

## Documentary as Social Justice Activism: The Textual and Political Strategies of Robert Greenwald and Brave New Films

John Haynes  
University of Essex \*

Robert Greenwald is a Hollywood veteran who has risen to prominence over the past few years as an independent producer and director of a number of progressive, left-liberal documentaries. The most famous of these include *Uncovered: The War on Iraq* (2003), *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism* (2004), *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price* (2005) and last year's *Iraq For Sale: The War Profiteers*. Following the success of *Uncovered* and *Outfoxed*, Greenwald founded the company Brave New Films, which produced and distributed his subsequent documentaries not to cinema chains, but to members of online grassroots organisations, who hold house parties at which the films are screened and follow-up actions discussed.

All of Greenwald's films share a focus on the deleterious effect of ballooning corporate power on both the minutiae of everyday life and the broader social landscape. *Wal-Mart* and *Iraq For Sale* in particular explore and sharpen the tensions between corporate profiteering and individual survival that were a characteristic theme of many social protest documentaries of the 1960s, a theme that has been revived in more recent films such as *Roger and Me* (1989) by Michael Moore, and Morgan Spurlock's hugely successful *Super Size Me* (2004). Following a close examination of one or two of Greenwald's characteristic textual strategies, I will move on to examine further the strategies of production, distribution and exhibition developed by Brave New Films. My emphasis throughout is on the attempts made in each sphere to broaden the appeal of the films' left-leaning messages, and so to unite and galvanise a more diverse audience to mobilise for grassroots activism around the issues they document, in an era that is frequently characterised as one of declining participation in more formal democratic processes in the USA.

With their characteristic direct address, cause and effect logic, and presentation of solutions to the social and political problems they identify, all of Greenwald's documentaries fit broadly into the 'expository' mode outlined by Bill Nichols (1991: 34-8). For Nichols, such documentaries advance an argument about the world, but are also able to capitalise on spectators' conventionalised expectations of objectivity. In his introductory discussion of spectators, for example, Nichols notes that overt

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\* John Haynes read modern languages at the University of Manchester, where he went on to complete his PhD in 2000. He is currently at the University of Exeter and can be reached on [jhaynes@essex.ac.uk](mailto:jhaynes@essex.ac.uk). He has published on Soviet cinema and interviewed Robert Greenwald for the current issue of *Cineaste*.

subjectivity may reduce the credibility of a documentary film's argument, and therefore that audiences may expect to engage more deeply with an issue or problem, than with any individual characters or protagonists. Finally, Nichols suggests, the key expectation of the documentary spectator is that the 'desire to know' will be gratified, which leads to his formulation that 'documentary convention spawns an epistophilia ... a source of pleasure that is far from innocent' (1991: 29-31). Nichols acknowledges openly that such conventions are bound up with ideology, and can thus change over time; the stormy reception of more recent, overtly politicised documentary filmmaking of the type most famously associated with the work of Michael Moore, for example, appears to indicate that expectations of objectivity have been thrown somewhat into crisis over the past decade or so.

There are one or two key distinctions to be made between the works of Moore and Greenwald, however, perhaps most notably Greenwald's decision not to make use of an onscreen persona and voice-over address. Brave New Films productions are themselves by no means objective, featuring as they do a number of segments that address, more or less overtly, a core constituency of leftist activists. *Wal-Mart*, for example, foregrounds issues of welfare, unionisation, gender and racial discrimination, environmentalism, and the plight of low-paid workers in China, Bangladesh and Central America. *Iraq for Sale*, meanwhile, is driven throughout by an anti-corporatist agenda, and nearly all of Greenwald's productions close with some kind of 'call to arms' segment documenting a specific campaign and (in the case of *Wal-Mart*) one or two conspicuous success stories.

The lively confrontation at the heart of *Outfoxed* between Jeremy Glick, the son of a Port Authority worker killed in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, and Fox News' Bill O'Reilly, appears at first sight to be a case in point. While it could be argued that Fox News is an easy target for mobilising leftist sentiment and, more particularly, that very few people take O'Reilly all that seriously, the film takes great pains to set the audience up for the clash. Peter Hart, a media analyst for the campaign group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), establishes the scene by suggesting that *The O'Reilly Factor* is emblematic of the station's approach to current affairs reporting. Glick himself talks the audience through his extensive preparation for his performance on the show, recalling, for example, his timing how long, on average, it would take for O'Reilly to cut down a 'hostile' guest, as well as his sense of intimidation at the sheer physical size of the host. Support is also lent by the jovial, avuncular figure of Al Franken, who had himself only recently been sued by the network in its attempt to trademark the words of its slogan 'Fair and Balanced'. According to Glick's testimony, O'Reilly's producers were 'insistent' that he appear on the show, after learning that he had participated in the organising committee of an anti-war petition that subsequently appeared as a two-page 'Not in Our Name' advertisement in the *New York Times*.

