

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

In Mondovino Veritas? Politics of the Documentary Film for Critical Management Research

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Abstract

Whether as a material or a method, the documentary film is increasingly used in management research. An analysis of the filmic device used in *Mondovino* – a film about the effects of globalization on the wine world – offers an opportunity to explore different politics at work in the documentary film. Based on the concept of politics as defined by Rancière, and the 'critical device' of Caillet, we show that the documentary film is a valuable resource for both the cinephile researcher and the filmmaking researcher engaged in critical research. We ascribe three political dimensions to the documentary film: (1) through its filmic device, it operates as an intervention or performance that concretely changes reality within its scope of action (*filmmaking*); (2) through its narrative, it builds a critical alternative that reconfigures our historical world (*worldmaking*); and (3) through making the filmic device visible in the cinematographic narrative, it enables the viewer to relate the political act of filmmaking to the critical issues in the narrative (*worldmaking in filmmaking*).

Keywords: Documentary film; Filmic device; Art-based research method; Politics; Critical management studies; Cultural globalization

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The subject of this article, which intersects methodological, epistemological, and critical considerations, is one particular research object or tool, namely the documentary film. We define it here as a creative assembling of images and sounds to make a narrative (more or less in story form) that stands alone as a valid whole, independently of the multiple visual and sound 'data' that compose it. The special feature of the documentary film with respect to fiction does not derive from artistic expression *per se* but in the continuity relation (Niney, 2009) between the *profilmic* world (visible on the screen) and the *afilmic* world (to which the filmmakers and the viewers both belong). In the documentary film, the filmmakers, the persons filmed, and the viewers all live and act in the same historical world. In the last decade, the documentary film (sometimes called *videography*) has been increasingly used in management research as a data source or method (Hietanen & Rokka, 2018; Wood et al., 2018). The growing interest in this format in management reflects at once the 'visual turn' (Bell & Davison, 2013; Bell et al., 2014) and the emergence of art-based research methods (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Debenedetti et al., 2019; Leavy, 2015; Mairesse, 2019), both of which have recently marked this field of inquiry.

Several overviews on the use of the documentary film in different areas of management research have already been published (Cléret et al., 2018; Hassard, 1998, 2009; Hassard et al., 2018; Rokka & Hietanen, 2018); this article has a more specific purpose, which is to assess to what extent the documentary film can support a critical research project, that is, to address the question of its *political* dimension. How can the management researcher make use of this object to critically examine organizations or markets? With the philosopher Jacques Rancière (2000), we see the political potential of the film in its ability to challenge not only the dominant patterns in our common world but also the film medium itself in its claim to 'represent' the world realistically. To analyze the politics of the documentary, we introduce the concept of the filmic device as developed by Aline Caillet (2014), referring to the sociomaterial modalities of film production implemented when filming, and we dissociate the filmic device from the cinematographic *narrative* (the 'finished' film, in the form of edited and ordered images and sounds). While the politics of the documentary is generally associated with – and limited to – the power to configure and destabilize that is proper to narrative, this article sets out to shift the terms of the debate by placing the filmic device at the center of the politics of the film.

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This research study is based on the analysis of the film *Mondovino*, by the American filmmaker Jonathan Nossiter (2004), a successful documentary officially selected for the Cannes film festival and the César Awards. This film on the global future of wine instigated our work and illustrates it. We show how it is political not only in its narrative, proposing an alternative, critical view of a wine world undergoing global homogenization but also more importantly in the practice of its filmic device, embodying 'in deeds' a concrete alternative to a standardized, luxury, expert, technical, Anglo-Saxon cultural production. Our analysis thus shows that a documentary film is political in three ways: (1) as a 'critical text' (narrative) reconfiguring our historical world; (2) as an intervention or performance (filmic device 'in deeds'), concretely changing reality within its scope of action; and (3) through making the device visible in the cinematographic narrative, bringing together the act of *filmmaking* and the topic (and subjects) of the investigation. In the Discussion section at the end of the article, we return to this plural ability of the documentary film to propose critical alternatives that challenge 'givens', and also indicate some possible avenues for 'cinophile researchers' or 'filmmaking researchers' using the documentary film in a critical research approach.

The documentary film and management research: A brief state of play

Here, we consider the documentary not as a particular form of video data collection to be studied according to the standards of qualitative visual analysis but instead as a 'film', that is, a set of visual and aural sensory signs ordered to form a narrative,¹ in which formal questions hold a fundamental place and which stands alone as a valid whole, independently of the multiple audiovisual data that compose it. We therefore emphasize a dialog with work on management devoted to the analysis or creation of such a filmic or videographic object of this nature integrating more or less direct references to the tradition, history, or figures of documentary cinema in their theoretical framework. We will not deal here with the history of documentary cinema. For this, the interested reader can consult specialized works (Bruzzi, 2006; Gauthier, 2015; Nichols, 1991, 2010; Niney, 2002), and some management overviews (Cléret et al., 2018; Hassard, 1998, 2009; Hassard et al., 2018; Rokka & Hietanen, 2018).

The documentary film has been regularly used for research in the field of administration for some 20 years, especially in management, organization theory, and consumer behavior. As

¹ Although documentary films are generally less narrative than fiction films (sometimes much less so), the 'narrative' of a documentary film is used here to specify the film as an assembly of images and sounds that tell us 'something' about our shared world. The distinction between *cinematographic narrative* and *filmic device* will be addressed later.

is classic in visual research methods (Bell & Davison, 2013), a distinction can be made between work that uses the documentary film as a given *material* or *data source* (the film precedes the research) and that which uses it as a *method* or *result* of research (the film is generated by or through the research). Certain research studies thus analyze one or more existing documentary films from a perspective that can be theoretical (Kenny, 2009; Tadajewski & Hamilton, 2014), historical (Aitken, 1998; Hassard, 1998, 2009), or epistemological (Steyaert et al., 2012; Walz et al., 2016). Even so, the documentary film format is increasingly often considered as a method for the production of data in its own right, in a sociological and anthropological tradition of filmed research (Colleyn, 1993, 2009; Pink, 2013), or more firmly anchored in contemporary *art-based* research methods (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Debenedetti et al., 2019; Mairesse, 2019). Some of these studies focus on the major steps in the production of filmed research, underlining the benefits and limits of video in terms of production, post-production, and dissemination of data (Belk & Kozinets, 2005; Cléret et al., 2018; Goodman, 2004; Petr et al., 2015; cf. also the interview with J. Bakan in Bell, 2015). Others emphasize the ability of the filmic form to grasp the physical and embodied dimensions of the organization, and also the democratic dimension of recourse to a collaborative or participative documentary production (Hassard et al., 2018; Slutskaya et al., 2016). Finally, several research studies reflexively emphasize the singularity of a documentary film production in terms that raise esthetic and epistemological questions (Hietanen & Rokka, 2018; Rokka & Hietanen, 2018; Wood & Brown, 2011, 2012; Wood et al., 2018).

