



poetics and  
 of politics  
 documentary  
 documentary

*On a Wing and a Prayer*  
 Alia Syed, 2016

Poetics  
 and  
 Politics  
 of  
 Documentary  
 Symposium

The Attenborough  
 Centre for  
 Creative Arts  
 University of Sussex



# welcome

Welcome to the third installment of the Poetics and Politics of Documentary Symposium, The first one was held at Aalto University Helsinki (2013), the second at UC Santa Cruz, (2015), and now at the University of Sussex. We didn't have the good fortune to attend the first incarnation, but we were both so impressed with the second one, organised by Irene Gustafson (UCSC) and Aparna Sharma (UCLA) that we agreed to take on the task of organising the next one, very much wanting the momentum to continue. We hope to pass the baton to someone at another institution so that this budding bi-annual tradition may continue uninterrupted.

The Poetics and Politics of Documentary symposium represents an unusual opportunity for filmmakers and artists working within the broad ambit of documentary who critically reflect on their own work to come together in order to think out loud about what it is we do and why it matters. As we are all aware, documentary carries with it the burden of the political, regardless of whether it deserves or can uphold it. Sometimes the attention to the political comes at the expense of a concern with poetics. What makes this event unique, is that it insists on holding fast to both terms

simultaneously, prioritising neither, yet unwilling to jettison either as well. What that might mean to any of the participants sharing their work in this venue over the course of these two and half days, is entirely open to discussion, and we look forward to hearing all of the possible permutations that arise.

We have set as the theme of this year's symposium, 'Beyond Empathy'. This has in part been inspired by the latest documentary craze, VR, and its over-determined and under-theorised rhetoric around empathic embodied experience, but we also thought it productive to raise this question of empathy now that documentary has finally been recognised as ontologically related not only to the intellect and knowledge production, but to the emotional and affective registers as well. We are interested in the ways in which these questions intersect with both the poetic and the political and look forward to the extended conversation we may have over the course of this weekend. Of course, not all presentations and panels will touch on this theme, but we would like to ask that we keep such considerations alive in our minds and responses if possible.

We are joined by some very special guests this year, with keynote talks by filmmakers John Greyson and Eyal Sivan, who have both helped to redefine the way we think about the poetic and the political in documentary. We also have a screening of a new film by Alia Syed, *On a Wing and a Prayer*, followed by a roundtable discussion with Ben Burbridge (University of Sussex), Pratap Rughani (LCC), and Alisa Lebow (University of Sussex). The symposium is organised so that there is a single stream of presentations all held in the main hall of the Attenborough Centre, and the only parallel event is the screening of works related to the presentations, which is being held in the adjacent Jane Attenborough Studio.

This year's conference is sponsored by the University of Sussex, School of Media, Film and Music, The Centre for Material Digital Culture, The Centre for Photography and Visual Culture, and The Middle East North Africa Centre. We are very pleased to be hosting the event at the University's newly reopened arts venue, The Attenborough Centre for the Arts, which marks Sussex's renewed commitment to critical and creative practice.

Warmly,

Alisa Lebow and Lizzie Thynne  
(Co-organisers)



# schedule

friday

**16.00**

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Registration: Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts – Lobby

**17.00**

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Welcome

Lizzie Thynne and Alisa Lebow

**17.30 - 18.45**

**Panel I Beyond Empathy**

Chair: Elizabeth Cowie

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**Jason Fox** (New York University) The Politics of Habit in the Production of Space

**Brett Story** (CUNY Graduate Center) Against a Humanizing Prison Cinema

**Arine Kirstein-Høgel** (Aarhus University) Glob and the Creation of Knowledge-Haptic détournement, Archive and Appropriation

**18.45 - 20.00**

**Screening/Roundtable**

Alia Syed's *On A Wing and a Prayer*

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Chair: Lizzie Thynne

Participants: Ben Burbridge, Pratap Rughani, Alia Syed, and Alisa Lebow

**20.00 - 21.00**

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Drinks Reception at ACCA Bar

# saturday

9.00

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COFFEE/TEA

9.30 - 10.45

**Panel II** Accessing the Nervature of the Past  
Chair: Luke Robinson

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**Patti Gaal-Holmes** (Arts University Bournemouth)

“Excavations for Opening up Histories: In Search of ‘the Nervature of the Past’”

**Irene Lusztig** (University of California Santa Cruz) “Yours in Sisterhood: Feminism, Utopian Conversation and Talking to the 70s”

11:00 - 12:45

**Panel III** Activist Interactive: iDocs from the Global South  
Chair: Emile Devereaux

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**Anandana Kapur** (Jamia Millia Islamia University) “Co-creating with My Viewing Publics”

