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The visual turn in IR: documentary filmmaking as a critical method

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Abstract

Although the field of international relations (IR) is arguably in the midst of a 'visual turn', few scholars have directly discussed research methods for studying visual international politics. This article follows the aesthetic turn's call to resist the rational methods that frame our understanding of ourselves and the world. Yet it also argues that the visual turn is more than an elaboration of the aesthetic turn. While analyses of visual culture are characteristically suspicious of the power of images, this article argues that making films can provide an innovative method for studying IR. In particular, the visual turn can better examine the IR of self/Other relations in terms of affect, bodily sense and experience. The article thus goes beyond such theoretical discussions to offer an autoethnographic account of the methods used to produce a documentary film about being the Other in China: *toilet adventures*. It argues that fieldwork that employs on-camera interviews does not just gather the 'facts' of peoples' experiences, but also can illustrate the affective politics of the estrangement, the giddiness, and thus the excess evoked by such experiences. The goal of this article is to show what documentary filmmaking can 'do' by providing an innovative method for creating new sites and senses of international politics.

Keywords: visual international politics, aesthetics, affect, filmmaking, China

The Visual Turn in IR:
Documentary Filmmaking as a Critical Method

Introduction

In July 2014, I started working on a documentary film, *toilet adventures* (19 min.), that addresses the politics of shit in China. It uses the on-camera testimonials of nearly two dozen participants recounting their first impressions of China to explore the very mundane personal experience of going to the bathroom in the PRC. I thought it would be an entertaining way to chart how people encounter the unknown through a bodily function that is both intimate and universal. In this way, I hoped to creatively address some of the self/Other issues at the cutting edge of critical international relations (IR): the

role of person-to-person relations, the importance of the everyday, and the value of emotions and embodied knowledge.[1] The goal was to provide a nuanced view of encounters with the unknown—in this case, Chinese public toilets—and show how different people addressed this alien situation, often with good humor: there was a lot of laughing as people recounted their uncomfortable experiences. Such laughs highlight what documentary filmmaking offers that is different from text-based studies, audio-recorded interviews, and written analysis of existing films. Namely, an appreciation of the power of the nonlinear, nonlinguistic and nonrepresentational aspects of knowledge: the laughs, sighs, shrugs, cringes and tears that are provoked in the on-camera interview process, which then can be edited into an engaging set of images that, in turn, can produce laughs, cringes and tears in the film's audience. In this way, filmmaking provides an exemplary method for showing what knowledge production can 'do'—rather than what it can mean.

Certainly, this topic risks descending into the cliché—i.e. Montezuma's revenge or Delhi belly—of middle class people experiencing structural poverty for the first time in the 'Third World'. Such funny stories are political in the sense that they distinguish insiders from outsiders: there is always 'the butt of the joke', in this case China, India or Mexico. The interviews thus tended to reaffirm dominant ways of formulating problems: the discourses of 'Orientalism' and 'Science', with their attendant and interrelated hierarchical distinctions of East/West and backward/advanced. Indeed, in one sense the film is merely one more illustration of the culture war of China vs. the West that raged during the Cold War, and continues in the twenty-first century to turn difference into Otherness for both sides. It also illustrates China's current odd position as both a potential 'threat' as the world's second largest economy and military, and its enduring 'backward' image as the world's

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[1] Todd Hall and Andrew Ross, 'Affective Politics After 9/11', *International Organization* (forthcoming, 2015); Michael J. Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn* (New York: Routledge, (2013); Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, and Emma Hutchison, 'Visual Cultures of Inhospitality', *Peace Review* (2014) 26(2):192-200; Cynthia Enloe, 'The Mundane Matters', *International Political Sociology* (2011) 4(5):446-462; Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchinson, eds., 'Forum: Emotions and World Politics', *International Theory* (2014) 6(3):1–105.

largest developing nation that still faces many 'hygienic modernity' challenges.[2]

Hence it is not strange that some viewers of early versions of *toilet adventures* concluded that China is a dirty backward place that is essentially different from the modern West. While participants and audiences were generally very enthusiastic about China and its recent economic success, at the same time, many still felt that the PRC is defined by what one participant called its 'lavatorial aspects'—and this was not meant as a compliment.[3] Hence while making the film, there was a persistent concern with the ethical problem of 'fairness' to my analytical subject (i.e. China), as well as to individual interview participants: I had legal permission to use the interviews, but was it fair to present them—and China at large—in a less than favorable light?

In this sense, the making of the documentary film *toilet adventures* provides a good case study; it helps show how documentary filmmaking can provide innovative methods for the study of international politics, especially when we think of foreign policy as a matter of self/Other relations.[4] The filmmaking process also can show how methods and ethics are intertwined in interesting and unexpected ways—for example, how one's ethical position

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[2] Gonçalo Santos, 'Technological Choices and Modern Civilizing Processes: Reflections on Toilet Practices in Rural South China', In *Anthropology and Civilizational Analysis*, eds. Johann Arnason and Chris Hann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming, 2015).

[3] Interview, 8/8/2014.

[4] David Campbell, *Writing Security* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); William Connolly, *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

becomes even more complicated when conducting a 'domestic ethnography' that films friends and family.[5]

The first section of this essay provides a critical analysis of IR methods and of methodologies for visual culture. It locates the analysis in the postpositivist debates that animate critical IR and visual cultural studies to do two things: 1) to appreciate the methodological shift from empiricism and hermeneutics to a 'critical aesthetic' mode of analysis, and 2) to argue that analysis of visual international politics also needs to shift from its focus on ideology to appreciate affect.[6]

While in many ways section one unpacks the impact of the aesthetic turn in IR[7] on studies of visual international politics, section two explores what could be called IR's visual turn. In general, critical analysis of visual culture and visual international politics is quite suspicious of the power of images. Michael Ignatieff's oft-cited dismissal of the visual is typical: 'the entire script of the CBS nightly half-hour news would fit on three-quarters of the front page of the *New York Times*'.[8] But rather than follow the aesthetic turn's focus on the power of language and the politics of representation, this essay will explore what visual images can 'do' that is different from the written word.

Hence, the second section engages in a 'visual turn'—which is perhaps better described in the verbal as a 'visualizing turn' because it stresses filmmaking as a theory-making activity that joins the metatheoretical with the practical. It explores what documentary filmmaking can 'do', by critically

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[5] Michael Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 216-29.

[6] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); William F. Schroeder, 'On Cowboys and Aliens: Affective History and Queer Becoming in Contemporary China', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (2012) 18(4): 425-52; Hall and Ross, 'Affective Politics'.