Politics of the documentary film in management research

To discuss the political dimension of the documentary film used for research, we first take support from the thinking of the philosopher Jacques Rancière, which affords a definition of the concept of 'critical documentary', with which we associate documentary films of the so-called 'expressive' vein. We then introduce the concept of 'filmic device' drawn from the work of Aline Caillet, and we set the politics of the documentary not only in the cinematographic narrative but also in the sociomaterial conditions in which the film was produced (its 'device'), the *modus operandi* by which the moving images and sounds are both captured and constructed.

Rancière and the political documentary

According to the philosopher Jacques Rancière (2000), political action always reduces to breaking with the imposed configuration of the 'sharing of the sensible', that is, the portions and

places assigned to each of us in our common space. This re-configuration of the sensible is a necessarily dissensual operation, as it involves creating 'polemical arenas' in which the traditional order is upset, thereby remapping what can be thought, said, or done, and in particular enabling the 'portionless' to join the debate. For Rancière, politics is an esthetic issue, insofar as forging a new 'distribution of the sensible' always implies staging, setting out, assembling, and dissociating elements, that is, constructing new physical arrangements of signs, images, and ideas in our common world. It is with this in mind that Rancière (2001), who has worked extensively on cinema, makes the documentary film a privileged arena or stage for politics, that is, a polemical space for making reality visible and questioning it. Here, the documentary differs from fiction, in that it is exempted from employing artistic means to ensure the 'suspension of disbelief' and the plausibility of the narrative.² It can concentrate on what is the very essence of cinema, namely, 'a way of cutting up a story into sequences or arranging shots to make a story, joining or disjoining voices and bodies, sounds and images, drawing out or speeding up time' (Rancière, 2001, pp. 202–203, our translation). This work of creative ordering pursued on our historical world, freed of fictional constraints, is political not because it reveals some already existing reality, or by its didactic power, but in its ability to generate an alternative arrangement that may challenge the 'given', that is, the dominant 'distribution of the sensible'. For Rancière, reality is thus never predetermined: it is not a given to be understood but above all an esthetic problem to be addressed. Documentaries that break with the dominant 'distribution of the sensible' he calls 'political fictions of the real'. These open up the possibility of a potentially emancipating alternative in the creative structuring of reality.

Documentary, politics, and management research: Representational and expressive perspectives

Manifestly, not all documentaries achieve their political potential. A distinction must thus be made between two ways of considering the documentary film, which lines up with the work of management researchers interested in this question. First, there are documentaries that we can call representational, and which Nichols (1991, 2010), in his authoritative typology of documentary modes, would term 'expository' or 'observational'.³ These films essentially raise the question of

their relation to reality in terms of more or less authentic or faithful representation, and tend to mask or ignore how the film is constructed, the process of enunciation, and the effects of the filming apparatus. Such documentaries are meant to capture the world as it is, and so they claim a political function of unmasking reality and of spotlighting what could otherwise have remained unseen. In Rancière's meaning of the term, these representational films have, however, a limited political power: 'Making reality visible' incurs two risks: (1) unintentionally legitimating a 'natural order of things' (reality *as it is*), and (2) seeming to take an all-knowing, authoritarian stance toward viewers assumed to be uninformed or blinkered (Hassard, 1998, 2009). Several lines of management and marketing research that make use of the documentary thus emphasize its ability to *re-present* the world in a filmic form, lending it, for example, an aptitude to 'describe ... capture ... collect data' (Goodman, 2004), or offer 'proof ... objectivity' (Petr et al., 2015), or be 'fact-based ... factual ... realistic' (Tadajewski & Hamilton, 2014), or understand the world 'as it is' (Joel Bakan, in Bell, 2015). The documentary is thus, first of all, envisioned as a tool for sampling information 'on' reality, and the accent is placed on the method that allows the truest rendition of the images of which the filmmaker was an eyewitness, while making the message as 'effective' as possible for the audience. From this realistic and representational viewpoint, the research film is also often considered as an illustration or proof in images of concepts developed upstream (Cléret et al., 2018; Petr et al., 2015; see also the experience of Joel Bakan, writer of *The Corporation* in Bell, 2015).

The typology of Nichols (1991, 2010) contrasts the representational documentary with participatory, reflexive, and performative documentaries.⁴ These comprise most of the films that we refer to here as critical or political, with Rancière. These films or videos are sometimes termed as *expressive* in management, in the sense of being non-representational, performative, and critical (Hietanen & Rokka, 2018; Hietanen et al., 2014). They are not the recording of a world that is 'already there' but the construction of a sensible, equivocal, uncertain,

commentary that explains them. In an 'observational' documentary, the filmmaker takes the camera to a location where there is tension and 'awaits a crisis'. In doing so, this ostensibly 'direct' cinema claims to be able to capture reality as it is through its direct access to daily life. Marked by the idea of transparency, the observational documentary makes the director an ideal, invisible, and neutral observer (Nichols, 1991, 2010).

⁴ Documentary filmmakers working in the participatory mode (*cinéma vérité*) expose the interaction between the represented subject and the human and technical recording apparatus. The camera records what it has itself caused. The 'reflexive' documentary, which has gained importance since the 1970s, no longer claims to be a commentary on the world but on the representation of the world itself. The 'performative' mode (sub-category of the reflexive mode) sets knowledge in the embodied, sensible experience of the filmmaker, who is overtly present in the first person (Nichols, 1991, 2010).