Taking into account not only Nichols' comments regarding subjectivity in documentary, but also the kinds of psychoanalytically informed responses to his 'rationalist' position articulated more recently by Elizabeth Cowie (1999) and Michael Renov (2004: 93-103), what is presented here may be taken as a fantasy

scenario calculated to mobilise the desire of a broadly left-liberal audience. The figuring of the show's host as an intimidating bully, and the inclusion of commentary from both Glick and Franken regarding his petulant distortion of the events in his follow-up segment ('This is our house here. If someone comes into *your* house and starts spitting on the floor, you'd ask him to leave...'), facilitates a certain liberal cheering for the underdog Glick as he tackles O'Reilly on his home ground. Beyond this fantasy dimension and the ways in which it attempts to draw spectators into an emotional identification with the experience of Glick, however, this sequence is also important in two further, and related, ways, when it comes to the evolution of Greenwald's textual appeals in a direction *away* from his core constituency.

Firstly, the inclusion of the clash between Glick and O'Reilly marks a transitional moment in the development of these strategies, insofar as it represents a shift from a rhetorical emphasis on objectivity, and a reliance on the presumed authority of expert testimony. In the earlier *Uncovered*, for example, the bulk of the testimony is delivered by a panel explicitly identified from the outset as 'The Experts',<sup>1</sup> and *Outfoxed* itself still relies for the most part on authoritative witnesses such as Peter Hart of FAIR. By the time of *Wal-Mart*, however, the emphasis has shifted markedly towards a focus on more personal, individual testimony foregrounding the subjective and affective realms. Former employees Edith Arana and Phenix Montgomery, for example, describe their experiences of gender and racial discrimination at the hands of management, and Laura Tanaka relives her harrowing abduction from a Wal-Mart car park in a segment devoted to demonstrating that the corporation employs security personnel and technology to protect profits and profits only. Subsequently, in *Iraq For Sale* Abu Ghraib interrogator Anthony Lagouranis and former detainees discuss the abuse at the infamous prison, wondering why the subsequent investigations only covered the military, leaving untouched the commercially contracted CACI interrogators. Meanwhile, truck driver Ed Sanchez and driver's widow Hollie Hulett replay a fatal ambush on a convoy – including a number of trucks that Halliburton subsidiary KBR included simply to maximise expenses charged to the US government and taxpayers – on Good Friday of 2004.

On one level, the motivation behind this development in the evolution of Greenwald's textual strategies may be identified by returning to the comparison with Moore. The lack of an explicit authorial persona, whether on the image or the sound tracks of Greenwald's documentaries, may have helped the latter to avoid, for the most part, the kinds of *ad hominem* attacks that bedevil Moore.<sup>2</sup> Such attacks tend to frame the debates around Moore's films, more in terms of the problematic nature of the filmmaker-as-personality and the formal strategies he tends to adopt than around the pressing social issues he documents. On the other hand, Moore's persona may be seen as functioning as a focal point for audience engagement, as he embarks on narrative quests that, in a way, demand resolution, even when a film such as *Roger and Me* turns precisely on the frustration of such a quest, and even when, in harsh reality, audiences appear as likely to use Moore's persona as a channel for anger and derision. The inclusion of individual subjective testimonies in *Wal-Mart* and *Iraq for Sale* is one way in which Greenwald has addressed the issue of audience engagement, although less in the terms proposed by Nichols, which in turn appear more suited to

the strategies on display in *Uncovered* and *Outfoxed*. These earlier films clearly marshal their witness testimony to fall into line with the implicit perspective and commentary offered in each case, which do tend to address in particular a fairly narrow audience of leftist activists.

The Glick/O'Reilly confrontation is, however, of further interest for the way it encapsulates, in a particularly explosive and condensed form, the discursive terrain that is to be contested in subsequent Brave New Films productions. Although the exchanges between Glick and O'Reilly are difficult to transcribe, as they frequently end up talking over one another in an increasingly heated manner and printed words do little to capture the tension, the following conveys, I hope, something of the flavour of the interview:

**Bill O'Reilly:** What upsets me is, I don't think your father would be approving of this.

**Jeremy Glick:** Well, actually my father thought that Bush's presidency was illegitimate [...] You evoke 9/11 to rationalise everything from domestic plunder to imperialistic aggression worldwide, you evoke sympathy with the 9/11 families...

**O'Reilly:** That's a bunch of crap. I've done more for the 9/11 families – by their own admission – I've done more for them than you will ever hope to do, so you keep your mouth shut [...] I hope your mom isn't watching this... I'm not going to say any more... In respect for your father, who was a Port Authority worker, a fine American, who got killed unnecessarily by barbarians...

**Glick:** ... by radical extremists trained by this government – not the *people* of America, the *ruling classes*, a small minority...

**O'Reilly:** Cut his mic. I'm not gonna dress you down any more, out of respect for your father. We'll be back in a moment with more of the facts...

