiration to take on profound thoughts and feelings. There is a reason that more and more films that I like are coming from the less prosperous parts of the world, where commercial value has not completely taken over."*<sup>10</sup>

"Tastes corrupted", maybe she means that the expectations of the audience are only to be entertained, or informed, not open to "poetic objects"?

Tired of "unify" and "organise" my perspective, I have lost interest in dictating the audience what to feel and what to think in the moviemaking way, now what?

With my film *Your Mind is Bigger than all the Supermarkets in the World*, I want to challenge the cinema audience. I want them to experience something else than a conventional story. To widen the possibilities and the spectrum of expectations of what to experience while watching a film. What film should be. Anything could happen in the cinema theatre if we rethink the black box as a space for art. After all there is image, sound, lights and shadows, a scene for performance... A huge potential that is not being used enough.

I love the black box. I love being in the dark cinema theatre, I love sitting with the anonymous mass around me. Alone and together. Even though not sharing the same experience, still we hear and see the same things at the same time. I love the concentration in the room, serving as a spaceship the transportation

I also love the white cube. To go around in an almost empty space where people whispers and moves separately, in silent reflection. As few people as possible is what I prefer, walking around alone with just a few other loners in the museum. In this stillness the white cube is becoming a church to me.

It is not one space against the other. Black or White. I just think art can happen anywhere.

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<sup>8</sup>"Democracy is a good idea - On politics, art and activism, idealism and pragmatism"

Morten Goll & Jesper Goll web: [http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol\\_2/contributors3/golltext.html](http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors3/golltext.html)

<sup>9</sup> Art is resistance; text by Thomas Hirschhorn, textbook "Rethinking Dissent"

Göteborgs 4:e Internationella Konstbiennial

<sup>10</sup>"A Century of Cinema" by Susan Sontag 1995

## 2.4 Art? / Relax with paradox and ambiguity

Now as I am leaving my identity as a documentary filmmaker behind, I want to find a more open relation to the world and the spectator. In fact, probably the only thing I CAN say as a fact is that I do not know anything for sure. I do not feel like making statements anymore. Turning inside-out. Outside-in.

I experienced a shift from wanting to change people's mind's into changing my own mind.

Or as Bill Viola says elegantly;

*"For me the shift from ideas about social perfection to the idea of self-perfection was a big turning point."*<sup>11</sup>

This is exactly what I mean. He intends his work to be means of transformation for himself, and indirectly a transformation for spectators, through a deepened experience of the world and the self.

For me this "shift" happened when I travelled around alone in Sri Lanka and India in 2004. I had plenty of time thinking and reading... Especially I was reading Pema Chodron an American buddhist nun:

*"As human beings, not only do we seek resolution, but we also feel that we deserve resolution..."*

*However, we deserve something better, which is the middle way, an open state of mind that can relax with paradox and ambiguity. To the degree that we've been avoiding uncertainty, we're naturally going to have withdrawal symptoms – withdrawal from always thinking that there is a problem and that someone, somewhere needs to fix it."*<sup>12</sup>

*"... what we want to do is to move to the left or to the right. We don't want to sit and feel what we feel.*

*We don't want to go through the detox."*<sup>13</sup>

No it was not nice, but I did sit down. I did go through the detox. And I started to meditate.

In my work *Your Mind is Bigger than all the Supermarkets in the World* I tried to adopt this attitude of openness, of "relaxing with ambiguity" of "seeing the flux of becoming-life".

Not editing the sound nor changing the image from one to another I have deliberately reduced the power of my own tools for manipulation, control and direction of the audience's emotions.

## 2.5 Presentation: *Your Mind is Bigger than all the Supermarkets in the World*

*Your Mind is Bigger than all the Supermarkets in the World* is an art project which moves somewhere in between experimental film and documentary film. A non-action movie. An art-film.

The film, or rather the sound, consists of a conversation between me and my meditation teacher Upul Gamage.

The image is the view from where we are sitting, on top of a mountain, overlooking another mountain.

A green valley, other mountains, forests and fields far away.

Our voices are surrounded by the rich sounds from the tropical landscape around us. There are insects and birds of all kinds, monkeys rushing in the trees, or someone chopping wood in the valley.

The whole interview is in just one take, a 45 minutes unedited stream of conversation and sounds. Even though separately recorded the image is also one single take of 45 minutes. An unedited piece of "now". A flow of raw material captured and then combined with the sound. In the image there is hardly any motion; just a grass straw moving in the foreground, some clouds moving slowly over the valley, creating shadows on the green mountain... So the impression is that there is no movement, but at the same time the image changes in every second.

One can compare this way of showing time passing with *Empire State Building and Sleep* by A. Warhol.

The difference is that in *Your Mind is Bigger than all the Supermarkets in the World* the conversation is added to the time passing. Another reference is Derek Jarman's "Blue", a feature length film where the image is only one colour, a blue screen, and with that the sound; conversations, thoughts, dealing with death and the fact that the filmmaker has AIDS.