² 'The documentary film... does not choose reality over fiction. It is simply that reality is not an effect that it has to produce. It is a given that has to be understood. The documentary film can thus isolate the artistic work of fiction by dissociating it from what it is readily assumed to be: the imaginative production of plausibility and effects of reality'. (Rancière, 2001, pp. 202–203, our translation)

³ The 'expository' documentary film is narrative, linear, chronological, and causal. The images, reduced to illustrations, are subordinated to a spoken

'monstrous' form (Hietanen & Rokka, 2018). Emphasizing the esthetic or poetic dimension of the narrative, this work makes the film an immersive, experiential form (vs. informational and conceptual) likely to disturb the relation between the researcher, the subject, and the audience (Wood et al., 2018), and to open up new ways of thinking, seeing, and understanding (Hietanen & Rokka, 2018; Rokka & Hietanen, 2018). This provides the research documentary a 'hybrid' status between art and science, blurring the frontiers between empirical evidence and artistic invention (Walz et al., 2016; Wood & Brown, 2011), and placing the researcher where the work of the scientist and the artist or *auteur* intersects (Belk & Kozinets, 2005; Wood & Brown, 2012). This overlap tends to bring the documentary closer to fiction ('video is fiction', Hietanen & Rokka, 2018), where the videography has 'the power to show us compelling fantasies of possible worlds' (Rokka & Hietanen, 2018, p. 114).

The filmic device at the center of the politics of the documentary film

Insofar as making a documentary film is an event that belongs to and participates in the filmed world (principle of afilmic–profilmic continuity; Niney, 2009), examining how reality is set out in the film means also examining how the film itself is produced. The political act of sensible reconfiguration of our world is not to be found only in the way images and sounds are eventually assembled but also in the 'performance' of filming, which implies a certain organization of our common world. The context in which the images and sounds are produced, and the choices, trade-offs, and joint endeavors that such an enterprise involves are not merely 'visual note-taking' (Pink, 2003) but form an integral part of the political process of constructing knowledge. After Caillet (2014), we call these conditions in which the film is produced the 'filmic device'. Addressing the politics of the documentary film from the viewpoint of the filmic device presupposes examining the *modus operandi* whereby the images and sounds are captured or constructed by filmmakers in action. The concept of 'device' (*dispositif*) in Caillet (2014) thus concerns the social and material apparatus by which a filmmaker 'sets out, within a unified reality, the observing subject, the capturing lens, and the captured reality, and thus gathers together all the protagonists'⁵ (p. 17, our translation). The term 'device' thus invites us to turn not to the cinematographic narrative but instead to the 'generating' means and protocols implemented to construct the images and sounds. Addressing the documentary via the device entails:

highlighting the idea of an apparatus [...] interposed between reality and the capturing subject [...]. The device thus shows us the technical resources with which reality is captured, the protocols implemented in the production of the work, and the contextual elements as parts of the work itself, and not, as is usual in a strictly poetic perspective, merely as means used to build the work that then vanish in the finished product. (Caillet, 2014, p. 18, our translation)

The concept of filmic device has several dimensions: (1) a strictly physical dimension, covering the tools and techniques needed to capture and construct the images and sounds in a particular situation (more or less sophisticated recording equipment, ancillary hardware, etc.), (2) a human dimension, referring to the 'position' occupied by the filming team in the filmed world (adopted place, stance, attitude, etc.); (3) a processual dimension, integrating protocols, routines, and 'ways of doing' set in place for filming; and (4) a situational, more general dimension, referring to the situation created on the ground by the device, which is both chosen (set up) and undergone (once the device is installed) by the filmmakers. Such a device is political in that it not only forms a 'generating principle' conditioning the subsequent construction of the narrative but also testifies to a singular approach to reality that defines a certain 'distribution of the sensible'. The point of emphasizing the filmic device is thus to make films *politically* and not merely to make *political* films, as famously stated by Jean-Luc Godard (1970). This follows on from Walter Benjamin, who in his essay of 1934, *The Author as producer* (2003, p. 131, our translation), enjoins authors first to 'find their place in the production process', linking the political dimension of a work to the technical choices underlying it. Here, Benjamin echoes Brecht for whom the critical artist's job is not to 'feed' the production apparatus but to 'transform' it, for in the words of Caillet (2008, p. 68, our translation), 'without a thought-through positioning in the production process, the best intentions will bounce back as counter-revolutionary proposals and can sometimes even fuel the discourse of the adversary'. Benjamin is writing in a context that is quite different from ours, but he forcefully reminds us of how the production conditions of a work are already always political, even before what it is going to represent has been determined.

The critical issue of the documentary viewed through the prism of the filmic device is examining how the film is made in the field – the process rather than the result – and appraising how the conditions of production of the film *politically* challenge the dominant forms of reality. However, most often the research film in management or marketing is reduced to a narrative that supposedly ignores its own generating device. Whenever the conditions of production of the documentary film are addressed, they are seen merely as means to an end (the cinematographic narrative) and vanish in the 'finished product'. This is obviously so in representational films, where

⁵ Here Caillet's device differs from Jean-Louis Baudry's 'cinematographic device' which emphasizes the presentation and reception of the film (projection equipment, venue, audience).

the filming is first conceived as an early neutral phase of 'data collection' (Cléret et al., 2018; Petr et al., 2015). However, it is also largely the case for work in the expressive vein for which the political weight of the film seems to be carried entirely by the performative, sensible, and destabilizing power of the visual and aural. The documentary film or videography is here defined as a critical text that can move its audience (figuratively and literally) through the deployment of various esthetic strategies (Lindstead, 2018; Rokka et al., 2018; Steyaert et al., 2012; Wood et al., 2018). It is the narrative that allows organizational life or a consumption experience to be evoked by sensible means, in all its variety, equivocality and multiplicity. The 'politics of the filmic device' is thus largely underestimated or ignored, except for some work addressing the collaborative dimension of filming as an essential democratic element in documentary practice (Chatzidakis & Maclaran, 2018; Hassard et al., 2018; Slutskaya et al., 2016).

Our objective, which is of relevance to critical researchers, is thus to examine the political dimension of the documentary film via its filmic device, and to reflect on the relations between the politics of the device and that of the narrative, that is, between the politics of the documentary as an intervention or process (device 'in deeds') and the politics of the documentary as a 'text' (cinematographic narrative).