[7] Roland Bleiker 'The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (2001) 30:509-533; Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[8] Cited in Bleiker, *Aesthetics*, 34.

recounting the methods of film production. Although such autoethnography can appear self-indulgent to those who desire analysis that is objective and rigorous, this article follows Brigg and Bleiker to suggest that we need to employ a different set of criteria to evaluate autoethnographic discussions of filmmaking.[9] Rather than looking for objectivity and generalizability as the guiding criteria, this method values creativity in the sense of generating new sites and senses of international politics: specifically, the role of person-to-person relations, the importance of the everyday, and the value of emotions and embodied knowledge. In this way, the film and the article each explore how affect theory's shift of attention from 'facts' to 'feelings' can inform our understanding of international politics. The essay thus does not aim to be a comprehensive survey of the growing field of visual international politics. It has the more modest goal of seeing how researchers can use filmmaking as a methodology to see what knowledge production can 'do': in this case, how it can provoke new sites and senses of international politics as self/Other relations.

Admittedly, writing about filmmaking is an uneasy strategy that raises many contradictions: i.e. using a linear and representational mode to discuss nonlinear and nonrepresentational methods. It is noteworthy that two leading IR filmmakers—James Der Derian and Cynthia Weber—both generally avoid academic discussions of their methods. Weber's book-length description of how she came to make the 'I am an American' suite of films is as much a personal travelogue as it is a critical analysis.[10] Like in her films, the book's images provoke analysis as much as the written text. Der Derian's essays and interviews about *Human Terrain* are fascinating for how they deliberately refuse to discuss methods: rather than look to the director to define the film's meaning, the point is to watch it, and then discuss it.[11]

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[9] Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker, 'Autoethnographic International Relations: Exploring the Self as a Source of Knowledge', *Review of International Studies* (2010) 36(3):779-98.

[10] Cynthia Weber, *"I am an American": Filming the Fear of Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[11] James Der Derian, 'Now We Are All Avatars', *Millennium* (2010) 39(1): 181-6; James Der Derian, 'War Becomes Academic: Human Terrain, Virtuous War and Contemporary Militarism', In *Militarism and International Relations:*

Alongside these two worthy approaches, this essay seeks to more deliberately describe and analyze the filmmaking process as an innovative method for producing knowledge in IR. In my case, film production and essay-writing definitely informed each other. But in the end, the film and the essay are actually about two different things: the film explores issues of self and Other on the toilet in China, while the essay focuses on the theoretical, methodological and ethical possibilities provided by filmmaking. For many of the reasons discussed in this essay—i.e. that filmmaking offers a different form of knowledge than that produced by writing texts—the essay does not seek to reproduce the film's content in written form. Hence it may be helpful to read the essay alongside watching the film, which is available at
http://vimeo.com/billcallahan/ta

I. The Aesthetic Turn: Visual Culture Methodologies and IR Methods

Since Roland Bleiker declared the aesthetic turn in IR theory,[12] much has been written about the need to resist the rational methods and the linear teleological narratives that frame our understanding of ourselves and the world. He called for IR to more directly address the interpretive aspects of politics, and suggested that we look at poetry, art, and film as alternative sources to understand international relations.

Although many scholars now employ visual images in their analysis, few directly discuss research methods for visual international politics.[13] Hence

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Political Economy, Security, Theory, Eds. Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby

(London: Routledge, 2013), 59-73.

[12] Bleiker, 'The Aesthetic Turn'.

[13] Cerwyn Moore and Chris Farrands, 'Visual Analysis', In *Critical Approaches to Security: An Introduction to Theories and Methods*, Ed. Laura J. Shepherd (London: Routledge, 2013), 221-35; David Shim, *Visual Politics and North Korea: Seeing is Believing* (London: Routledge, 2013); Lene Hansen, 'Theorizing the Image for Security Studies: Visual Securitization and the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis', *European Journal of International Relations* (2011) 17(1):51-74; Roland Bleiker, 'The Politics of Visual Methods and Methodologies', 2014 *Millennium* Conference.

it is helpful to examine how scholars use visual images in their analysis more generally. Still, the pickings are slim: for example, David Campbell's analysis of photography, humanitarianism and genocide, Cynthia Weber's books that use films to discuss IR theory and US foreign policy, James Der Derian's work on the 'military-industrial-media-entertainment network', and geographers' consideration of the visual in 'critical geopolitics'.[14] Even fewer people actually make films as a method for considering international politics: as mentioned above, Weber's 'I am an American' films and Der Derian's co-directed film *Human Terrain: War Becomes Academic* stand out as exemplary.[15]

To explore research methods for visual international politics, then, it is helpful first to separate analysis into the two cognate fields: visual cultural studies and IR. Certainly, there is much discussion of methodology in the

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[14] David Campbell, 'Geopolitics and Visuality: Sighting the Darfur Conflict',

Political Geography (2007) 26(4):357-82; Cynthia Weber, *International*

Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction (New York: Routledge, 2013);

Cynthia Weber, *Imagining America at War: Morality, Politics and Film*

(London: Routledge, 2006); James Der Derian, *Virtual War* (New York:

Routledge, 2009); Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics* (Minneapolis:

University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Fraser MacDonald, Rachel Hughes,

and Klaus Dodds, eds., *Observant States: Geopolitics and Visual Culture*

(New York: I.B. Taurus, 2010).

[15] Weber Cynthia. (2007) '"I am an American": Portraits of post-9/11 US

citizens',

https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/i_am_an_american_portraits_of_post_

9_11_us_citizens (viewed on September 3, 2014); Weber, *"I am an*

American"; James Der Derian, David Udris and Michael Udris, dir., *Human*

Terrain: War Becomes Academic, 2010.

social sciences, and new attention to methods in IR as well.[16] However, there is less discussion of methodology in visual cultural studies. Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Research with Visual Materials* stands out as an example of a theoretically-sophisticated practical handbook of research methods. In line with postpositivist IR theory, her goal is not to find the singular correct 'truth' about visual images, but to 'ground … interpretations in careful empirical research of the social circumstances in which they are embedded'.[17] Rose thus develops a 'critical visual methodology' by considering the 'cultural significance, social practices, and power relations' that are embedded in each image, with the aim of challenging mainstream ways of seeing, understanding and acting.[18] This multifaceted research method is helpful because it targets both the factual/explanatory and the embodied/affective role of images, which will be discussed more below. The question here is not (just) how images look, but what they can 'do' in the sense of an active notion of what bodily affect they can provoke.[19]

In its later editions, *Visual Methodologies* ventures into the social sciences to see how researchers can answer 'questions not by examining images, but by making them': e.g. taking photographs.[20] Rose laments that there is little dialogue between these social scientists and visual culture specialists, and commends anthropologists and geographers for 'experimenting with making images in order to explore the nonrepresentational aspects of the social'.[21] She explores this in a chapter on 'making photographs as part of a research project', and notes that many of these photographic projects are deliberately involved in political reform

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[16] Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Shapiro, *Trans-Disciplinary Method*; Laura J. Shepherd, ed., *Critical Approaches to Security: An Introduction to Theories and Methods* (London: Routledge, (2013); Bleiker, 'The Politics of Visual Methods'.