The conversation in *Your Mind is Bigger than all the Supermarkets in the World* is existential and deals with questions about the meaning of life, causes for happiness/unhappiness, ways out of depression states, universal human issues as loneliness and "aloneness", connectedness, and our possibilities to train our minds and learn to deal with loss, memories and other stressful situations in life.

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<sup>11</sup> Article about the artist Bill Viola [www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/viola/artist.html](http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/viola/artist.html) 2003

<sup>12-13</sup> "When things fall apart – heart advice for difficult times" Pema Chodron Shambala Editions 2000

*"Actually, what is past? You can't find past without your mind. There is no past in your diaries, calendars or in the museum. No past. It is in your mind. And, past is a present thought. What is yesterday? You can't find yesterday without thinking about yesterday. So each time you think about yesterday it's a present action. No? But we don't know it. We think we are living in yesterday. We forget about the present, we forget about here and now. Then yesterday, that ignorance, is giving life to yesterday."*<sup>14</sup>

He is also talking about the reasons for happiness and unhappiness;

*"...normally we are looking for bigger supermarkets. We are looking for modern things, for beautiful things. But we never look at our mind. So if you want to find a permanent solution you have to turn back into your mind and see; who wants this? Why do you want this? What is the wrong if I don't get this? Then your mind cannot be your boss anymore"*<sup>15</sup>

The conversation and the image of the mountain is recorded at the Nilambe Meditationscenter in Sri Lanka. The project is an attempt at giving an experience of "now", of presence, and is meant to balance our otherwise fragmented visual environment. What happens when we have to meet our own restlessness, our longing for speed, get away, change the channel, or change whatever there is. A new bathroom? Another apartment, another job, another life? Or whatever exciting experience we might miss if we just stay still. With this project I want to comment on the western culture of consumption of experiences, our need to be entertained, and our fear of non-action, emptiness and silence. It is a comment on the habit of grabbing things, people or projects to fill the restlessness in our minds.

So the reason I chose to only have one image, one long take, is to experiment with this idea in form, as well as in content. By abstaining from most editing, or changing the image from one to another, I am not giving in for the spectators desire for a new image, or the urge to move on to another place. I do not let entertain, seduce nor do I "kidnap" the spectator to another world.

The function of the silver screen and the image usually have in a movie is there for radically altered. Because of the human mind's restlessness, you will lose interest in the image, you will drop out of the illusion of the big screen and instead be confronted with yourself and your own mind, your own restlessness. The mind will begin to wander, to think about other things, to see what is around you. You will become aware of the present moment. So instead of sinking into the screen, you are falling out, confronted with yourself and your restlessness.

Maybe Deleuze didn't think of the same kind of image I talk about, but still I find Sebastian Abrahamssons analyse of Deleuze interesting;

*"When the image becomes what Deleuze speaks of as a time-image, time in itself is presented before us, showing the very becoming and dynamism of life. The screen itself is the cerebral membrane where immediate and direct confrontations take place between the past and the future, the inside and the outside, at a distance impossible to determine, independent of any fixed point...The image no longer has space and movement as its primary characteristics but topology and time."*<sup>16</sup>

For me categorizing people was very important in my documentary work, because it is very difficult to obtain social political changes (for example fighting homophobia, sexism or racism) without being able to classify humanity in certain groups, and see problematic structures. At the same time I feel these categories may become a prison and prevent people to identify with each other as just humans, with about the same hopes and fears, longing for happiness and fear of death.

I have always had, and in many ways still has a constructivist view on race, gender, sexuality. I find Judith Butler's theory on gender as a continual "performance" as something we do in every moment, and in consequences can stop doing, very interesting. Also I find Massumi criticism is relevant:

*"The constructivism approach (i.e. the assertion that sex, gender, class, race etc. are all constructed in discourse) tells us little, if anything, about the immediacy and the becoming in the process by which categories are transformed and reinvented, all it can tell us is this and that happened there and then. It is as if time has stopped and objects been arrested. The real problem here is that constructivism cannot explain movement and change since it halts before them."*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14-15</sup> Transcript from the film *Your Mind is Bigger than all the Supermarkets in the World* interview, Upul Gamage 2006

<sup>16</sup> *Deleuze 1989: 125* "Cinema And Its Outside Making A Deleuzean Sense of Moving Images"

Sebastian Abrahamsson Cultural Studies and Contemporary Cultural Theory, Lund University Department of Sociology 2005

<sup>17</sup> Massumi 2002: 4-5 "Cinema And Its Outside Making A Deleuzean Sense of Moving Images"

Sebastian Abrahamsson Cultural Studies and Contemporary Cultural Theory, Lund University Department of Sociology 2005

It is no wonder then that one who looks for these categories will inevitably 'find' them in one way or another.

So apart from the formal reason, the idea of not showing any image of Upul Gamage or myself has to do with the problem of categories. Hearing but not seeing us, there are at least less possibilities to get stuck in prejudice. Hopefully, one may instead listen to what we are actually saying.