Presentation of *Mondovino* and our research approach

Presentation of *Mondovino*

Mondovino, a modest production financed by France and Argentina, is a documentary film made by the American filmmaker Jonathan Nossiter, acclaimed in particular for his film *Sunday*, which won the Grand Jury Prize at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival. *Mondovino* was released in cinemas in 2004 and on DVD in 2006. It ran for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, competed for the best European film at the César Awards, and was nominated for the best documentary film prize at the Deauville American Film Festival. *Mondovino* made the enviable box office score (for a documentary) of 300,000 ticket sales in France alone. This enthusiastic reception led certain critics to brush it off as just one more dogmatic, demagogic anti-globalization documentary, in the line of the polemical films (and methods) of Michael Moore. Yet, *Mondovino* is a rich example of a political documentary, testifying to how a documentary filmic device and narrative can support alternatives, and in so doing constitute two ways of exerting political action through film.

As its title suggests, *Mondovino* has a twofold subject: the wine world and the global prospect of the wine field. To address this subject, Nossiter meets with players in the wine world (some 50 producers, experts, merchants, public

regulators, critics, etc.) in five countries, and allows them or prompts them to speak in their home or work settings. Through multiple images and discourses around vineyards, new technology, new wooden casks, the roles of critics, globalization, etc., *Mondovino* develops a singular, personal, committed vision of the global future of the business, in particular the great vintages and 'star' wines. Winegrowing as it is gradually embodied on screen appears as exposed to the harmful forces of globalized trade. The world of great vintages seems beset by a conflict between two major cultural and economic logics, that of local identity, the *terroir*, and that of the global *marque*. Several of the persons interviewed emerged as eager promoters of the *marque* or as staunch defenders of the *terroir*. The temptation to switch from *terroir* to *marque*, linked to what some called 'globalization', was associated with a risk of a worldwide standardization of taste, itself linked to an ever-faster commodification of practices.

Methodological note

Mondovino is both the motivation and the subject matter of this research. Our analysis of the film takes an approach of the art-based research type (Debenedetti et al., 2019; Mairesse, 2019), which is supported by (1) a systematic analysis of the film based on its thorough dissection, making use of the classical tools of filmic analysis (analysis of the staging and narration; cf. Aumont & Marie, 2020; Bordwell & Thomson, 2015; de Baecque & Chevallier, 2012; Goliot-Lété & Vanoye, 2015); (2) the sensible reflexivity of the researchers through which they were constantly attentive to their affects on viewing the work (how did this film move us and what did it move in us?); and (3) an interview with Jonathan Nossiter conducted by us in 2016, lasting 3.5 h.

At the start of the project, the aim of this study was to use *Mondovino*'s 'incongruity' to draw out new ideas on 'cultural globalization' from the sensible, in an abductive approach proper to art-based research. However, our intimate experience of the film gradually led us away from this standpoint toward questions of an epistemological order. This new research orientation arose from a shared perception of a gap between the cinematographic narrative, presenting a weary, predictable conflict between the proponents of *marque* and *terroir*, and our own sensible experience, as enthusiastic observers of a blossoming, lively, positive cinematographic alternative embodied in its *modus operandi*. The perception of this gap, confirmed by our meeting with the filmmaker, guided us toward an analysis of the filmic device, as explicitly disclosed on the screen. What does this 'DIY' approach to reality, the central place of this polyglot filmmaker, these ostensibly modest means, make us feel and think about the cultural globalization at the heart of the narrative? The initial topic of the article – a critique of cultural globalization – thus turned into an

exploration of the political alternatives generated by the filmic device and of the relationships these alternatives have with the cinematographic narrative. The article is the result of a constant reciprocation between film and theory, *Mondovino* being both the rich source fueling our thinking and our research on the politics of the documentary, and a remarkable illustration of the same concept.

The following analysis of *Mondovino* focuses on the politics of the film, that is, on how the film problematizes and constructs an alternative cultural globalization in a polemical way. Some still images from the film together with quotations from the interview we conducted with Jonathan Nossiter illustrate and support our analysis.

Politics of cultural globalization in *Mondovino*

Our analysis of *Mondovino* identifies three distinct political acts. First, *Mondovino* is immediately political in the deployment of its singular filmic device, which itself constitutes a way of capturing reality that can challenge the dominant forms of cultural production. Second, *Mondovino* is political in that its narrative offers the construction of a critical alternative version of a 'globalized' wine world. Third, *Mondovino* is political in the way it reveals its filmic device in its narrative, enabling the viewer to bring together the acts of 'filmmaking' and 'winemaking' in the context of globalization.

Filmmaking: Politics of the filmic device

Even before being a narrative, the film exists as a filmic device deployed in a field of investigation. What types of intervention and relation to reality does *Mondovino's* filmic device bring into play? By what types of designed assembling does this device configure a singular 'sharing of the sensible' where it operates? The filmic device can first be characterized by its *material dimension*. It is rapidly obvious that Nossiter usually has only one digital camera, very occasionally two, and a microphone, which sometimes appears on the screen. The supporting 'team' is generally limited to one helper

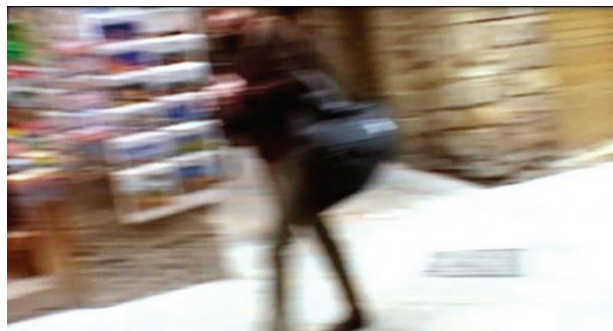
(alternately Stéphanie and Juan, two friends). This minimalistic device overtly positions *Mondovino* in a particular cinematographic terroir: that of a 'cinéma pauvre' (poor cinema) (Comolli & Sorrel, 2015), in which deliberately precarious physical conditions favor nimble filming, and a certain free and spontaneous approach to reality:

I'd just made a film with a lot of money, where there were 150 people on set, very formal. I'm just not interested in all that. It was a struggle because what I'm interested in is vitality in a film. It was so liberating [for *Mondovino*] to be alone with my friend, just close together, I was happy and free, and also concerning the wine world, nothing at stake, I didn't care. (Interview with Jonathan Nossiter by the authors, our translation)

The on-screen result of this 'featherweight' filmic device is a ramshackle DIY esthetic, unforgettable for the viewer (Still 1), far removed from the 'luxury product' and the technical expertise that characterize both the great *marque* wines and the *blockbuster* movies (including documentaries). The single camera wanders, trembles, zooms in and out, suddenly pans, or lets the microphone into the frame.

