

# Revolution Unfolding: The Historical Present between 'Real Time' and Latency in Found Footage Filmmaking

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The inextricable connection between uprisings and technologies of audiovisual recording and broadcasting, especially within an ecology of digital networks, suggests the possibility to follow events in 'real time'. This paper asks how filmmakers explore the complexities of this notion—and the questions of spectatorship, temporality and mediation that are attached to it—by drawing on the an-archive of protest footage. It is especially interested in the ways in which found footage filmmaking manages to (re-) create a sense of the historical present without resorting to a flat presentism. How do filmmakers re- and deconstruct experiences of 'real time' and the fraught notion of immediacy it proposes? How do their narrations attempt to give shape to the openness of the present moment? And how do they negotiate the latent historicity of events? To approach these questions, the paper undertakes a close reading of two films, *Fragments of a Revolution* (anonymous, 2011) and *Videograms of a Revolution* (Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, 1992), thus drawing a connection between digital and analogue 'guerilla images'.

The proliferation of moving images during uprisings and revolutions—particularly their production by the protesters themselves—has been recognised as an intrinsic dimension of political movements, "*integral to the texture and dramatic structure of the event itself*" (Snowdon 2020, 52). Their proximity to the event confers on such images a particular status as a record, especially in their connection to 'real time': In their density, speed of distribution, and aesthetics—often blurry and shaky—they are linked to fragile promises of presence, immediacy and authenticity, especially (but not exclusively) within an ecology of digital networks. Together, they constitute a growing "vernacular *an-archive*" (Ibid., 18) of political events: A distributed, often unstable collection of images and sounds that invite a response to, or even a reactivation of their energy, from another point in space and time. While the notion of the an-archive plays with an anarchic refusal of institutional organization and corresponding systems of classification and selection (Zielinski 2016), the term has also come to evoke a potentiality that both distributed and centralized audiovisual archives hold (Thain 2018): A sense of the eventfulness and lively assemblages from which they were produced in the first place. This paper discusses how found footage filmmaking

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teases out the temporal and affective experience of uprisings through (an-) archives of guerilla images. In particular, it focuses on a dimension that may at first seem counterintuitive: Historicity and latency within configurations of 'real time'.

Through practices of collecting, combining, and editing pre-existing footage, filmmakers can interrogate critically how audiovisual media shape imaginaries and representations of the past (Russell 2018). Through a series of aesthetic choices that subject pre-existing material to a different, perhaps even subversive reading, such practices create their own filmic experience and historiographical narratives. However, their material still testifies to its emergence from specific media practices, whether these are associated with cinema, amateur video or television. In this sense, found footage films are "media-referential", as William C. Wees (1993, 25) has pointed out: "They cannot avoid calling attention to the 'mediascape' from which they come, especially when they also share the media's formal and rhetorical strategies of montage." I am interested in the way found footage films reflect on the mediascape of guerilla images and its effects, by presenting spectators with a mediated sense of the historical present: A feeling of watching something—a revolution?—unfold. 'Historical present' here refers both to the rhetorical style of narrating an event in the present tense and to the historical dimension of the present. How do filmmakers reconstruct and deconstruct sensations of 'real time'? How do their narratives give shape to the openness of the present? And how do they negotiate the latent historicity of events?

In what follows, I engage in a close reading of two films that are separated by more than 20 years and grounded in very different cultural and technological contexts. Yet both speak productively to the questions at stake: *Fragments of a Revolution* (*Fragments d'une revolution*, 2011), produced anonymously under the pseudonym Ana Nyma, follows the mass demonstrations of the Green Movement in Iran in 2009/2010 from the perspective of a filmmaker in Paris, who watches, archives and edits footage of the uprising in her apartment. The film gathers these pieces of footage in a gesture of solidarity, while struggling with the complicated position of spectatorship at a distance. On the other hand, *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992) by German filmmaker Harun Farocki and Romanian filmmaker Andrei Ujică appears more analytical in its approach to the footage of the Romanian revolution in 1989—considered to be one of the first revolutions to be 'televised live' by the protesters themselves. Their film reconstructs the five central days of the revolution from a variety of footage, highlighting the mediated perspective on the event. While this paper does not offer a media archaeological approach per se, the choice of the latter film aims to highlight the relationship between real time image production and protest practices before the rise of digital ecologies.