**Amir Husak** (Leeds Trinity University) “Digital Dissent: Citizen-activist Video”

**Fabiola Hanna** (University of California, Santa Cruz) “Software and its Structuring of Interactive Documentary”

**Ersan Ocak** (Bilkent University) “iDoc Database of Gezi Resistance”

12.45 - 14.15

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LUNCH

14.15 - 15.45

**Panel IV** Archeology of the Archive  
Chair: Irene Gustafson

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**Miranda Pennell** (Independent Scholar/Filmmaker) “On Looking More Justly at an Image of the Past”

**Matt Soar** (Concordia University) and **Danica Evering** (Concordia University) “Migration, Media Archaeology, and the Montréal-Mirabel International Airport”

**Lennaart Van Oldenborgh** (Goldsmiths College) “Memory and Montage in Mostar: Re-reading the Past in a Southern Bosnian Town”

15.45 - 16.15

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COFFEE/TEA

16.15 - 17.45

**Panel V** Military Quotidian  
(Chair: Lizzie Thynne)

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**Melanie Friend** (University of Sussex) “The Lacquer Box and The Field Gun: A Study of the Militarised Landscape of Salisbury Plain”

**Margareta Kern** (Falmouth University) “Thursday War”

**Sharon Daniel** (University of California, Santa Cruz) “Aftermath: Geographies of Ethno-territorial Violence and Restorative Justice in the City of Belfast and Beyond”

# saturday/sunday

**18.00 - 19.15**

**Keynote I** Eyal Sivan  
Chair: Alisa Lebow

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“Redemptory Spectacle or  
Emancipatory Experience: The  
Politics Behind the Character  
and Story Driven Documentary”



**20.00**

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**Conference Dinner** at Hotel du  
Vin, at 2 Ship St, Brighton BN1  
1AD (advance registration  
required)

## SUNDAY

**9.00**

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COFFEE/TEA

**9.30 - 10.45**

**Keynote II** John Greyson  
Chair: Lizzie Thynne

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“Stereoscopy’s Unknown and  
Karaoke’s Uncanny: A



Documentary Dialogue about  
Activism and Poetics (Using  
Chat Roulette)”

**10:45 - 12:00**

**Panel VI** Human/Non-Human  
Chair: Alisa Lebow

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**Irene Gustafson** (University of  
California Santa Cruz) “Home  
Work”

**Pablo Mollenhauer** “Geo-  
cultural (re)calibrations:  
Lens-based Media Practises as a  
New Approach for the Inclusion  
of Material's Agencies”

**12:00 - 13:30**

**Panel VII** Documentary  
Incursions: Past, Present, Future  
Chair: Pratap Rughani

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**Treasa O’Brien** (University of  
Westminster) “‘Making of’ as  
Primary Form – a Generative  
Reflexive Rhizomic Film Genre”

**Karen Boswall** (University of  
Sussex) “The Mobile Phone  
Musical Documentary: Explor-  
ing Innovative Participatory  
Video Methodologies in Cre-  
ative and Collaborative Digital  
Documentary Production in  
Mozambique”

**Christine Cynn** (Independent  
Filmmaker) “From the Past to  
the Future: Dramatization and  
Meta-narrative Process as  
Documentary Practice in The  
Act of Killing and scienceFU-  
TURE”

**13.30 - 14.30**

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LUNCH

**14.30 - 16.00**

**Panel VIII Still/Laughing: Ludic Disruptions of History**  
Chair: Suzanna Helke

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**Roz Mortimer** (University of Westminster) "Pools of Affect: the Tableau Vivant as a Disruptive Space"

**Fathima Nizzarudin** (Jamia Millia Islamia University)  
"Nuclear Hallucinations"

**Rebecca Ora** (University of California, Santa Cruz)  
"Documenting 11/9 and the New Limits of Representation"

**16.15 - 17.45**

**Panel IX Affective Economies**  
Chair: Irene Lusztig

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**Ian McDonald** (Newcastle University) "Documentary as the Cinema of Poetry"

**Susana Helke** (Aalto University) "On the Emotion Economy and the Poetics of Compassion"

**Abigail Child** (Independent Filmmaker) "A Politics of Poetic Form: Sound and its Affect"

**17.45 - 18.00**

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Closing remarks

Special thanks go to Tim Jordan, Nick Till, Sarah Maddox, Emile Devereaux, Ben Burbridge, Hilary Kalmbach, Karen Boswall, Laura McDermott, Matt Knight, Emma Harrison, Zoha Zokaei and all of our volunteers.

All symposium panels and keynotes, as well as the first night's screening and roundtable, will be held in the **Main Auditorium of the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (ACCA)**. The sidebar screening programme will be held in the **Jane Attenborough Studio in ACCA**. Registration, Coffee/Tea breaks and lunch will all be in the **ACCA foyer**. There are several cafes and bars on campus, as well as a supermarket, a post office, and cash machines. Just ask one of our volunteers for directions. Wifi is best accessed via Eduroam.