What bothered some viewers was that if you pay money (for wine or to see a film), you expect a luxury product. A lot of people, especially those who weren't film buffs, said, 'Yes, the substance of the film is terrific, but the form is lousy'. [...] What I'm most proud about in the film is its freedom. [...] I was free and so the camera was free. (Interview with Jonathan Nossiter by the authors, our translation)

Besides its material parsimony, the filmic device of *Mondovino* is characterized by its *human dimension*, that is, the type of relations it creates among the protagonists. The two persons who alternately accompanied Nossiter were not technicians or assistant filmmakers but close friends, also wine lovers. Nossiter thus claims 'the requirement to be accompanied by close friends, not by technicians [...], seeking to elicit views on us that are very different from those induced by the presence of "professionals"' (Beuvelet, 2011, p. 8, our translation). Nossiter and his friends take turns with the camera and the



Still 1. The viewer never forgets Jonathan Nossiter's unruly camera

microphone, participating collegially in the work, although the interviewer is Nossiter. To evoke the human dimension of the documentary device, Caillet (2014) substituted the concept of 'position' (*in* the world) for that of 'point of view' (*on* the world). The term 'position' has several meanings, in particular a topographic meaning (place) and an ethical meaning (stance, attitude). What is remarkable about the place occupied by the filmmakers in *Mondovino* is their constant movement from one side of the camera to the other: The filmmakers move unceasingly between the two spaces (their bodies or parts thereof, and their hands), while Nossiter's voice (those of his friends less often) continually crosses the frontier between the filmic and the profilmic. The fluidity of their place makes them characters in the film in their own right: they are fully committed to the film they are making, intervene in it, and claim it as their own. As regards stance, the narrative attests to a device marked by simplicity, modesty, and spontaneity; in other words, a certain authenticity in the relation to others (Still 2). The physical flexibility of the device enables Nossiter to be constantly open to the unplanned and off-the-cuff, and to improvise, guided by his vision and sensibility.

Nossiter and his helper thus never appear to be positioned 'in advance' of the viewer (Comolli, 2004). They have no prior knowledge or expertise. Nossiter feels his way, marks his surprise, and questions both the person filmed and himself. One fundamental part of the device in its human dimension favors this authentic, spontaneous stance with regard to the persons being filmed. This part is language: Nossiter is a polyglot, fluent in English, French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese. He can thus talk freely with everyone without having to go through an interpreter: He can laugh at jokes, tell some of his own, engage in banter, and appreciate shades of meaning. The filmic device largely takes support from this capacity, which favors encounter and improvisation, and sets the film within a certain idea of globalization: *Mondovino* is not only nomadic but also, as Nossiter asserted when we met him, 'thoroughly cosmopolitan. It's a song about fluid exchanges between cultures and languages (our translation)'.

The material parsimony of the device, the closeness of the filmmaking team, and their open and spontaneous approach to reality created something that, with Caillet (2014, p. 114), we could call an 'esthetics of the encounter', insofar as 'the artist, avowedly subjective, attentive to the context, and to all that can come to bear on the situation, is fully involved in a relation established according to closeness and sensibility, on the basis of which the artist constructs a project' (Still 3).

Finally, by refusing a certain standard of documentary cinema (particularly as seen in television), the filmic device set in place in *Mondovino* works as a political performance, opposing a resistance 'in deeds' to a certain vision of cinematographic production: luxurious, expert, technical, and Anglo-Saxon. This political work on the medium echoes the invitation of Benjamin (1934/2003) to work from within the 'bourgeois' production apparatus to avoid fueling the 'discourse of the adversary'. As it advances, the device set in place does more than just produce images: it functions as a political system that enables Nossiter to test and experience a possible way to escape the homogenization of content fostered by cultural globalization that standardizes production on an essentially commercial and technical basis. Such a filmic device is engaged in what Sassen (2008) calls 'counter-geographies of globalization' to describe certain artistic initiatives set in the global network but retaining their local attachment: 'These interventions are deeply imbricated with some of the major dynamics constitutive of globalization yet are not part of the formal apparatus of global firms and global markets nor of their aims' (Sassen, 2008, p. 11). In its own way, Nossiter's film joins with these subversive forms of intervention in globalized capitalism, which while respecting the general dynamics of globalization (nomadic, cosmopolitan 'world cinema') refuse to renounce their singular minority cinematographic footings.

Making the world of wine: Politics of the narrative

The narrative of *Mondovino* – the film in its sensible materiality of edited images and sounds – consists of and gives voice to a



Still 2. Nossiter's helper Juan carries the Louis XV armchair belonging to Henri de Montille (seen from behind) to the sitting room



Still 3. Jonathan Nossiter (right) with Battista and Lina Columbu: an 'esthetic of encounter'



Still 4. Camera-straddling handshake between Jonathan Nossiter and 'beheaded' Patrick Léon

succession of scenes shot in five countries, showing places and people associated with the wine world (producers, merchants, critics, etc.). The narrative does not take a strong story form, despite some follow-on between sequences, and there is no off-screen commentary or voice-over. The viewer is immersed in a kaleidoscopic, sensual experience, both visual and aural (languages, accents, registers, and music), which repositions the globalization of the wine business at the individual and local scale, where the issues that matter are not solely economic but also cultural, historical, ideological, familial, physical, and sensory. Here, globalization is about relationships with land, vines, wood, family inheritance, language, and history, and is associated with hierarchical relations within winegrowing firms.

Each scene is constructed by the *setting*, which shows the individual *terroir*, in which those who make or sell the wine, and those who advise the producers, express themselves. Some 50 persons are filmed, ranging from the vineyard owner to the agricultural worker, from the 'star' wine expert to the press agent, via the wine merchant. Nossiter's mobile, unsteady camera is never 'awed' by a brand image and does not seek to 'in-plate' anything or even to 'film properly' (Still 4).