# FRAGMENTS OF A REVOLUTION: GATHERING TRACES OF THE EVENT IN 'REAL TIME'

A hand flips open a laptop on the desk in front of it. In an abrupt cut, we are thrown into an agitated demonstration. Shots are being fired. The camera rushes to the street corner, where a wave of people is shooting forward, carrying a man in their middle. The camera catches his face for a brief moment, before he is swallowed again by the crowd, shouting with outrage and grief. We leave the scene as suddenly as we were thrown into it: The full-screen mode is dissolved, and we are reminded that the video was mediated through a browser window. On the laptop we see the now somewhat outdated interface of YouTube, where the video was uploaded. It is titled "June 20, 2009 Iran Raw Footage: 3rd murder" and has a brief, collapsed description: "Warning Extremely Graphic I am submitting video from anonymous sources in Ira[n] ..." The cursor clicks on a download button and navigates through a folder structure to save the video under "youtube video Iran", subfolder "1-juin 2009".

In its opening scene [Fig. 1], *Fragments of a Revolution* already foregrounds a relationality between two locations that will pervade the film: It jumps back and forth between Tehran, where the demonstrations of the Green Movement mainly take place, and Paris, where an unidentified filmmaker engages with the protesters' footage. The movement between these spaces makes the protests in Iran tangible as something that takes place on the ground, in the street (with great risk for the participants), but that also continues through the transmission of images and sounds via digital networks. Throughout the film, we follow Ana Nyma as she tries to find a position for herself that is not just on the receiving

Fig. 1  
*Fragments of a Revolution*  
(Anonymous, 2011), film still © .Mille et Une. Films / L'atelier documentaire / LCP Assemblée Nationale / TVM Est parisien



end of these transmissions, but that can somehow be invested in the uprising, even if it is in a minimal way—gathering audiovisual fragments of the event, downloading them onto a hard drive before they are removed from the online platform, editing them into a film. For Ana Nyma, these actions were about the desire and urgency of “finding an active place, even if it is a modest one, in the middle of these protests. It was a way of participating in the distribution of these images, of these words coming from Iran” (Ana Nyma, Guichard, and Lanzuisi 2011, n.p.).

*Fragments of a Revolution* recounts the events following the June 2009 presidential election in Iran without a voice-over narration, relying instead on what information is conveyed by its use of cell phone and television footage as well as personal correspondences. Occasionally, dates are inserted for orientation, but the film does not follow a strict chronology. In this way, it recounts the anticipation of political change by supporters of the reformist candidates in the days leading up to the election, the suspicions of fraud following the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on June 12, 2009, and the huge demonstrations with over a million protesters that ensued almost immediately. Brutal attempts to repress the uprising followed in the weeks and months, resulting in countless arrests and several deaths. The film traces the different phases of the Green Movement up to its anniversary one year later, a point at which the protests seem to have lost their initial force.

The film explicitly stages the phenomenological and subjective experience of engaging with the protests through digital networks. It uses a set-up that strikes one as an early version of a desktop documentary; but differently to a screen-capture, it emphasises the filmmaker’s bodily presence: Filmed over Ana Nyma’s shoulder<sup>1</sup>, we see her exchanging news with friends in Tehran, who clandestinely send footage from the latest demonstrations, always risking that their actions are being traced by the Iranian authorities. She also actively seeks out more information and material on YouTube and other online platforms. Her engagement with the events takes place within what David Berry (2011, 143) has described as “an *ecology of data streams* that forms an intensive information-rich computational environment”. Berry further qualifies this ecology as one in which a subject dips in and out of such streams in real time, picking up pieces along with it to create its own narratives. This is certainly reflected in the way *Fragments of a Revolution* stages a gathering of fragments—already indicated in the title—and their subjective rearrangement by a filmmaker, who reflects throughout the film on the challenges of finding a narrative for this material. However, the film highlights how such an engagement does not only take place online, but is always a bodily and geographically grounded experience. This creates palpable moments of non-simultaneity and a sense of disconnection.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, we see neither the filmmaker’s own shoulders nor her own hands or apartment, as she reveals towards the end of the film on cue cards. While this serves to further anonymize her, it can also be read as a gesture that distributes her subjectivity across a collective position of spectatorship, as argued in Shilina-Conte 2021.