[17] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage, 2012), xviii.

[18] Ibid., xix.

[19] Ibid., 11, 16.

[20] Ibid., 10.

[21] Ibid., 11.

campaigns that explore the experience of 'marginalized or disempowered people and places: children, ruins, the homeless'.[22]

International politics documentaries can work as 'campaign videos' in similar ways. Weber's suite of films, for example, plays off of a popular Ad Council Public Service Announcement (PSA) 'I am an American', which celebrated the diversity of the United States in the wake of the September 11th attacks. The Ad Council's goal was to promote tolerance of diversity—especially for Muslim-Americans—and to unify the nation: the PSA ended with America's national motto: *E Pluribus Unum* ('Out of Many, One'). Weber's film project uses a similar format, but explores a different set of participants to show the gap between the ideal and the lived experience: 'the son of an immigrant without papers, a political refugee *from* the US, a person wrongly accused of being a terrorist spy'. In the end, she concludes that the US has always been fragmented, and her films each finish with the reworked motto: *Ex Uno, Plures* ('From One, Many').[23]

In this sense, 'I am an American' is a strong example of an analysis of self/Other relations in international politics. The various stories are each tragic in their own way, which is shown not only through the information conveyed, but also through the participants' silences, tone of voice and facial expressions. Indeed, a large part of the work of the films is done through visuals: the establishing shots at gravesites, military memorials, the US-Canada border, and the US-Mexico border. The films thus work by showing how participants are concerned, bewildered, disappointed and disillusioned that the US is not living up to its ideals.

Like many social science film projects, 'I am an American' thus seeks to make disempowered subjects more 'visible' so their problems can be addressed through a mobilization of progressive reform movements.[24] This is part of a common polemic in visual international politics that seeks to criticize the War on Terror more generally, thus reproducing mainstream IR's focus on sovereign state power in the international system.[25] Although Weber explains

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[22] Ibid., 297-327, 326.

[23] Weber, *"I am an American"*.

[24] Gillian Rose, 'On the Relation Between "Visual Research Methods" and Contemporary Visual Culture', *Sociological Review* (2014) 62(1):24-46.

[25] Weber, *Imagining America*; Der Derian, 'Now We Are All Avatars';

MacDonald, Hughes and Dodds, *Observant States*.

that her films aim to 'suggest the possibility for new mobilizations of affect, aesthetics, and politics',[26] when push comes to shove, ideology trumps affect. For example, when Minuteman founder Chris Simcox used Weber's film about him to raise funds for his US Senate campaign, Weber removed the film from the Internet and forbade Simcox from using it 'at any time for any reason in any form whatsoever' because this constituted a 'flagrant violation' of her politics.[27]

While such ethically-charged research is admirable for provoking political discussion, such a sharp focus on social and political problems also can limit visual methodology to certain forms of identity politics and partisan politics. As Michael J. Shapiro argues, a 'critical attitude' of self-reflection needs to go beyond 'merely serving particular social segments or disempowered groups'. Rather it needs to 'present a challenge to identity politics in general, … even those on which some social movements are predicated.'[28] The methodological goal here is to shift from campaign videos' oppositional stance of 'disgust' and 'disillusion'—which can actually reaffirm the reigning political system—to think again in ways that 'disrupt' dominant discourses, create 'dissensus' and 'discord', and thus 'displace' institutional forms of recognition to open up spaces for new political thinking.

Shapiro argues for this critical attitude by contrasting three methodologies: empiricism, hermeneutics and critical aesthetics. Shapiro first analyzes what he calls empiricism's 'pre-Kantian slumber', where 'experience is engendered by what appears'.[29] Here the researcher's job is to explain the data by 'systematically achieving representations of experience by using reliable (that is repeatable) techniques of observation' and representation.[30] Kant's innovation was to explore what was behind appearance to privilege the conditions of possibility: the goal for post-Kantian hermeneutics thus is to trace patterns of signification, and thus show 'how the text can be understood in terms of the hidden content it discloses'.[31]

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[26] Cynthia Weber, "'I am an American': Protesting Advertised "Americanness",' *Citizenship Studies* (2013) 17(2):288.

[27] Weber, *"I am an American"*, 187.

[28] Shapiro, *Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 8.

[29] Ibid., 1.

[30] Michael J. Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2009), 5.

[31] Shapiro, *Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 29-30.

While the aesthetic turn generally concentrates on criticizing empiricism to allow space for hermeneutics,[32] Shapiro questions both empirical and hermeneutic modes of inquiry: 'to interrogate statements is not to discover either fidelity of what they are about (the empiricist focus on representation) or their intelligibility when their silent context is disclosed (a hermeneutical focus on disclosure)'.[33] He thus advocates a post-empiricist, post-hermeneutic mode of inquiry that poses the question of power by emphasizing the forces (languages, genres, apparatuses) that are involved in the production of presence.[34]

This critical attitude is 'aesthetic' in two senses. It shifts from the normal objects of scrutiny in IR (official documents, elite interviews, survey data, and so on) to artistic genre (novels, music, films, and so on) in order to challenge the epistemological certainties of the other modes of inquiry. Rather than offering a traditional model of explanation or interpretation, artistic genres provide a 'heterogeneous assemblage' that can jam common sense.[35] Films are valuable not necessary for their narrative content, but for their visuality: in discussing a film's critical contribution Shapiro explains that '[w]hile the narrative of the film reaches no dramatic conclusion, the film's landscape and close-up face and body shots carry the burden of its political thinking.'[36] In this decentered world, 'time is a function of the cuts and juxtapositions of the editing rather than linear flowing of the movement of the characters'.[37] Shapiro thus encourages us to 'avoid argument-marking meta-statements' in order to allow 'juxtapositions [to] carry much of the burden of the analyses.'[38] Here we move from an empirical/hermeneutic process of making subjects more 'visible', to the critical aesthetic mode of exploring the 'visuality' of how images

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[32] See, for example, Bleiker, *Aesthetics*, 1-47. Bleiker's mimetic/aesthetic distinction is much like Shapiro's empiricist/hermeneutic distinction.