However, it is lively, curious, spontaneous, and subjective, like the filmmaking team themselves, and reflects their way of

approaching reality (see above). Each character is thus situated visually and aurally in an environment made up piecemeal of assorted elements (discourse, objects, spaces, landscapes, men, women, animals, external events, etc.), which are brought into the picture by a highly mobile camera, operating sometimes with a fertile decoupling of image and sound. The framing also has an ethical dimension. It tends, in particular, to equalize positions and issues: far from making the owner or manager the hero, the camera readily brings into the picture the family (spouse, child, parent, siblings, photographs of the departed, family archives, etc.), men and women in the sidelines (assistants, press agents, heads of communication, or receptionists), or 'invisible' players ('ordinary' employees, house staff, or agricultural workers). Generally, Nossiter's eager camera accepts all those who are 'there' at the time of filming, simply because they are 'there', living testimony that wine, like the film itself, is a shared adventure. In particular, this allows Nossiter integrate the question of inequalities in position and place into the narrative (Still 5).

The creative editing of sequences translates the experience of a journey, of incessant travel from one region to another, from one country to another, and from one language to another. The narrative thus reflects the diversity of *terroirs*,



Still 5. Rosa, Marquess Antinori's domestic employee, brought (back) into the picture by Nossiter

cultures, situations, points of view, and interests. The wine world is constructed as a 'polemical arena' marked by strong dissensus. The scenes, ordered non-chronologically and non-causally, are nonetheless organized in a set of visual and aural rhymes and dissonances. In the tracery of successive dialoguing sequences appears a conflict between *marque* and *terroir*, but probing questions are outlined, and possible answers to them suggested: those in particular concerning the process of 'globalization', perhaps not as 'natural' as might be thought, to some extent orchestrated, marked by relations of power and explicit or implicit alliances among actors, leading to a possible standardization of tastes for the commercial benefit of certain players, etc. The montage thus puts to the test the narrative of a linear, beneficent, unstoppable globalization supported, among others, by the proponents of the *marque*, such as the wine expert Rolland or the Mondavi family.

The narrative of the wine world posits that winemaking is a polemical issue with battlefronts of varying kinds (cultural, familial, and ideological), power struggles, and an opposition between two visions, that of the globalized *marque* and that of the local *terroir* (the two becoming at times intertwined). This version of the wine world constructed in the narrative is not presented as a new given and transparent reflection of reality but conveyed by Jonathan Nossiter in person. The narrative thus leaves a large place for the filmic device, the 'film-making'. The team (Nossiter and helper), the equipment (camera and microphone), the ways in which reality is approached (a film constructed 'going along': more or less unexpected arrivals, improvisation in situations, spontaneity of reactions, etc.) are thus largely shown and voiced. In particular, Nossiter himself is ever present in both image and sounds (Stills 6 and 7). The film espouses his point of view, in the first person, making the most of hesitations, trial and error; iterativity, the filmmaker's hand seeking, questioning, succeeding or failing, starting over, etc.

By eschewing objectivity, Nossiter makes (again) an ethical choice, that of clearly signaling to the viewer that his narrative results from a personal sensibility.

My presence, the only thing I need to say is that it's not hidden, I was having fun, I didn't want to hold back what emerged naturally. It would be wrong to make any claim to an objectivity that's pointless, and that doesn't exist in the cinema, and this lets the intelligent viewer judge me as a character like any other, which seems to me to be a more ethical relationship with the viewer'. (Interview with Jonathan Nossiter by the authors, our translation)

The wine world as constructed by the narrative relies on the act of filming, and so cannot be understood – or criticized – independently of the tools and protocols that produced it. Does this alternative version of the wine world marked by conflict and galloping commodification allow for the multiple and equivocal nature of reality? In this regard, *Mondovino* has been criticized for lacking some of the 'looseness' referred to by Steyaert et al. (2012), in its temptation to let the camera have the 'last word' on some characters (e.g., Boisset, Rolland or Parker), and to allow the montage suggest a connivance between Rolland, Parker, and Mondavi. Even so, although it must of course be borne in mind that the camera is always a power exercised over those being filmed, we note that Nossiter never seeks to 'ambush' his characters (like Michael Moore). Besides, those few who are finally wrong-footed by the narrative are always the powerful, the dominant parties, those who enjoy strong media attention and multiple opportunities to express themselves, to take the stage for their audiences and shape the wine world to their image (especially Rolland, Parker, and Mondavi).

Making the wine world in making the film: Politics of the filmic device versus politics of the narrative

Integrating the filmic device into the core of the narrative acts not only as a reflexive reminder of the constructed dimension of the world shown on screen. The presence of Nossiter and his device works also to induce the viewer to sense a parallel between the act of *winemaking*, central to the investigation, and the act of *filmmaking*. By placing side-by-side the filmic device in action and the wine world drawn out on screen, Nossiter constructs two partially disjunct polemical arenas. The politics



Still 6 (left). Jonathan Nossiter at a table with Shari and Garen Staglin (Staglin Vineyard, California)



Still 7 (right). Jonathan Nossiter expresses his embarrassment to his female operator friend at the offer made by Antonio Cabezas

in the filmic device diverges in several ways from that of the critical narrative on the wine world in the throes of 'globalization'.

First, it is useful to bear in mind that the cinematographic narrative concerns the *wine world*, whereas the filmic device 'in deeds' is foremost the assertion of a possible alternative globalization in the *cinema world*. By the implementation and the ostensible visibility of his device, Nossiter gives an echo 'in the cinema' of a possible response to the questions raised by the narrative about wine. This twofold cultural and sensory attachment invites the viewer to ask what is similar and what is different between *winemaking* and *filmmaking* in cultural globalization. By creating a tension between the liberty of the filmic act and the risk of standardization that threatens the wine world, *Mondovino* looks at what brings together the creation of a wine and that of a film in globalization. Nossiter's act echoes that of certain *terroir* craftsmen in their shared requirement for singularity and liberty, and the refusal of luxury, technical prowess, and the 'standard' in cultural production. *Mondovino*, in Nossiter's words, is 'a film that seeks out those places where human beings can still express themselves freely within a daunting cultural and economic homogenization' (interview with Jonathan Nossiter by the authors, our translation). The idea is just as valid for wine as it is for the cinema. Although the parallel between the two industries does have its limits, it is also fruitful in that it emphasizes a creative act subject to multiple physical, human, and symbolic constraints,⁶ and threatened by the global standardization of cultural forms.