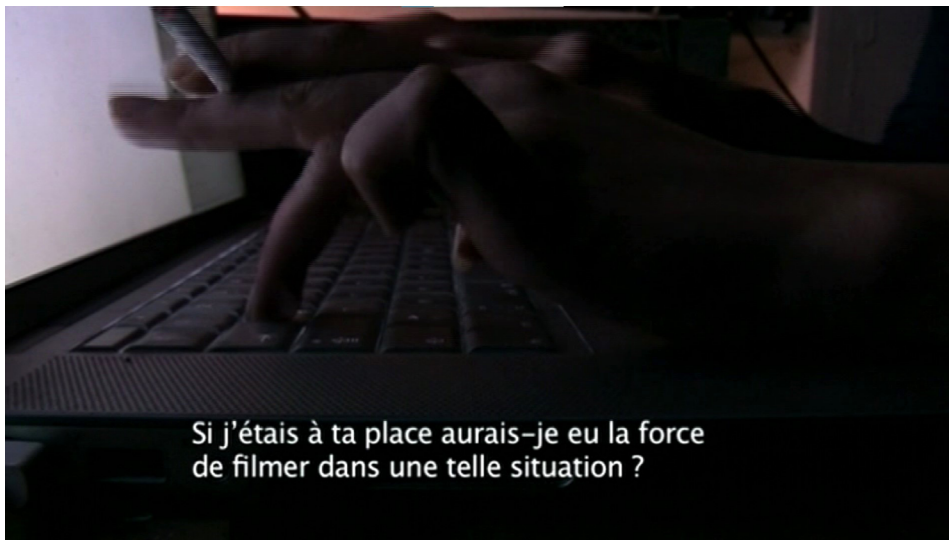


Fig. 2.  
 “If I had been in your place, would I have had the strength to film in such a situation?” *Fragments of a Revolution* (Anonymous, 2011), film still © .Mille et Une. Films / L’atelier documentaire / LCP Assemblée Nationale / TVM Est parisien

Nerve-wracking scenes from the protests in Tehran are juxtaposed with tranquil sights of Paris, showing how these two realities can hardly be aligned, even though they apparently occupy the same timeline.

As a temporality, ‘real time’ is to be understood less as a technological reality than as a “*technological imaginary*”, albeit one with a strong cultural impact (Berry 2011, 143). While social media was important to the Green Movement, it should not be omitted that Internet access was heavily restricted at the beginning of the protests (Manoukian 2010, 248). Furthermore, YouTube only introduced live streaming in 2011, two years after the first demonstrations in Iran. There were therefore various forms of delay in the circulation of footage and information. Such latency is always at work within real time, even if it is sometimes almost imperceptible to the human senses. In information science, real time describes the *ideal* of reducing the time between input and output to a minimum, making computational processes as efficient as possible (Furtwängler 2012). Already in this capacity, it has a certain wishful, if not ideological dimension to it. The rhetoric of real time as a form of immediacy, even (or especially) if supported by digital infrastructure, tends to obscure the fact that behind it lies “[...] a temporal geography as uneven as our social and political geographies, in which slowness and waiting are produced and distributed alongside every advance in convenience and speed” (Volmar and Stine 2021, 10).

The film constantly interrupts the notions of ease and gratification that often accompany the metaphorical description of real time networks as a ‘stream’ or ‘flow’ (Wyatt 2021). Instead, we encounter moments of agitated scanning and searching, a perceptible sense of restlessness in the constant piecing together of fragmented bits. This restlessness is not a floating affect, but is anchored in the gestures and bodily presence of the filmmaker and her hands—clicking and dragging, sorting and editing, typing on the keyboard, drumming nervously on the table, lighting a cigarette [Fig. 2]. This is further illustrated in a scene in which numerous browser windows of YouTube videos accumulate on the desktop. A cacophony of different voices and sounds arises, all trying to communicate

