

<b>Institution:</b> University of Aberdeen
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 – Modern Languages
<b>Title of case study:</b> Paradigmatic Film Practice: <i>In Time of Place</i> to <i>The Director's Cut</i>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>This case study examines the impact of Alan Marcus's work as documentary film director, practice-based researcher and organiser of a series of events known as <i>The Director's Cut</i>, in which he interviews internationally renowned filmmakers, script writers, composers, actors and animators to bring out, for a public audience, the paradigms, creative influences and innovations that shape their work. The public impact of his films can be assessed by the many institutions which have held screenings of them, together with invited talks by Marcus, and the impact of <i>The Director's Cut</i> interviews by the scale of their immediate audience (regularly over 200 and sometimes as many as 900, in the case of Sir David Attenborough), and the amount of media coverage and internet activity they generate. This impact is enhanced by workshops and masterclasses that allow aspiring filmmakers to work with some of the major film practitioners in modern cinema and television, and by <i>Junior Director's Cut</i> events which encourage film-making among local schoolchildren.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Marcus's research combines the creative, technical and research expertise of someone who has worked in both British and American broadcasting with a profound interest in the afterlife of places of traumatic historical experience. His <i>In Time of Place</i> films (2008-2010, <a href="http://www.abdn.ac.uk/timeofplace">www.abdn.ac.uk/timeofplace</a>) explore the relationship between places of traumatic memory and their contemporary 'banal' reality, in order to chart the ways in which modern societies have rendered the horrors of their recent histories into consumable events. The films evoke survivor experiences but relate them to the de-traumatised landscapes shaped by modern urban design, mass tourism and a globalised culture in which memory does not confront us with horror but distances us from it. The research underpinning the films is thus historical (the detailed investigation of the source of trauma), sociocultural (the residue of past events as they are memorialised in particular places) and ethnographic (how people live in or visit such places in the present); it is also self-reflexive about how picture and sound can dramatise the relationship between place, time and memory.</p> <p>The films are based on extensive archival research, interviews with survivors and holocaust scholars, together with detailed architectural, environmental and ethnographic exploration of the locations on which they are focused. Thus <i>In the Birch Grove</i> took its inspiration from an interview with Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel at his offices in New York, and its form from Marcus's encounter with Johann Kremer's diary during a week-long investigation into the archives of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The film, with its long shots of the remains of Auschwitz, is punctuated by texts from Kramer's diary that underline the 'banality of evil' (in Hannah Arendt's famous phrase), but also the banality of the aftermath of evil. Each of the films explores that banality by different visual and aural techniques, so <i>The Cemetery</i> employs a form that Marcus describes as 'snapshot ethnography', which adopts the formal structure of the snapshot in order to capture scenes in which all the participants are using cameras and cameraphones to capture their own presence in a Jewish cemetery in a city, Prague, that was virtually cleared of Jews in the Second World War. These 'film meditations' in places such as Munich/Dachau (<i>In Place of Death</i>, 2008), Venice (<i>The Ghetto</i>, 2009), Prague (<i>The Cemetery</i>, 2010) and Boston (<i>The Memorial</i>, 2010) have achieved international recognition and are now held by major museums (e.g. the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Getty Center; the Huntington Museum) and Holocaust memorial institutions (e.g. The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity, New York; the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington; the Imperial War Museum, London). Marcus has himself analysed the content and style of his 'practice-based research' in book chapters such as 'A Tale of Two Cities: Dachau and KZ Munich' (in Kroeck, ed., <i>The City and the</i></p>

*Moving Image: Urban Projections*, 2010) and 'Beautiful Dachau's Contested Urban Identity' (in Marcus and Neumann, eds, *Visualizing the City*, 2008).

Marcus uses his own personal experience of the research involved in making film to inform his interviews in *The Director's Cut* series with prominent filmmakers, script writers and animators, in order to bring out the paradigms that inform their films, the creative influences which have shaped their conception of film as a medium and the ways they try to evoke particular reactions from their audiences. Commencing in November 2007 with Europe's most prolific avant-garde director, Raul Ruiz, the series aims to foster dialogue between practitioners, academic staff, students and members of the public. It is the only one of its kind in the UK, and in over 30 events it has explored methodological innovation in the work of filmmakers such as Sir David Attenborough, John Akomfrah, Craig Armstrong, Simon Callow, Gurinder Chadha, Alex Cox, Guy Hamilton, David Mackenzie, Kevin Macdonald, Hans Petter Moland, Pawel Pawlikowski, Malcolm Ritchie, Nicolas Roeg and Jane Treays. Each event involves underpinning research by Marcus into the work of his interviewee in order to focus what is most distinctive about the individual's contribution to film practice. These interviews attract very large audiences into the University of Aberdeen (regularly over two hundred, nine hundred in the case of Sir David Attenborough), requiring at times an audio-visual feed to an overflow location, and most of the events are archived as webcasts on-line, thereby serving as a public resource and attracting thousands more viewers. Marcus's interview with Gordon Cameron of Pixar attracted the largest single audience of any event at the University's May Festival in 2013.

### 3. References to the research

Speaker, 'Snapshot Visual Ethnography, *The Cemetery* and Kafka's Prague', and screening of *The Cemetery* (Marcus, 2010) at the largest annual international documentary film conference, Visible Evidence XX, Stockholm (Aug 2013).

*Director's Cut Masterclass on Filming Holocaust Sites* and cinema screening at Belmont Picturehouse of *In Place of Death* (Marcus, 2008) and *In the Birch Grove* (Marcus, 2012), in commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day, Aberdeen City Council (Jan 2013).

*The Memorial* (Marcus, 2010) selected as the only UK film for screening at the largest annual international film conference, organized by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies in Boston, US (Mar 2012).