We have also seen that the narrative on the wine world is largely structured around an opposition and a conflict between two approaches to winemaking. The filmic device 'in deeds', as it is shown and conceived by the narrative, invites

the viewer to shift and question the terms of this conflict, in two ways:

- First, the presence of Nossiter and his team and equipment in the narrative 'blurs' and ultimately transcends the *marque-terroir*, global-local opposition that is at the heart of the wine world constructed in the narrative. Nossiter and his team in the field appear to be neither rootless ('globalized') nor rooted ('localized'). For example, the fact that the filmmaker talks to everyone in their own language (English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese) enables him to question the global-local binary opposition by both embodying the rootless cosmopolitan and refusing a global Anglo-Saxon standardization of the language. Generally speaking, *Mondovino*'s nomadic, cosmopolitan, and parsimonious device proves that being 'global' is not necessarily synonymous with content standardization and technical expertise (cf. 4.1). By the yardstick of the device 'in deeds', the issue is, therefore, not so much the local-global opposition as the capacity of certain actors to refuse it (cf. 4.1: *Counter-geographies of globalization*, Sassen, 2008). The filmic device set in place by Nossiter 'outpaces' both the localists, hunkered down in the defense of their *terroir*, and the globalists roaming the world to offer always more 'sameness', backed by capital investment and technicality.
- Second, while the singularity of the device 'in deeds' contests commercial globalization, it does so in a different register from the narrative. The aim here is not to portray *resistance against* (the oppositional theme of the wine narrative) but to *assert* (positivity of the artistic device 'in deeds') by demonstration, the possibility of a concrete alternative. Against the somewhat pessimistic narrative documenting the dangers of wine globalization for the diversity of the *terroirs*, Nossiter

⁶ In this regard, we can compare *Mondovino* with the graphic novel *Les Ignorants* by Etienne Davodeau (2011), comparing the winemaker with the comic book author.

proposes a positive, joyful creative act.⁷ 'I'm still proud of this act, of what it represents. The film, made in another way, would have lost everything, esthetically and also in human truth. There's a certain carelessness, cheekiness, but also joyfulness inside it all'. (Interview with Jonathan Nossiter by the authors, our translation). In the words of Rancière (2004, p. 65, our translation), we can say that Nossiter's critical device, more than the narrative on wine, does not merely 'heighten awareness of the mechanisms of domination to change the viewer into an actor conscious of the transformation of the world' but by offering a concrete example, 'gives the viewer confidence in their own capacity to transform it'.

In a nutshell, while the alternative embodied in the device 'in deeds' supports the narrative in its contestation of a certain state of cultural globalization, we can also say that it blurs this contestation, and in a way supersedes it. The point is no longer wine globalization but rather cultural globalization. The *marque-terroir* of global-local opposition is eclipsed by the possibility of going beyond this opposition. *Resistance against* is less relevant than the assertion of a positive, concrete alternative. Thus, while the narrative constructs an alternative critical version of the world, the integration of the filmic device into the narrative in its own way challenges the alternative conveyed by the narrative. The gap that the film inserts between the narrative and device enhances its political dimension, enabling it to reach out to a higher complexity.

Discussion and conclusion

Steered by the approach to politics of Rancière (2000) and the concept of filmic device of Caillet (2014), we have explored, in this article, the political dimension of the documentary film, that is, its capacity to challenge the dominant patterns in our common world. This study of *Mondovino* (Nossiter, 2004) has enabled us to analyze this political potential, which makes the documentary film a privileged tool for critical thought and work on management, organizations, and markets. In this conclusion, we review the fundamental findings of the article, and indicate some possible pathways for both the cinephile researcher and the filmmaking researcher seeking to pursue their critical research with or through film.

⁷ Close in spirit to the dynamics described by Nossiter in his latest documentary film, *Résistance naturelle* (2014), in which he films Italian intellectual philosopher-farmers who have left the university to experiment with a counter-model of resistance winegrowing: 'natural wine'. Like Nossiter before them, they showed by example that another model could work by choosing to make it happen.

Politics of the documentary film and research

While the documentary film is a rich epistemological tool in the hands of the critical researcher; working on its political dimension implies paying attention to its filmic device, in addition to and in relation to its cinematographic narrative. The documentary film is thus in our view triply political: by its narrative (1), by its device 'in deeds' (2), and by the involvement of the device in the narrative (3). Finally, this politics of the documentary is an invitation to rethink the concept of performativity as it applies to the research film (4).

1. As the proponents of the 'expressive' documentary film in management (Lindstead, 2018; Rokka et al., 2018; Steyaert et al., 2012; Wood et al., 2018) remind us, a film is political in the operation whereby an alternative version of our historical world is constructed, as a critical text made of images and sounds (called a 'narrative' here). Using esthetic strategies to configure a version of reality without diminishing its equivocality and complexity, the documentary filmmaker thus arms the viewer for action, both intellectually and through sense perception. In *Mondovino*, the cinematographic narrative constructs an alternative version of the wine world in the context of globalization, marked by the *marque-terroir* opposition, and exposed to the risk of a commercial standardization of tastes. Through his narrative, Nossiter offers the viewer another story to tell, an alternative version of our world that can form a common basis for thinking and acting outside the dominant versions of wine globalization, marked by the omnipresence of the market and technical means.
2. What we also show is that the politics of the film is not to be sought in its narrative alone. Drawing on the concept of critical device developed by Caillet (2014), we show how a documentary film is also political through its tools, technical means and protocols used in its field of action to capture and construct the real. Its conditions of production are not mere means 'vanishing in the finished product' (to quote Caillet) but are the machinery of a generating principle at the heart of the work's political meaning. The filmic device, considered in its physical, human, and processual dimensions, acts politically wherever it operates, testifying to a singular relation to the world (and to the topic of the film), while challenging 'in deeds' the dominant forms in which our historical world is constructed.⁸ Following Walter Benjamin (1934/2003), this other way for the filmmaker to be political is thus to take position relative to the mode of

⁸ For the documentary cinema: objectivizing standardized reportage, whether ordinary television or luxury high-tech of the *National Geographic* type.