something about the protests in Iran [Fig. 3]. Then suddenly a black screen, as if someone had pulled the plug. "Too many images", reads the subtitle. A flash of images, then darkness again. "Too many images don't find their place." In the background, a creaking chair and a suppressed sigh speak of the strain on mind and body. Anxiety is not (only) an individual, but a social phenomenon that "has a marked if still-poorly understood relation to always-on computing" (Hodge 2021, 208). In this particular scene, this is presented as a consequence of the gap between the human capacity to process information and the demands of a 24/7 attention economy. However, the film also makes tangible how such anxiety is linked to anticipation. It lies, for example, in the mundane aspects of Ana Nyma's encounter with latency in a digital ecology: Waiting for the web page to refresh, for the Wi-Fi to reconnect, or for the download to complete. But in a much more urgent sense, anxiety lies in the time of waiting that is social—a sociality that is a part of the digital ecology in which she moves, but that also extends beyond it: The anticipation of hearing back from friends, of finding out if they are safe, of seeing what has been uploaded to YouTube after the demonstrations. It is even the anticipation of a definite breakthrough for the Green Movement that creates a tangible sense of anticipation.

## STAYING WITH THE 'SITUATION'

One of the main issues that the film grapples with is the *deferral* of a resolution of the protests to an unknown point in time. The events do not take the course that the protesters and, along with them, the filmmaker expect them to take. This is first and foremost a political and ethical issue, but it comes to bear on the

Fig. 3.  
Fragments of a  
Revolution (Anonymous,  
2011), film still © .Mille  
et Une. Films / L'atelier  
documentaire / LCP  
Assemblée Nationale  
/ TVM Est parisien



film's narrative as well. Over its course, Ana Nyma reflects on a growing sense of disorientation and discouragement that puts her at a loss as to how to proceed with the film. In an e-mail to a friend, she writes:

*The sky in Paris is always grey. Yet during these eight months, it is as if I have been virtually living in Tehran. [...] I try to recompose the story with the images you send me. But it is as if I am facing a large puzzle where certain pieces are missing. The events of the last few months have almost made me forget how full of joy and hope we were.*

Towards the end of the film, the Green Movement anticipates a major demonstration on the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, but cannot renew its momentum, not least because of the massive persecution of protesters by the state. In the last images of the film, life in Tehran seems to go on almost as usual. Suddenly, the camera pans over to some bullet holes in the façade of a building—tangible rem(a)inders of what has happened (and could happen again).

Tensions between expectation and experience, and the ways in which they affect each other, are integral to the sense of historical time (Koselleck 2004, 255–63). To describe more precisely how *Fragments of a Revolution* engages with this, Laurent Berlant's concept of "genres of event" seems productive. These are affective and narrative templates that shape how people make sense of what they encounter, how they manage their expectations in everyday life (and in art as well), and how they come to a sense of a shared present. Particularly, Berlant's notion of the "situation as a genre of unforeclosed experience" (Berlant 2011, 5) is helpful to understand what the film presents us with. When we speak of a critical 'situation,' this implies a radical openness of the moment, in which the status quo is suspended and the trajectory of events is unclear. Uprisings seem to be paradigmatic of this. "The situation is therefore a genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos" (Berlant 2011, 6). However, certain frames of reference can serve as orientation in the midst of this openness. 'Revolution' can be understood here as another genre of event that serves as an orienting template within such a situation, implying, for example, that there will be a shift or rupture that not only suspends the status quo, but permanently alters it (such as the overthrow of a regime). As such, revolution is not just a historical concept that is attached retrospectively to certain events, but a genre that already shapes people's expectations and understandings of their actions within their shared historical present.

What exactly constitutes such a definite shift is open to debate—whether it is seen to be political, cultural, or social; or whether it takes place in a compressed or extended period of time. *Fragments of a Revolution* ultimately refrains from making any claims for the Green Movement. It does not pretend to possess some insight from the relative hindsight to which it has access. Instead, it stays with the uprising in the uncertainty and openness of the present as a critical

situation. By holding the tension between the avowed desire for a revolution and the suspension of the status quo, the film refuses to close the situation off. In doing so, it allows for a non-directional latency in which the meaning and impact of events may present themselves differently at another time. In the final scene, Ana Nyma (still unidentifiable) turns to the camera with a personal statement on cue cards, in which she reflects on her choice of anonymity. Over the course of the cards, her "I" becomes a collective singular: "I profess that this is not the end of the story. I profess that I am countless", read the final cards. Indeed, the archival gestures within the film already point to a future in which these 'fragments of a revolution' can be rearranged and recontextualised again.