*"Democracy has never existed. Yet, it is a good idea."*<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

When watching "Your Mind..." you become aware of time passing, and your own mind's movement's. The image of the mountain will function as a meditation object, which means something you try to focus on, then loses when your mind is wandering off, and then tries to come back to. With Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's definition meditation is;

*"...not about escaping life or trying to reach an utopian mind set. Neither is it a question of mental gymnastics. Meditation simply is, what is, and there is nothing mystical about that... we find a way of approaching reality...it's a way of becoming one with the present moment."*<sup>19</sup>

Actually, in this way, only combining two pieces of raw documents, and giving them the function of a meditation object, I seem to get closer to reality than I earlier did in traditional documentary filmmaking.

*"...in reality the body is changing form at every moment; or rather, there is no form, since form is immobile and the reality is movement. What is real is the continual change of form: form is only a snapshot view of transition."*<sup>20</sup>

In screening one single take on a mountain for 45 minutes, which seems not to be changing but still is changing constantly, I hope to capture or examine the concept of change and impermanence of life.

This work raises questions about the existence itself. What is the meaning of Life? What is the meaning of Art?

I became a filmmaker because I wanted to change the world. There are so many things that are wrong, so many "problems that need to be fixed"! So much injustice and lack of equality between the North/south, men and women, white and coloured, rich and poor, straight and queers in the world. This fight for justice, for others and for me, has been the main reason to work with documentary films. So in my heart I am an activist, but in my mind and in this text I am questioning my methods.

May dualist, strong opinions blind me from perceiving reality? What if life is not a struggle for this or that? What if life is not a war? How to find peace and with that happiness? For both myself and the world?

Letting go of opinions is hard. Opinions are the material out of which we build identity. Define ourselves with contours in this world. So what I am aspiring to do is in fact to go beyond identity, or to deconstruct my fixed views of the world, my truths, my ego.

*"... When we perceive the spaciousness in our lives, when we sense a gap in the continual conversation we have with ourselves, when we suddenly notice what's in front of us, when we take a fresh, clear, unedited look at reality, we can recognize it as egolessness."*<sup>21</sup>

Yes, I long for a fresh, unedited look at reality... And now, where are you going? What's your conclusion?  
To fuck politics? Become a saint? Be an artist without an ego?  
- I don't know.

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<sup>18</sup> "Democracy is a good idea - On politics, art and activism, idealism and pragmatism" Morten Goll & Jesper Goll web: [http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol\\_2/contributors3/golltext.html](http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors3/golltext.html) publ. in "The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest" in November 2003 vol 1

<sup>19</sup> About Meditation, quote from Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Shambala website [www.shambala.org](http://www.shambala.org)

<sup>20</sup> *Bergson 1911: 318-319* "Cinema And Its Outside Making A Deleuzean Sense of Moving Images" Sebastian Abrahamsson Cultural Studies and Contemporary Cultural Theory, Lund University Department of Sociology 2005

<sup>21</sup> "When Things Fall Apart – Heart advice for Difficult Times" Pema Chodron Shambala Editions 2000

<sup>22</sup> Yoko Ono Sculpture Magazine, 2000

<sup>23</sup> Article about the artist Bill Viola [www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/viola/artist.html](http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/viola/artist.html) 2003

How is this aspiration of egolessness even possible to combine with a career as an artist? Isn't that a contradiction in itself? I am not the only one thinking about these issues... Yoko Ono expressed it like this:

*"The struggle with art, for me, became about the concept of whether you were stating your ego through your work or creating an environment where other people can be creative as well."*<sup>22</sup>

Bill Viola said;

*"...could my precious art exist in service to something else, something much broader and deeper? Until that moment my measure of success in art resided within the confines of exhibiting in museums, galleries and alternative art spaces....it was beginning to sink in that perhaps art resided in life itself, that as a practice it derives primarily from the quality of experience, depth of thought and devotion from the maker"*<sup>23</sup>

I want to have the intention of offering in my work. I like the idea of making art as a service.  
So I still want to change the world...but maybe the change will have to begin with myself?

As Upul answers in the film;

*"You can use the life to understand about the life. Life is a great school, a great laboratory to do your own experiments."*<sup>24</sup>

So the ultimate challenge is to find a way of letting go of self, of ego, of opinions, and at the same time being myself, finding my own way in the art world labyrinth, keeping my activist ideals, at the same time changing my methods, the too common dualist view on the world.

*A thought is a function of time, a pattern of growth, and not the 'thing' that the lens of the printed word seems to objectify. Duration is the medium that makes thought possible, therefore duration is to consciousness as light is to the eye. Time itself has become the materia prima of the art of the moving image.*<sup>25</sup>

## **Cecilia Neant-Falk**

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<sup>24</sup> Transcript from the film *Your Mind is Bigger than all the Supermarkets in the World* interview, Upul Gamage 2006

<sup>25</sup> Bill Viola "Video Black" Illuminationg Video s242, edited by Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer , Aperture Foundation.  
[http://webzone.k3.mah.se/k99af9ts/3\\_VIDEOKONST.htm](http://webzone.k3.mah.se/k99af9ts/3_VIDEOKONST.htm)

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Robert Flaherty Nanok of the North.