[33] Shapiro, *Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 4.

[34] Ibid., 3.

[35] Bleiker, 'The Politics of Visual Methods'.

[36] Shapiro, *Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 23.

[37] Ibid., 24.

[38] Ibid., 31.

themselves can 'do' things beyond representation and interpretation.[39] This is what is meant by the shift in evaluative criteria from 'generalizability' to 'creativity' for research methods.

The critical aesthetic mode of inquiry thus is less interested in representing facts and making interpretations than it is to see how artistic genre can open up new emotional spaces. Here we encounter the second sense of aesthetics: '*aisthitikos*–the ancient Greek word/concept from which aesthetics is derived–refers to the pre-linguistic, embodied, or feeling-based aspect of perception'.[40] 'Affect' is a broad and contested concept.[41] It generally seeks to shift critical focus from facts to feelings, from stable individual identity to multiple flows of encounter, from texts to nonlinear, nonlinguistic and nonrepresentational genres, and from abstract rational knowledge to embodied forms of knowledge. Rather than test the truth-value of data, it seeks to appreciate the 'cringe-value' of heterogeneous encounters. The critical aesthetic mode here is not about what symbols mean, but embodies what experiences 'do', and thus moves from ideology to affect.

As we saw in the discussion of visual culture methodology, affect theory looks to image genres, particularly film and television. Schroeder offers an exemplary analysis of affect work when he considers the strange and unexpected feelings produced in China by Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*

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[39] Rose, 'On the Relation', 36-41.

[40] Shapiro, *Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 15.

[41] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*; Schroeder, 'On Cowboys and Aliens'.

(2005).[42] Many commentators expected Lee's film to have limited impact in China even among gay and lesbian audiences due to its unfamiliar setting and strange language. Hence scholars were surprised when broad audiences in China–both gay and straight–embraced the film in what came to be known as 'Brokeback Fever'.[43]

Many viewers identified with a character who had to sacrifice love for duty, which is a common experience in China for both gay and straight people, who are torn between the filial duty of heterosexual marriage and reproduction, on the one hand, and the romantic freedom to pursue their own desire, on the other. The film appealed to a wide variety of Chinese viewers, therefore, not because it was familiar in content (white homosexual cowboys), but because of its affective resonance: the shared experience of sacrifice and forbearance. Schroeder argues that this is not simply a 'Chinese' appropriation of a 'Western' story, but actually was successful because it resonates through an experience of liminality that connects gay and straight people, Chinese and Americans, and Brokeback Mountain with the world.[44]

For some, the very alien-ness of the story and the setting created space for an affective connection at the visceral level: 'that excess, which might be best described as "giddiness" and which I suggest is at its most striking or potentiating when derived from the disorientation associated with

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[42] It might seem odd to look to a feature film to explore methods for documentary filmmaking. But as many postpositivist theorists have noted, the epistemological divide between fact and fiction is hard to sustain (Malin Wahlberg, *Documentary Time: Film and Phenomenology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xiv; Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*; Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics*, 77; Bleiker, *Aesthetics*, 9). Likewise, the directorial practices of feature films and documentary films are bleeding together (Der Derian, 'Now We Are All Avatars', 182; Wahlberg, *Documentary Time*, 80).

[43] Chris Berry, 'The Chinese Side of the Mountain', *Film Quarterly* (2007) 60(3):32–37.

[44] Schroeder, 'On Cowboys and Aliens', 432.

connecting with the strange'.[45] Through this contingent affective experience, the film created space for people to be both 'queer' and 'Chinese' in ways that jammed established discourses of identity, locality and history.[46] The film thus goes beyond the guiding binaries of identity politics (e.g. East/West, gay/straight) to create new sites and senses for international encounters.

This section has argued that more attention to visual images is helpful for realizing some of the goals of the aesthetic turn: in particular, suggesting ways to resist the rational methods and the linear teleological narratives that frame our understanding of ourselves and the world. It also pushes further to argue that employing a critical aesthetic mode helps to shift analytical attention from issues of ideology to an appreciation of affective experiences.

II. The Visual Turn: Making Movies, Making Theory

Theorists of the critical aesthetic mode and of critical visual methodology generally focus more on 'reading' found images than on 'making' new images.[47] This an outgrowth of the suspicion of state and corporate powers' manipulation of images as a mode of cultural governance. Deconstructing the visuality of war thus is a major concern, especially with the growth of state and corporate surveillance activities since September 11th.[48]

This section, however, will argue that the visualizing turn of documentary filmmaking provides a useful method for IR analysis because, 1) filmmaking provides a method for shifting from ideological issues to exploring affective experience that is nonlinear, nonlinguistic and nonrepresentational, and 2) it is particularly helpful for examining the international politics of self/Other relations, especially the role of person-to-person relations, the importance of the everyday, and the value of emotions and embodied knowledge. By exploring these themes, section 2 more deliberately moves from what films can mean, to see what filmmaking can 'do' in the sense of provoking new sites and senses of international politics.

Since issues of self/Other relations in foreign climes are likewise explored in the cognate field of visual anthropology, it is helpful to consider the two approaches considered in section one alongside discussions of

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[45] Ibid., 440.

[46] Ibid., 447.

[47] Shapiro, *Trans-Disciplinary Method*; Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 318.

[48] MacDonald, Hughes, and Dodds, *Observant States*; Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics*; Der Derian, *Virtual War*.

ethnographic filmmaking methods.[49] But rather than summarize and critique debates in visual anthropology, this section will employ them to frame the examination of the methods used in making *toilet adventures*. This section thus engages in autoethnography to critically describe the issues confronted in the production of a recent documentary. By dealing with filmmaking at both the metatheoretical level and the practical level, we will be able to see how film-production can profitably inform theory-production.[50]

      As Brigg and Bleiker's discussion of autoethnography shows, such self-referentiality is still controversial in the social sciences.[51] To avoid accusations of self-indulgence they suggest that while autoethnographers need not be judged according to the standard social science criteria of objectivity and generalizability, they still need to locate their research within a specific knowledge community. If we locate this essay's research in the cognate communities of visual international politics and visual anthropology, then we can further explore how the visualizing turn in IR allows researchers to value

[49] Elena Barabantseva and Andy Lawrence, 'British Born Chinese':

Encountering Vulnerabilities Through Filmmaking as a Research Method',

2014 *Millennium* Conference; S. Pink, ed., *Advances in Visual Methodology*,

(London: Sage, 2012); Paul Henley, 'Are You Happy? Interviews,

"Conversations," and "Talking Heads" as Means of Gathering Oral Testimony

in Ethnographic Documentary', In *Film und Interview. Volkskundliche und*

ethnologische Ansatze zu Methodik un Analyse, Eds. Joachim Wossidlo and

Ulrich Roters, (Berlin: Waxmann Verlag, 2003), 51-67; Paul Henley, 'On

Narratives in Ethnographic Film', In *Reflecting Visual Ethnography: Using the*

Camera in Anthropological Research, Eds., Metje Postma and Peter Ian

Crawford, (Hoejbjerg: Intervention Press 2006), 376-401; Renov, *The Subject*

of the Documentary; Wahlberg, *Documentary Time*; Marcus Banks, *Visual*

Methods in Social Research (London: Sage, 2001).