representation itself. Approaching the documentary format via the filmic device is thus to consider that even before it becomes a critical text (a political narrative), the documentary film is always already a performance or an artistic invention that challenges dominant reality *politically*. From this perspective, the critical documentary film is a type of 'performative action research', like the in-situ performances of some contemporary artists that have the capacity to 'reframe, disturb or alter current configurations of worldmaking' (Beyes & Steyeart, 2011, p. 103). Considered in this way, the critical documentary film is a micropolitical *action* by which filmmakers (or filmmaking researchers) reconfigure their field in the immediate action of their filmic device. In this sense, seen from the field in which the filmic device operates 'in deeds', the film is already political even before the first images are shown. In this regard, the filmmaker can be seen as an *artist* whose political activism does not consist merely in 'naming, recounting and circulating' (Contu, 2020) alternatives but in acting immediately, making them appear here and now. In this article, we thus show how in *Mondovino*, Nossiter and his helpers perform 'in deeds', via their filmic device, the actual possibility of an alternative cultural production in the context of globalization.

3. In contrast to the performative works studied by Beyes and Steyeart (2011), the documentary film also takes the form of a cinematographic narrative that lives on after the filming. The way in which the filmmaker integrates the device into this narrative is another major political issue. By showing and demonstrating its own generating device, the narrative invites the viewer not only to reflect on the political dimension of the sociomaterial conditions in which the film is made but also to compare the filmmaker's filmic act and the world that appears on the screen. This interaction is rich with meaning, as the alternative proposed by the device 'in deeds' questions the one constructed in the narrative, extends it, challenges it, or supersedes it. In *Mondovino*, the presence of the filmic device at the heart of the narrative on wine enables the making of wine and the making of a film, in the era of globalization, to be considered jointly, thereby offering the viewer two different ways of contesting cultural standardization.
4. The political capacity of the documentary film to construct multiple alternatives implies the concept of performativity, which has already been associated with the critical documentary in management research to underline certain esthetic strategies that enable the narrative to arm its viewers (intellectually, emotionally, and practically) for action (Lindstead, 2018; Seregina, 2018;

Steyaert et al., 2012). However, in our view, the concept of performativity of the documentary film should go beyond the mere recognition of its impact. First, the singular designed ordering of moving images and sounds drawn from the real (the narrative) constitutes in itself an alternative version of our historical world, a 'document' as defined by Zenetti (2017), that is, an element in a discourse network by which our historical world is permanently shaped and reshaped. In this sense, and whatever its impact, the documentary narrative always 'performs' our common world. Second, the documentary is also – and primarily – performative by its device 'in deeds' that immediately, concretely, and politically changes the reality in which it operates. Hence, it is in the *filmmaking* act itself, and then in the *document* formed by the narrative, that controversial spaces open for the reconfiguration of our common 'sensible', independently of any 'effects' the film may have (Féral, 2003). The performativity of the critical documentary film then consists no longer only in encouraging the emergence of an alternative, or in 'moving' its viewers, or even in envisioning alternative forms of capitalism 'for later' in the hope of making them appear some days, but rather giving them life here and now. The example of the critical documentary thus enjoins us to shift the performativity of the film from *downstream* (the question of the 'effects') to *upstream*. It is in this primary work – common to art and politics – of fashioning (images, words, gestures, positions, and perceptions) that other 'sharing of the sensible' are built and give form to new relationships with our common world.

Implications for the critical researcher

We hope first that this article will have convinced our readers of the political potential of the documentary film. More specifically, the case of *Mondovino* allows us import some useful ideas from the world of cinema for critical researchers in management, whose approach is based on the documentary film, whether they take the stance of the cinephile researcher (making use of an existing film as matter for investigation) or that of the filmmaking researcher (making a film as a research method).

First, our analysis enjoins researchers to pay the closest attention to the filmic device. Far from being simply a means to an end (the narrative), the choice of device is at the core of its political payload. This attention paid to the conditions of production and intervention addresses the filmmaker's capacity (as that of the filmmaking researcher) to make a film 'politically', and not just a 'political film' (in the words of Godard), and so avoid unintentionally fueling the 'discourse

of the adversary' (Cailliet, 2014) by neglecting the generating device.

Paying due attention to the filmic device does not merely mean addressing the process by which knowledge is produced. From a critical perspective, what happens when images are captured/constructed is not just an early stage in the collection of material, but an integral part of the filmed world (documentary principle of a filmic–profilmic continuity). As the filmic device is not independent of the filmed world presented on the screen, the device invented should fit the knowledge project in the film. When Nossiter takes on the globalized, overly technical and commodified wine world, he does so with a minimalistic, casual filmic device that conveys an alternative that is rich with questions, both for the cinema and for wine. *Mondovino*, thus owes its success to the invention of a filmic device that both participates in and embodies the calling into question of cultural standardization, an issue also at the heart of the narrative. Another recent example clearly illustrates this political objective of the device: in *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse* (2000), Agnès Varda redefines consumption around the activity of gleaning and the opposition between gleaning and wastage, while explicitly using her digital video camera and its new technical possibilities (small size, lightness, ease of handling, etc.) as a personal tool for gleaning images and moments while filming, enabling her to demonstrate and test another way to make and conceive films through the concept and deed of gleaning (Halévy, 2001). The filmmaker does not just want to make a film on gleaning but experiments with this device to 'glean a film'. Working on the conditions of production of the film as an *integral part* of the subject is in our view a distinctive feature of an art-based approach.

Finally, we feel that for the viewer or the analyst to be able to grasp the political purpose of the filmic device, it is necessary for the narrative to take explicit account of it. Placing the device in the cinematographic narrative, with its material, human and processual dimensions, makes it possible not only to address the filmmaker's mode of intervention and action in reality (performance) but also to place side by side the action of the filmic device (making a film *politically*) and the issues proper to the world constructed in the narrative (making a *political film*).

To conclude, this article does not seek to close the debate on the critical dimension of the documentary format. In particular, the case of *Mondovino* – a film intended for commercial distribution in cinemas – does not address one important political issue raised by some research in management (Chatzidakis & Maclaran, 2018; Hassard et al., 2018; Slutskaya et al., 2016), namely, that of collaborative work with the people being filmed, in the writing and in the construction of images, and in how the film is brought and shown to its viewers.

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