## VIDEOGRAMS OF A REVOLUTION: THE BREAKDOWN AND RESIGNIFICATION OF TRANSMISSION

Although Harun Farocki's and Andrei Ujică's *Videograms of a Revolution* (*Videogramme einer Revolution*, 1992) is by now over 30 years old, the film seems uncannily relevant to contemporary debates about audiovisual protest practices. Television played a key role in the Romanian revolution: The screen and the studio were both sites where the shift in power was made visible and actively enacted by the protesters themselves. Analogue video cameras had also become available to more individuals. Some of them filmed the protests and fighting in the streets, others recorded what was happening on the television in their living room, effectively archiving its broadcasts. Based on this footage, *Videograms of a Revolution* reconstructs five consecutive days of the revolution: From December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1989, the day of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's last public speech, to December 26, the day after the trial of him and his wife Elena, in which the couple were sentenced to death and executed. In between, the film follows the takeover of the television station, the appearance of counter-revolutionary militias, the resignation of the prime minister and the power struggles within the revolutionary movement.

The mediatization of the Romanian revolution has prominently, even notoriously, been the topic of public debate. Misinformation was running rampant and media outlets bought into images that were later exposed as fakes. Many also deplored the 'spectacle' that was made of the revolution through the use of television, particularly the broadcasting of the trial and (possibly restaged) execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. For media critics such as Vilém Flusser and Jean Baudrillard, the Romanian revolution demonstrated the end of history in an age of hyper-mediality, where events are swallowed up by their own simulacra. It was this debate that initially caught Farocki's attention, whose filmmaking was rooted in an interrogation of the politics of images and their power. He approached Ujică after reading a book that the latter had co-edited on the impact of television on the Romanian revolution (Amelunxen and

Ujică 1990). After their research in public and private archives in Bucharest, they recognized the potential in the material to produce a specific sensation by arranging it in a linear chronology: "The aim was to disentangle the mass of images and to arrange sequences in such a way as to suggest that, for five days, one was moving from camera to camera on one and the same reel of film" (Ujică and White 2011). Intertitles with dates structure the film and emphasize the mediated perspective: "Eine Kamera erkundigt die Lage" (A camera observes the scene), "Übertragungsversuche" (Transmission attempts), "Zum letzten Mal live" (Live for the last time). A voice-over comments on the scenes and draws the viewers' attention to the use of cameras at certain moments.

*Videograms of a Revolution* pays close attention to the ways in which the 'real time' of television is reclaimed by the revolution. It begins with Ceaușescu's last public speech in Bucharest, broadcast live as a choreographed rally. It is an attempt to get a moment of unrest under control, as the week before there had been mass demonstrations in Timișoara, where protesters had been shot. We see the dictator presiding over the crowd on the balcony of the Central Committee, framed centrally by the camera, until suddenly a commotion seizes the people. Ceaușescu, visibly bewildered by the turmoil, interrupts his speech, at which point the live transmission is cut [Fig. 4]. Only after a while is the broadcast recontinued. The film probes this scene over and over, using various camera angles and a parallel montage of different footage. Its analysis of the sequence posits the discontinuation of the broadcast as critical: It is not merely a technical interruption, but an interruption of Ceaușescu's propagandistic use of television and its attempt to realign political reality with an idealized image of it on screen. Here, what Jane Feuer writes about the ideological dimension of American



Fig. 4.  
*Videograms of a Revolution* (Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, 1992), film still © Harun Farocki/Andrei Ujică 1992. Courtesy of Harun Farocki GbR.

television's use of liveness holds true in a very different context: It serves the attempt to suture a disjunctive social and political reality, corresponding to "an ideology of liveness overcoming fragmentation" (Feuer 1983, 16). The relevance here is not so much in what the images show—which is, in fact, relatively little—, but in the disruption of certain pre-constituted protocols of their production and distribution: The interruption of real time transmission corresponds to a loss of power over the ideological construction of unity.