[50] See Wahlberg, *Documentary Time*, x.

[51] Brigg and Bleiker, 'Autoethnographic International Relations'.

creativity in the sense of generating new sites and senses of international politics.[52] The remainder of this section will examine what filmmaking can 'do' by discussing 1) how issues of the international politics of the everyday were confronted in pre-production, 2) how issues of the IR of person-to-person relations were addressed in production, and 3) how the international politics of emotion and embodied knowledge were negotiated in post-production editing.

Pre-Production: Selecting Cinematic Topics and Sources for the International Politics of the Everyday

The *toilet adventures* project actually started at a personal level: my maternal great uncle was a businessman in Shanghai from 1924 to 1949,[53] and my father was in Qingdao and Shanghai as a sailor in the US Navy in 1946-47. I thought it would be interesting to compare their stories, and then like others,[54] became interested more generally in the experience of non-Chinese who over the past century chose to live in China. Until quite recently, the border between China and the rest of the world was very high—legally, politically, culturally and symbolically. People who crossed—going either direction— entered a strange new world of the unknown. *toilet adventures* thus is part of a much larger film project, 'To Be the Other', that examines how people construct their self through very personal everyday encounters when they become the Other while abroad.

By 2014, this project included nearly 100 on-camera interviews with participants aged between 12 and 107 years, from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the US, the UK, France, Thailand, India, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Canada, Denmark, Belarus, Australia and Mexico. The main interview question was 'what was your first impression of China' for non-Chinese participants, and 'what was your first impression of [country X]' for Chinese

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[52] Actually, social science filmmakers are not shy about describing their own

projects in detail to make theoretical and methodological arguments

(Barabantseva and Lawrence, 'British Born Chinese'; Weber, *"I am an*

American"; Der Derian, 'Now We Are All Avatars'; Renov, *The Subject of the*

Documentary, 154-57).

[53] See Bill Callahan, dir., *Uncle Chuck: The Shanghailander* (2012, 22 min.),

www.vimeo.com/47901393.

[54] See Kin-ming Liu, ed., *My First Trip To China* (Hong Kong: Muse, 2012).

participants. The logic of this project is that the personal everyday experiences of non-Chinese in China (and Chinese outside the PRC) embody 'foreign policy' in the sense of encounters with the foreign, the strange and the unknown.[55]

The interviews were simple but opened-ended, and thus provided a mass of material to work with. One way to negotiate complicated material is to employ the 'classical' narrative mode of a three act drama that follows the protagonist on their experiential journey.[56] Weber's 'I am an American' films, for example, follow characters through the 'typical arc of normal life before 9/11, how 9/11 changed the character's life for better or usually worse, [and] how this change was adjusted to or resolved.'[57] Der Derian likewise explains how *Human Terrain* is a character-driven film because 'it makes it easier for the audience to identify and understand a complex issue.'[58]

Since no single character stood out in the 'To Be The Other' project, I thought making an 'episodic film' that explores a theme from multiple perspectives, but without the backbone of a single character arc,[59] would be a more effective way of using film to explore the international politics of the everyday. The 'toilet adventures' theme actually jumped out in the first interviews of the 'To Be the Other' project in 2011: Thai and American women, in particular, went out of their way to recount their 'suffering' with toilets in China.[60] Following the episodic mode, the film is emplotted not according to a chronological beginning/middle/end,[61] but through a nonlinear affective movement inspired by the Five Stages of Grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance—which are reworked in *toilet adventures* as shock, fear, bargaining, struggle, and acceptance.

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[55] Campbell, *Writing Security*; Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, Rachel Bowlby, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[56] See Toni de Bromhead, *Looking Two Ways: Documentary's Relationship with Cinema and Reality* (Arhuus, Denmark: Intervention Press, 1996), 35-67.

[57] Weber, 'I am an American', 286.

[58] Der Derian, 'War Becomes Academic', 60.

[59] de Bromhead, *Looking Two Ways*, 69-79.

[60] Interview, 9/1/2011.

[61] Henley, 'On Narratives in Ethnographic Film'.

Toilets provide a good hook because, on the one hand, everyone has to use them, and on the other, it is still generally taboo to discuss toilet activities. Toilet experiences thus provide what Wahlberg describes as a 'frame-breaking' experience:[62] discussing it is defamiliarizing, first for the interview participant, and then for the audience. Such frame-breaking experiences are not natural, but are 'manufactured' by the filmmaker in order to call social codes into question. For example, when recalling how a group of Chinese women watched her take a pee in a public toilet, an American professor declared, 'It was as if I wasn't alone, and usually going to the bathroom should be a solo activity'.[63] Well, maybe not—as another participant explained, pissing and shitting can also be a collective social activity that is widely discussed.

Toilet adventures thus provides a good topic because it breaks the frame of modern/Western/bourgeois propriety, both in terms of explanatory meaning, and in terms of affective meaning.[64] Indeed, the toilet has provided the hook for critical discussions of Japanese aesthetics, American consumerism, and Chinese 'hygienic modernity'.[65] Toilets also join elite and popular experiences of foreign relations. On the one hand, the sovereign power of the self/state includes sovereign control over such mundane bodily functions: a former UK ambassador to China was 'grateful' to recall that in his more than eight years' service in the PRC, he 'never had to encounter a Chinese toilet *in extremis*, so to speak'.[66] On the other, Cynthia Enloe challenged researchers to take 'notes in a brothel, a kitchen, or a latrine' in order to get a bottom-up understanding of international politics.[67] Toilets thus

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[62] Wahlberg, *Documentary Time*, 44.

[63] Interview, 5/7/2014.

[64] Wahlberg, *Documentary Time*, 51.

[65] Junichiro Tanzaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 8-12; Francesca Bray, 'American Modern: The Foundation of Western Civilization' Website, (2000) http://www.anth.ucsb.edu/faculty/bray/toilet/index.html (accessed on January 3, 2015); Santos, 'Technological Choices'.

[66] Interview, 25/7/2014.