# screenings

Jane Attenborough Studio, Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts

## SATURDAY

### PROGRAMME 1

10.00

#### **Rights of Action**

Jason Fox, 2016, 17 mins

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Rights of Action is a pastoral symphony for a public park as it turns 100, as performed by the creatures that use it. A portrait of habitual gestures and shared movements within Rocky Mountain National Park, Rights of Action explores the ways that the park brings shape to our bodies and our bodies bring shape to the park. It takes particular interest in the relationship between habits and habitat, habits as a shared basis for community, and shared habits as that which marks insiders from out.

10.20

#### **YMX: Migration, Land, and Loss after Mirabel**

Cheryl Sim, 2016, 15 mins

Co-curators: Matt Soar and Danica Evering

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YMX speaks to the parallel stories of displacement and forced migration through the site of the now-closed Mirabel

Airport in Montreal: those dispossessed of their land to build the airport and the thousands of people who arrived there escaping war, disaster, or economic adversity. Memories of exproprié and refugee—Pierre Nepveu, Prem Sooriyakumar, and Kim Thuy—stitch together archival footage of the airport and the protests that followed its creation.

10.35

#### **Kutikula (work in progress)**

Karen Boswall, 2017, 25 mins

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An initial exploration into innovative hybrid participatory methodologies of documentary film-making where aspects of constructed masculinity and femininity are explored through a creative collaboration with young musicians, dancers and writers in Northern Mozambique. Evaluating the gender roles learned through song from their elders and ancestors, Belu and Tani record mens and womens songs from the villages they hail from and draw on them to produce their own new contemporary musical and cinematic reflections of their visions of themselves.



## PROGRAMME 2

**11.15**

### **Liliesleaf Farm Mayibuye: In Search of the Spectres of History**

Patti Gaal-Holmes, 2016,  
10 mins

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Liliesleaf Farm was headquarters of the ANC's military-wing in 1960s apartheid South Africa. The dual screen film juxtaposes personal and political narratives with Liliesleaf house acting as a palimpsest to open up multiple layers of history, raising questions about the diffuseness of memory and the meaning of complicity and truth.

**11.25**

### **The Host**

Miranda Pennell, 2016,  
60 mins

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A filmmaker turns forensic detective as she pieces together hundreds of photographs in search of what she believes to be a buried history, only to find herself inside the story she is researching. The Host investigates the activities of British Petroleum (BP) in Iran; a tale of power, imperial hubris and catastrophe.

## PROGRAMME 3

**14.15**

### **This is History (After All)**

Roz Mortimer, 2016, 31 mins

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The hidden history of the Roma Holocaust in Poland told through the testimony of five witnesses and survivors. Mortimer's camera probes the landscapes of forgotten mass graves, forensically examining memory, place and trauma.

**14.45**

### **Nuclear Hallucinations**

Fathima Nizaruddin, 2016, 54 mins

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Nuclear Hallucinations is a film, which claims to be a documentary, and it is centered around the anti-nuclear struggle against the Kudankulam Atomic Power Project in South India. In a context where cases of sedition and waging of war against the state are filed against anti-nuclear protesters, the film attempts to question the totalitarian nature of pro-nuclear assertions through comic modes.

## PROGRAMME 4

**16.15**

### **Shooting Ourselves**

Christine Cynn, 88 mins

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Shooting Ourselves is a dream-like window onto the human experience of a world at war. In this hyper-technological

world, we need machines that film us to help understand our relationship to machines that kill us.

## SUNDAY

### PROGRAMME 5

9.30

**Cake and Steak** (Part 1 from The Suburban Trilogy)  
Abigail Child, 2004, 20 mins

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The first part of a series of digital projections that excavate 'girl training' in the legacy of home movie and post-war American suburban culture. The project is imagined as a digi-novel in chapters. The first part re-reads the American dream to question the American nuclear family.

9.50

**The Future is Behind You** (Part 2 from The Suburban trilogy)  
Abigail Child, 2004, 21 mins

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The Future is Behind You family archive from 1930's Europe, reconstructed to emphasize gender acculturation in two sisters who play, race,

fight, kiss and grow up together under a shadow of oncoming history.

10.20

**Forty Years**

Irene Lusztig, 2017, 14 mins

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For the past two years I have been filming people (mostly women and mostly strangers) reading letters sent to the editor of Ms. Magazine in the 1970s, in the cities where the letters were originally written. In this short film, four women read letters about sexual violence that were sent to Ms. Magazine in the 1970s.

### PROGRAMME 6

10.45

**Acts and Intermissions**

Abigail Child, 2017, 57 mins

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A new experimental documentary feature utilizing the life of Emma Goldman to explore the resurgence of protest in the 21st century. The work is hybrid and prismatic, including contemporary footage, archive and re-enactment to expose the continuing conflicts between labor and property, revolutionary purity and personal freedom.