Invited speaker, 'Recovering Meaning in an Iconic Urban Terrain', and screening of *One Market Day* (Marcus, 2011) at the FACT Arts Cinema, organized by the Centre for Architecture and Visual Arts, University of Liverpool (Nov 2011).

Invited speaker, 'Dachau/Munich as a Conceptual Urban Space' and screening of *In Place of Death* (Marcus, 2008), Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University, Krakow (May 2011).

Invited speaker, Academic Vice-President's annual lecture, 'Forgetting to Remember: the broken glass of historical assumptions', and screening of *In Place of Death* (Marcus, 2008), St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia (Nov 2010).

Research grants

Carnegie Trust Research Grants (2008, 2010, 2011, 2013, totalling £9,390)

### 4. Details of the impact

Three linked elements generate the impact of this project: the impact of Marcus's films themselves, as he develops his techniques for exploring time, place and trauma; the impact of his exploration of other filmmakers' techniques through the interviews of *The Director's Cut* and the archive that it creates for future researchers; and the impact of *The Director's Cut's* associated events, particularly the public masterclasses at Aberdeen's art cinema, The Belmont Picture House, and

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the *Junior Director's Cut* competitions which encourage schoolchildren to become involved in filmmaking.

The films of the *In Time of Place* project have led to over 40 invited talks, keynotes and public talks with audiences in the fields of Architecture, Divinity, Film and Visual Culture, History, Jewish and Holocaust Studies, Memory Studies and Philosophy, underscoring the research project's interdisciplinary significance. Public screenings and talks have included the Irish Film Institute in Dublin (2009), and public lectures in Antigonish and St. John's, Nova Scotia (2010) in tandem with Remembrance Day and the anniversary of Kristallnacht, and a screening and talk for archivists at the Museum for the History of the Polish Jews in Warsaw (2011). *The Cemetery* (2010) was selected for screening at the largest annual documentary conference in 2013, VEXX in Stockholm, and was followed by a discussion of its experimental ethnography that was chaired by the VEXX conference director and involved leading documentary theorists, including Bill Nichols (1991, 2001), Michael Renov (1993, 2004) and Catherine Russell (1999), while *The Memorial* was the only UK entry selected for screening at the largest annual international film conference in 2012, organized by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies in Boston.

*The Director's Cut* has attracted significant local attention, not only in terms of the numbers regularly attending the events, but in terms of its high profile in the local press. The *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, for instance, in reporting on Nicolas Roeg's participation, stated: 'film fanatics gathered in their hundreds in Aberdeen last night for a special presentation by a world leader in international cinema' (April 2008). Roeg directed the landmark films, *Walkabout*, *Don't Look Now* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. In covering *The Director's Cut* event with Sir David Attenborough, the same newspaper recorded that, 'a hugely popular series of talks celebrating the art of the filmmaker reached a new high yesterday as one of the world's most famous naturalists was welcomed to the fold' (July 2008). The impact of the series can be measured in part by its longevity – commencing in 2007 it has increased in frequency and in popularity in each succeeding year and major events are planned for 2014 and 2015 – as well as by its transfer to other parts of Scotland e.g. the 2010 Glasgow Film Festival invited Alan Marcus to stage a *Director's Cut* at the Glasgow Film Theatre featuring Academy Award-winning director Kevin Macdonald (*Touching the Void*, *Last King of Scotland*), which was subsequently broadcast on BBC Radio.

These impacts are enhanced by the practice-based offshoots of *The Director's Cut* in the masterclasses held in the Belmont Picturehouse to give local filmmakers the opportunity to learn from visiting directors, and in the *Junior Director's Cut* filmmaking competitions, organised in conjunction with Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire schools in 2009 and 2012. *The Director's Cut* has also developed significant external partnerships which include the Norwegian Embassy, Glasgow Film Festival, Scottish Screen, Creative Scotland, Picturehouse Cinemas, BBC Radio and BAFTA Scotland, many of whom have used the series to promote their own public engagement agendas, as well as with Aberdeen City Council, which selected *In the Birch Grove* (2012) and *In Place of Death* (2008) for a special screening and workshop in commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day. The City Council has also commissioned a series of documentary films on local artists, made by recent graduates of the University and overseen by Marcus, as part of its bid to become 'City of Culture'.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. The Director's Cut: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/directorscut>
2. Alan Marcus with Sir David Attenborough, *Youtube*, 26 September 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixbtc5OtfUo&context=C4daf081ADvjVQa1PpcFN7lrZXFm9eUbDBL7DUWIYxrQ-GraJ15Jo=>
3. Alan Marcus and Hans Petter Moland interviewed by Janice Forsyth, *Movie Café*, BBC Radio, 9 October 2008. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/directorscut/media/Moland.mp3>
4. Guy Hamilton interviewed on *BBC Television News*, 29 April 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/8024553.stm>

Public Events:

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5. THE Awards 2008 Shortlist, *Times Higher Education*, 25 September 2008, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/403650.article>
6. Alan Marcus featured on the BBC Radio Shereen programme, 6 April 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0179nnw>

## Media Reviews:

7. Stephen Christie, 'Renowned director takes centre stage at university', *The Press and Journal*, 30 April 2008, <http://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/Article.aspx/615124>
8. *BBC News*, 'Sir David Attenborough honoured', 21 May 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/north\\_east/7410033.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/north_east/7410033.stm)
9. Richard MacKenzie, 'Holocaust film raises many questions', *The Casket*, 17 November 2010, <http://www.thecasket.ca/archives/4464>
10. Lurna Robertson, 'Film director juggles work and family life', *Evening Express*, 12 March 2011, [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/directorscut/uploads/files/GC\\_EE.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/directorscut/uploads/files/GC_EE.pdf)