[67] Enloe, 'The Mundane Matters', 447.

provide a rich theme for self/Other relations in the international politics of everyday life.

Even so, *toilet adventures* differs from many IR documentaries because its topic is not directly 'geopolitical'. As we saw above, many critical studies of visual international politics focus on the interplay of stagecraft and statecraft.[68] The focus of *toilet adventures*, however, shifts to the act of shitting as a more intimate experience where state-to-state relations are reconstituted as person-to-person relations. Campaigning for better sanitation around the globe is a worthy endeavor: the United Nations has designated November 19th as 'World Toilet Day' to highlight this important issue. However, the goal of the film is more modest: to see international relations in terms of how people negotiate the messy relations of self and Other while they are abroad, and while they are on the toilet.

Since filming in toilets would be an ethically-problematic approach that would raise a host of sticky issues, I decided to make a 'memory film'[69] that uses on-camera interviews and archival images as its main sources. The list of participants for the project started from colleagues, friends and family, and quickly expanded to friends of friends and acquaintances of acquaintances (i.e. the snowball sampling method). In this sense, on-camera testimonial interviews appeal to standard methods of qualitative analysis: it is a matter of getting a broad representative sample, and accurately recording and representing their information.[70]

But it was actually dissatisfaction with the reliability of elite interviews that ultimately led me to the method of staging formal on-camera interviews. The Chinese state and its policy-making procedures are highly opaque, and it is difficult to get reliable information from using standard interview techniques. Officials and academics in the PRC generally are suspicious of 'foreigners', and wary of providing them with information on 'sensitive' topics like foreign relations. This is a common problem with fieldwork, which is exacerbated in the Chinese context where people risk being imprisoned for providing

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[68] Weber, *Imagining America at War*; MacDonald, Hughes, and Dodds *Observant States*, 10.

[69] See Douglas MacDougall, 'Films of Memory', In *Transcultural* Cinema (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 231-244.

[70] Ruth Blakely, 'Elite Interviews', In Shepherd, *Critical Approaches to Security*, 158-68.

information to foreigners. Elite interviews, therefore, are a problematic method for researching international politics in China.[71]

Visual anthropologists have a different objection to the use of interviews in documentary filmmaking. Ethnographic filmmaking training often downplays instruction in interview techniques because, as in ethnography more generally, such films 'should be about showing not telling. That is we should be interested in showing how our subjects actually lived their lives rather than giving them the opportunity to tell us how they did so'.[72] Formal on-camera interviews thus are viewed with 'suspicion' by many visual anthropologists largely due to problems of reliability and accuracy.

The *toilet adventures* project, however, returns to the elite interview method, but with a different objective. Rather than using the interview to extract secret information from participants, the purpose is to appreciate the contours of participants' on-camera testimonials as a 'performance'. As with the visualizing turn more generally, here we switch from evaluating interviews in terms of their 'truth-value'—i.e. whether or not they provide accurate information—to appreciate their affect-value: can they provoke new sites and senses of international politics. Hence alongside asking the 'what happened' questions characteristic of standard rationalist methodology, interviews pay particular attention to the 'how did it make you feel' questions to illustrate the affective dynamics of embodied knowledge. Henley thus argues that interviews can do much more than reveal facts: the visuality of the practice 'reveal[s] cultural conventions of speaking, gesture and storytelling … like [in] a theatrical performance.'[73]

Thinking of on-camera interviews in terms of performativity also highlights how the categories that we use to understand international politics are not merely socially-constructed, but come into being through the 'visual performance of the social field'.[74] Here we are shifting from requiring objectivity, to value issues of subjectivity, otherness, and ethics.[75] In terms of

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[71] William A. Callahan, *China Dreams: 20 Visions of the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4-5.

[72] Henley, 'Are You Happy?', 53; also see Wilkinson, 'Ethnographic Methods', In Shepherd*, Critical Approaches to Security*, 129-45.

[73] Henley, 'Are You Happy?', 57.

[74] See Campbell, 'Geopolitics and Visuality', 361.

[75] Wahlberg *Documentary Time*, xi, xvii.

topics and sources, then, documentary filmmaking provides an innovative method for research on nonlinear and nonrepresentational topics, and the international politics of bodily performativity in everyday life.

Production: Hospitality-as-Method for Exploring Person-to-Person IR

Filmmaking is a relational process, where one does not just read books, but also interacts very directly with various participants in person-to-person relations. It thus provides an interesting method for theoretically-engaged fieldwork that highlights the relationality of knowledge.[76] Filmmaking's reliance on person-to-person relations thus raises a particular set of ethical and methodological issues.

To address issues of Otherness in on-camera interviews it is helpful to employ an ethic of hospitality-as-method. Although it may seem like a conversation to the participants, an interview is not an encounter between equals. In both the actual interview and in postproduction editing, the agenda is set by the researcher, and there is 'no parity of exposition' in the sense of 'self-revealing testimony by the interviewer'.[77] One way to critique this unequal situation is to make it more equal in the sense of negotiating the research agenda with the participant.[78]

But another is to recognize the hierarchy, and employ an ethic of hospitality. Hospitality, of course, means different things in different contexts and traditions: for example, in Greek and Chinese philosophy.[79] Kant's essay on 'Perpetual Peace' continues to make hospitality an issue for cosmopolitan

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[76] See Brigg and Bleiker, 'Autoethnographic International Relations'.

[77] Henley, 'Are You Happy?', 51.

[78] Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*, 122-24; Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 332-37.

[79] Julian Pitt-Rivers, 'The Law of Hospitality', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (2012[1977]) 2(1): 501–17; James Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

global politics, while Levinas and Derrida use the concept to address local and global encounters with the Other.[80]

If we can delink hospitality from the Kantian metanarrative of cosmopolitanism that dominates IR, then a more Hellenistic shared meaning emerges: it is the person-to-person relations of welcoming the stranger as a guest. In this situation, the host is in a superior position to provide hospitality to the stranger, either as an unconditional right or as a conditional duty. The stranger's main obligation is to be a proper guest: as Benjamin Franklin quipped, 'Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days.' Even with conditional hospitality, Derrida argues that the stranger still has some power in the sense that the host can become hostage to the guest.[81] Hence, 'hospitality', 'host' and 'hostage' are in a dynamic contingent relationship.