The next day, mass protests take place in the streets of Bucharest: The Ceaușescu are already on the run, and people have stormed the Central Committee. Others are headed to the television studio to occupy it [Fig. 5]. The camera is filming before they go live: A group of people squeeze into the frame, heatedly discussing what they should say. Finally, they are ready. "As soon as we go live", says a man who appears to be from the station, "23 million people will be listening to you". "Brothers", begins one of the protesters, but he is cut off—too soon, not yet live. Finally, now: With God's help, he says, they have made it into the television studio. Mircea Dinescu, the famous Romanian dissident writer is introduced, who promptly forgets to present his latest poem, as previously agreed, and gives a spontaneous speech: There will be another speech in ten minutes, he says, God be with them, the dictator has fled. He appeals to the Minister of the Interior to send the army home, and in five minutes there will be a speech ... And anyway: "Television is with us!"—"Victory! We have won!" The scene, in all its chaotic energy, has a comic element to it. But to dismiss it for its clumsiness is to miss the point: That the rules of habitation for this televisual space, as we might call it with Berlant, have been suspended and are in the process of being negotiated.



Fig. 5.  
*Videograms of a Revolution* (Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, 1992), film still © Harun Farocki/Andrei Ujică 1992. Courtesy of Harun Farocki GbR.



Fig. 6. In the bottom left, Nicu Ceaușescu (son of the dictator) is escorted into the television studio. In the background, news of his capture is transmitted to the occupied Central Committee over the phone. *Videograms of a Revolution* (Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, 1992), film still © Harun Farocki/Andrei Ujică 1992. Courtesy of Harun Farocki GbR.

During the short transitional period between the fall of the Ceaușescu regime and the consolidation of a new government, the television broadcasts a completely different image than before: The tightly framed shot reserved for Ceaușescu is replaced by a wide shot to capture the multitude of people who are claiming their right to occupy this frame. However, as Frances Guerin reminds us, this apparent democratization of the image does not mean that ideology can be done away with; the image "is necessarily given over to another form of ideological system, in which equally biased decision set new processes of representation in motion" (Guerin 2012, 496). This is most evident in the use of live broadcasting by the revolutionary movement, which is not merely a communicative tool, but imbued with a desire for performative transparency—for example, when political prisoners are being paraded in front of the studio camera to announce their capture [Fig. 6]. Ideology returns in another guise: Real time communication carries a political promise of authenticity, underpinned by a rhetoric of unmediatedness. Farocki and Ujică continually deconstruct this image production, drawing on uncut footage to show how seemingly spontaneous moments are created and re-staged, precisely with a delay that stretches out real time's latency and testifies to immediacy's ideological dimension. By cutting back and forth between the space of the television studio and the appearance of its broadcast in various 'videograms', feedback loops begin to build up, turning simultaneity into a refracted and layered experience.

Soon enough, however, the temporary suspension of pre-existing templates of image production is replaced by old ones. Towards the end of the film, as power is being centralized by a new political elite, the television returns to its conventional protocols. The studio has been cleared of the crowds, and a single newscaster announces the evening's program: the trial of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu.

## AS IF HISTORY HAD FILMED ITSELF

The footage produced by television and private video cameras during these five days has a difficult status as a 'historical document': It not only records people's actions during those days, it becomes an intrinsic part of them, whether their actions take place in the streets, in the Central Committee or in the television studio. At the same time, its claim to immediacy is highly constructed. As Deborah Esch has stressed, the traces that mediatized events leave behind must be understood as traces of the *making* of the event, as an archive of "the ways in which what we take to be historical events are produced, even constituted by an array of discursive technologies" (Esch 1999, 6), in turn embedded in media ecologies.

In the same vein, attention should be paid to the way in which *Videograms of a Revolution* employs its own strategies to produce a sense of historical experience: Of watching a revolution, in Berlant's sense of genre, come about. It does so, I argue, by creating a narrative that seems to need no author. The continuity editing of the film manages to transcend the multiple authorship of the sources in a way that "it seems as though we are seeing history itself creating its own shape" (Farocki 2001, 264). This narrative style corresponds to a form of historiographical writing that Hayden White has characterized as a "discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story" (White 1997, 2). It is not the linearity of the chronological reconstruction as such that constitutes this style of historical narrative, but the appearance that there is an unambiguous congruity of events that renders any author obsolete—put differently, that a plot already lies within the events themselves, just waiting to be unearthed. According to White, this corresponds to a desire to see reality possess a coherence that pre-exists processes of meaning making:

*Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal. This is why the plot of a historical narrative is always an embarrassment and has to be presented as 'found' in the events rather than put there by narrative techniques. (White 1997, 21)*