Although the topic of *toilet adventures* is provocatively frame-breaking, the interviews for the broader 'To Be the Other' project rely on hospitality in its various forms. One of the main tasks is to build rapport with participants. For these interviews, I generally chose participants whom I have known for years—and sometimes decades. They were colleagues, friends, teachers, students and family. Hence, many of the interviews started from a sense of intimacy and trust, which of course raised a peculiar set of ethical issues. It's one thing to deal with the macro-level postcolonial ethical issues thrown up by a 'white American man' (like me) filming 'China'; it's something else entirely when you are filming a 'domestic ethnography' that includes your mother and mother-in-law.[82] While such issues of methods and ethics certainly arise in standard interview-based fieldwork, they take on an added dimension in filmmaking because people tend to be even more protective of their visual image than of their spoken and written words. As one participant put it: 'Don't make me look stupid'.[83]

The relations of hospitality thus involve what Renov calls 'co(i)mplication' because they are complicated in ways that co-implicate the

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[80] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis

(Pittsburgh: Duquense University Press, 1969); Derrida, *Of Hospitality*.

[81] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 109, 123-24; also see Pitt-Rivers, 'The Law of

Hospitality'.

[82] Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*, 216-29.

[83] Interview, 7/25/2014.

subject/object identities of the researcher and the participant.[84] On the one hand, the researcher is the host because they set the agenda and make editing decisions. But on the other, participants act as the host by welcoming the researcher into their homes and offering them their testimony. Indeed, one of the problems of testimonials is that the participant can 'hijack' the interview to lead it in a different direction, which in effect holds the filmmaker hostage.[85] This is particularly problematic in a domestic ethnography, where the filmmaker has to keep 'tacking between inside and outside' in order to maintain both familial harmony and scholarly distance.[86]

At the same time, it is easy for the researcher to abuse this hospitality. Certain participants—students and Asian friends in particular—likely feel more obligated to accept the request for the interview. Furthermore, the clips used for *toilet adventures* are actually taken from interviews about something else: people's experiences on their first trips abroad. Participants thus may be surprised to see that out of their hour-long interview, I have chosen the fifteen seconds where they talk about their most intimate and embarrassing episode.

While one is required to gain informed consent from participants during the interview, this legal requirement is not necessarily sufficient. It is better to see consent as a 'rolling process' rather than a 'one-off event'.[87] Researchers thus can be good hosts by taking their participant-guests' feelings into account in the finished product—but without becoming hostage to any across-the-board postproduction approval. The method of hospitality thus requires an ethic of care, and a sense of intersubjective reciprocity.[88]

Although this discussion of hospitality-as-method may appear to be a list of problems, such co(i)mplicated on-camera interviews can provide rich views of a participant's multilayered performance of both rational knowledge

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[84] Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*, 218.

[85] Henley, 'Are You Happy?', 2003.

[86] Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*, 218; Der Derian, 'Now We Are All Avatars', 185-86.

[87] Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 327.

[88] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*, 219.

and affective experience. It thus explores the dynamic of person-to-person relations in ways that generate new sites and senses of international politics.

Postproduction: Editing-as-Critique for Affective IR

In one sense, filmmaking is even more linear than essay-writing. The first step in the online editing process is to copy all of the relevant film clips onto a timeline, which teleologically proceeds from beginning to end. Editing typically, then, is less the practice of creating, than it is of cutting and trimming. In a way, it actualizes Foucault's dictum: 'Knowledge is not for knowing: knowledge is for cutting.'

But in another way, film editing is a much more complex way of producing knowledge than writing essays. The timeline itself is just the spine of the story, to which numerous layers of visual image and sound can be attached. Wahlberg employs the analogy of film and music to explain how editors need to skillfully conduct multiple elements,[89] which is much like how a conductor directs the many instruments of the orchestra. The musical analogy is also useful for understanding the temporal dimension of editing, where the editor plays with the order, duration, and frequency of film clips to produce visual rhythm.[90] Episodic films, like *toilet adventures*, need to pay particular attention to rhythm, because their narrative coherence appeals to the repetition of similar experiences rather than to the progressive journey of a character arc. Here the tremors of affect are produced through the montage of images and the juxtaposition of interview film clips.

In *toilet adventures*, clips from over a dozen interviews conducted between 2011 and 2014 in China, Thailand, the US and the UK are edited together to create a rhythmic conversation around common themes. At key points in the film, two separate people talking about a similar experience are edited together in fast-cuts to build suspense and produce affect. Examining one of the film's edited-interplays can illustrate this technique: two women—Wannapa a PhD with the Ministry of Public Health in Thailand who did her fieldwork in rural China, and Miriam an American historian who studies the politics of public health in Maoist China—explain their experiences of Chinese public toilets in the 1990s:

>   Wannapa: I would like to go to toilet, we have to go to the public toilet. I don't know how to do, and I don't know…
>   Miriam: - I went into the bathroom. There were cubicle-like stalls, back to back to back down the middle. They were all squat toilets -

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[89] Wahlberg *Documentary Time*, 64.

[90] Ibid., ix, 66.

W: - with very, very low walls, low walls. But no door –

M: - the barriers between these cubicles came about breast high. So you could stare down the entire row of ladies squatting at the toilets.

W: And then I saw something dirty, smelly –

M: - the stench of the place, as is normal, was outrageous. The cleanliness, we won't even speak of that.

W: - so I have to walk and look, look, look and go into the last one, the last one.

M: I squatted to do my business and I had this very peculiar feeling. It was as if I was not alone.

W: I tried to do something, but I could not even sit down, because I saw so many accumulated faeces, faeces. As well as I saw the maggots, a lot of maggots. …

M: I sort of look up, and I am surrounded. There is an entire group of Chinese ladies who are peering down to see if my butt is as white as my face is.

W: - so I just walk away, and told my professor that I can't do it. (Laughter) I couldn't do it.

M: - and I eventually get out there as quick as I can, not only because of the stink but because the observation was intense.

W: (Sigh)

The participants here provide plenty of facts to answer the 'where', 'when', and 'how' questions of going to the bathroom in rural China. But the main point is affect: the cringe-factor that we see on the participants' faces when they recall coming face-to-face with a dirty, smelly squat toilet for the first time, the anxiety about catching infectious disease, the uncomfortable laughs provoked when the private becomes public, and the cathartic relief when the experience is complete. These two different experiences are edited together in fast-cuts so that 'juxtapositions carry much of the burden of the analyses'; the film thus can 'avoid meta-statements' that efface affect in favor of explanation and interpretation.[91] Reading this transcript alongside watching the film also shows what documentary filmmaking's complex multilayered visualization of nonlinguistic and nonrepresentable experiences of Otherness and vulnerability can 'do' that is different from textual analyses of international politics.