In *Videograms of a Revolution*, the material is edited in such a way that the dramaturgical arc of a classical drama can be discerned, as Christine Lang has lucidly pointed out: An initial "messenger report" (speech by a revolutionary from Timișoara) is followed by the "initiating event" (protests disrupting Ceaușescu's rally), "peripety" (resignation of the prime minister) and finally "tyrannicide" (execution of the Ceaușescus) as "catharsis" (Lang 2014). But the impression that the events follow this plot by themselves—that history simply unfolds according to it—owes much to the immense editorial work of the filmmakers: Condensing about 120 hours of raw footage into a final 106 minutes already implies a multitude of decisions about what to select and where to cut. Another editorial aspect that is often overlooked is the process of translating from Romanian: Whose voice to

choose from a plurality of speakers and which parts of their speech to turn into a subtitle are all choices that contribute to the creation of a narrative. It is in the editing room where this apparent congruency of reality is created: In his later film *Interface* (*Schnittstelle*, 1995), Farocki will reflect explicitly on this central space of filmmaking, but in *Videograms of a Revolution*, it remains unmarked<sup>2</sup>. The absence of an authorial position is further supported by the way the camera's perspective as a political agent is constantly foregrounded in the film. Technical interruptions, blurriness and glitches only add to the apparent authenticity of its discourse (Kernbauer 2021, 61).

My point in detailing this narrative technique is not to double down on a deconstructive gesture, though Farocki and Ujică might ask us to do just that: To think not only about what politics are at work in the footage, but also in their montage. Nor is it to follow White down a path into constructivism, where history is produced solely through narration. What I am interested in is how the recourse to a narrative genre produces an affective dimension within the film, through which history is rendered as much present as the present is rendered historical. The potential of the archive is pushed beyond reconstruction to an anarchival reactivation of the affective energy it carries, channelled and mediated through an aesthetic form. In this way, *Videograms of a Revolution* achieves something similar to what Berlant outlines for the historical novel: It "bridges the historiography of an entextualized moment and the affectivity gathered up in the evidence that points to the animating situation" of the present (Berlant 2011, 67). But the use of found footage inadvertently produces an excess: It introduces a contingency that resists the 'odor of the ideal' that the emplotment of a narrative emits. This has a paradoxical effect: The trope of excess ends up reaffirming the film's claim to offering a privileged access to the reality of the event.

By presenting a dramatic arc with an ending, *Videograms of a Revolution* suggests a form of closure that arguably does not exist for many people more than 30 years after the Romanian revolution<sup>3</sup>. But its commitment to the historical present as a visual and temporal rhetoric also brings the revolution back from the past into the virtuality of the present moment. The film's epilogue seeks to retain this virtuality: After an extensive list of credits to the producers of the footage follows a final, short clip. A worker, standing among a group of people, addresses the camera directly. He recalls the repression and suffering of the people under Ceaușescu's regime and emotionally pleads for them to hold

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**2** Volker Pantenburg explores Harun Farocki's and Jean-Luc Godard's shared interest in the editing room as a place of meaning making and history writing, cf. Pantenburg 2015, 153–74.

**3** The shooting of many protesters by unidentified militias during the revolution is still not resolved. Former President Ion Iliescu and other officials of the post-revolutionary government currently face charges for apparently misleading the public during the revolution by covertly staging a counter-revolution together with members of the Securitate, with the aim to profit from the ensuing confusion of the situation. The trial is still ongoing, but activists claim that their efforts to bring those responsible to justice have been systematically impeded (Higgins 2023).

on to the new sociality that the events of the past few days have brought about. His message carves out a space in which the past is not yet past: Open to an undefined future.



If revolutions are mediated by their agents in the moment of their making, these practices already create the (an-)archives that structure any subsequent engagement with the events. While *Fragments of a Revolution* and *Videograms of a Revolution* both reconstruct a sense of presentness in their engagement with guerilla images, I hope to have shown that this differs from a presentism that uncritically reaffirms real time image production and its promises. Not only do they emphasize real time's connection to delay, rupture and non-simultaneity; they also explore how it might hold the possibility of historical experience. They do so in different ways: While one explores the tensions between expectation and experience, holding onto the openness of the situation, the other uses the structuring function of an authorless narrative to create an affective experience of history. Yet both are intent to not erase the latency of events—they rather explore the present as a moment of historical dimension that continues to unfold.

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