Like with the Chinese reception of *Brokeback Mountain*, the experience—and the storytelling—is interesting not in spite of being exotic (and here perhaps Orientalized), but just because it is exotic. Here Der Derian's notion of diplomacy as interpersonal 'estrangement'—rather than

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[91] Shapiro, *Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 31.

state-to-state 'engagement'—is actualized, again and again, through affect in various participants' experiences of Chinese toilets.[92] It is a matter where *l'étranger*—Derrida's discussion of the 'foreign' and/as the 'strange'[93]—takes shape when people choose to be the Other. Affect here is not simply evoking emotion, but appreciating 'the unpredictability of the virtual' in a nonlinear 'connection between multiple places and times, [that] challenges ideology's power to arbitrate meaning'.[94]

Alongside this affect strategy, the fourth chapter of the film, 'struggle', shifts back to the explanatory/interpretive mode by putting non-Chinese participants' toilet adventures in the context of the PRC's recent history of public health campaigns, which continue to promote a form of 'hygienic modernity' that values both sanitary progress and political disciplining.[95] Here the editing method shifts from fast-cut juxtaposed 'conversations' to longer monologue testimonials that provide historical analyses of political campaigns, rather than personal memories of private encounters. Like in many 'memory films', the editing here employs visual archives that run parallel to the auditory testimony:[96] a public health campaign film on spitting, and public health campaign posters from the 1950s and 1960s.[97] Yet even these 'propaganda posters' provide much more than simply the facts: as a montage they evoke feeling through images and slogans that connect individual health to family health to public health, and finally to the health of socialism and of the Chinese nation. The images from visual archives thus can be understood as a performance that evokes affect, rather than simply as evidence that proves an analytical point.

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[92] James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

[93] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 3ff.

[94] Schroeder, 'On Cowboys and Aliens', 427.

[95] Santos, 'Technological Choices'.

[96] Henley, 'On Narratives in Ethnographic Film'; MacDougall, 'Films of Memory'.

[97] National Institutes of Health, 'Chinese Public Health Posters' exhibit, (2006) http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/chineseposters/introduction.html (viewed on July 28, 2014).

Editing thus can serve as critique. Its techniques, especially fast-cut juxtapositions and image montages, can be used to virtually create an affective register. Through editing, face-to-face conversations can be produced that highlight emotional and sensorial knowledge practices. Editing-as-critique is also helpful for examining the uneasy relation between ideology and affect.

Conclusion

As Kimberly Hutchings noted in her critical summation of the 2014 *Millennium* conference, producing knowledge is a messy business. This essay has argued that documentary filmmaking allows researchers to 'do' a range of things that call into question standard modes of representation. In particular, it showed how on-camera testimonials, where people recount their uncomfortable experiences while in public toilets in China, can provide a different kind of knowledge: a nonlinear, nonlinguistic and/or nonrepresentational mode of knowledge, which manifests itself in laughs, cringes and tears rather than in facts or interpretations. This method was employed to explore three sets of issues that animate self/Other notions of IR: the role of person-to-person relations, the importance of the everyday, and the value of emotions and embodied knowledge. These themes were examined through an autoethnographic account of the making of *toilet adventures*, which utilized on-camera interviews to do more than just gather the 'facts' of peoples' experiences, but also to illustrate the affective politics of the estrangement, the giddiness, and thus the excess evoked by such experiences. Rather than test the truth-value of data, it seeks to appreciate the 'cringe-value' of heterogeneous encounters. Indeed, *toilet adventures* shows how bowel movements can provoke emotional movement, and even political mobilization.

Documentary filmmaking thus provides a good method for exploring the intricacies of how international politics works through self/Other relations, especially as state-to-state relations interacts with people-to-people relations through experiences of hospitality, estrangement, intimacy and vulnerability. In this way, the essay pushed on the empiricist/hermeneutic debate of the aesthetic turn towards a visualizing turn in IR to show how documentary filmmaking provokes new sites and senses of international politics. The goal was to demonstrate how documentary filmmaking provides an exemplary method for showing what knowledge production can 'do'—rather than what it can mean.

One of the main thrusts of the essay was to shift from framing international politics in terms of ideology to appreciate its affective register. This was not simply a theoretical argument, but a political intervention. In the Introduction, I suggested that *toilet adventures* is complicit in the reproduction

of the dominant discourses of Orientalism and Science, with their attendant hierarchical distinctions of East/West and backward/advanced. In many ways the film plays into stereotypes of China as an exotic place that, although achieving much progress, is still 'behind' the 'advanced' West. But the essay also aimed to take a critical view of such 'ideological' arguments, to suggest that we should examine the affective work that documentary films can do. Shifting from the ideological polemic of East/West, to the affective register of self/Other relations here can produce a critical opening.[98] Like we saw in Schroeder's discussion of *Brokeback Mountain*, the documentary's heterogeneous encounters jam any simple Chinese/non-Chinese binary division to create new sites and senses of international politics. Rather than treating 'China/non-China' as a contradiction in need of resolution, audio-visual media provokes a new set of experiences. The *toilet adventures* documentary film project thus both reinscribes and resists dominant discourses by refiguring them in a strange place: Chinese toilets.

Throughout the essay I have employed the rhetoric of 'shifts': from facts to feelings, from texts to nonrepresentational genres, from ideology to affect, and from the aesthetic turn to the visualizing turn. But as the discussion of film production methods showed, perhaps it is better to think in terms of a rhetoric of juxtaposition, mixture and montage, such as that exemplified in the Maoist public health posters that mix facts and feelings, written texts and images, and abstract concepts with embodied forms of knowledge. In this way, to employ Emmanuel Levinas's critique of rational knowledge, the visualizing turn of documentary filmmaking can provide 'a mode of thought better than knowledge' for understanding international politics.[99]

The challenge for the visualizing turn, then, is like that for the aesthetic turn: to gain legitimacy in academic institutions and policymaking debates.[100] Although articles that analyze films are increasingly published in top academic journals, the real challenge is to make filmmaking itself count as a legitimate academic activity for recruitment, tenure and promotion. To facilitate this, peer-reviewed journals could 'publish' IR films on their websites, as well as articles about films. While the aesthetic turn has a hard time gaining traction with mainstream audiences and policymakers, award-winning films by Der Derian and Weber show that non-specialists have an easier time engaging

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[98] See Allen Chun, 'An Oriental Orientalism: The Paradox of Tradition and Modernity in Nationalist Taiwan', *History and Anthropology* (1995) 9(1):28.

[99] Cited in Renov, *The Subject of the Documentary*, 148.

[100] Bleiker, *Aesthetics*, 187-88.

with a well-made IR film. Hence, while waiting for an often skeptical academy to recognize the value of filmmaking, it is important to keep making films and keep 'publishing' them in the friendlier fora of film festivals, exhibitions and the Internet.