**Glick:** What – are we done?

**O'Reilly:** We're done.<sup>3</sup>

What interests me in particular about this argument is the way it is centred around the motifs of individual responsibility (whether or not Glick should have assisted in the organisation of the petition), family values (dis/respect for, especially, Glick's father as 'a fine American') and the nation (as 'the people' or the *élite* that mis/represent them). These are the motifs, traditional conservative terrain, that are foregrounded to a much greater extent in *Wal-Mart* and *Iraq for Sale*, and articulated with those films' subjective and affecting testimonies of, especially, loss and bereavement.

*Wal-Mart*, for example, begins with the device – familiar from its use in a number of films by Moore – of undercutting the enemy's rhetoric. Footage of Chairman and CEO Lee Scott delivering a self-congratulatory address to the previous year's Annual Meeting of shareholders allows the audience to hear of a second successive record-

breaking year. Scott goes on to emphasise the value of ‘good citizenship’ as key to overcoming the fear and envy he sees as bred by the kind of staggering success enjoyed by his corporation. The film then cuts to its first non-archive sequence, in which we witness the closing down of the local independent Hunter Hardware store in Middlefield, Ohio. Later in the film the strategy is repeated: on this occasion it is the Esry family’s independent grocery in Hamilton, Missouri, that has been forced into closure.

These two local businesses are posited as having more in common than simply being independently owned: great care is taken to emphasise that these are also *family* businesses, as successive generations in either case – focused in particular on fathers and sons – speak either to camera or in voice-over about the role their respective stores have played in their lives and their communities. In both instances the musical score, consisting of plaintive, folksy solo harmonica or guitar picking, contributes to the feeling of loss, and plays to a sense of nostalgia for a simpler era that is being bulldozed as the megacorporation, seemingly inexorably, advances. Meanwhile, the camera alights (without overt commentary) on telling aspects of mise-en-scène at Hunter Hardware: the Stars and Stripes outside the store, the Ronald Reagan calendar in the office, the Bush bumper sticker on the family car. Similarly, the ageing Red Esry is introduced by a sequence in which, in veteran’s uniform, he hoists the Stars and Stripes aloft outside his local branch of the American Legion. *Wal-Mart’s* deliberate inclusion of testimony from Republican-voting store owners wrestling with the full extent of the implications of free enterprise, like the interviews with Republican and pro-war truck drivers and military experts in *Iraq for Sale*, appears to demonstrate that the maxim of the personal as the political traverses party-political lines.

But there is more at stake in such sequences: the images that frame and, to an extent, authorise these personal testimonies reinforce an insistent emphasis on the individual, the family, and the nation. The (perhaps strategic) refusal to take these categories apart, alongside the figuring of these values as under attack from the irresponsible actions of corporate élites, demonstrate Greenwald’s willingness to take the fight right to the Republican heartlands. Alongside their traditional leftist appeals, then, the more recent documentaries from Brave New Films appear to be reaching beyond this core constituency, offering Republican voters a kind of deal that lets them know they can hold on to their belief in individual freedoms, family values, and patriotic pride, but still ask questions of corporate power.<sup>4</sup>

Before moving on to discuss the distribution and exhibition strategies of Brave New Films, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider one or two potential problems with Greenwald’s textual politics, especially in these more recent documentaries. Most obviously, for example, in their attempts to claim the territory of the individual, the family and the nation, and to hold onto them as what Slavoj Žižek (1989) refers to as ‘quilting points’, Greenwald’s movies resist more radical impulses and tend to leave these categories unquestioned.<sup>5</sup> As with the director’s stated intention to use the Fox Network’s own words and images against them (Boynton 2004), this approach is not necessarily going to please those on the left who have little faith, to borrow a

phrase from feminist postcolonial theory, in the power of the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.

Similarly, Greenwald's films tend to focus their not inconsiderable energy on the evils of one particular corporation or group of individuals, and so neglect to question the wider context of globalised neoliberal consumer capitalism. The consensual and populist impulses informing Greenwald's filmmaking, although in far less demagogic mode than those of Moore, do tend towards a certain lack of critical rigour in favour of what might be described as a form of muted sensationalism, which aims to provoke lively post-screening debates. Although, once again, such a strategy may well not be all that palatable to leftist intellectuals, in his defence, Greenwald does include in *Wal-Mart* sequences documenting the appalling working conditions of outsourced labourers in China, Bangladesh and Honduras, while openly acknowledging in interview the validity of such criticisms:

I'd say such comments are exactly right, and I couldn't agree more. The trick is to go from the specific to the general—from the one storekeeper to the multinational neoliberal corporate issues. I felt that the best way for a film to work is to reach people's hearts, and then you begin to get to their minds—through putting the statistics on at the end of each chapter for example. So over a period of time you begin to create such connections.... I felt these films would be stronger by taking these first steps for people and then, over time, beginning to stitch these themes together more and more.

Finally, as this quotation suggests, much is staked on the device of rounding off sections of Greenwald's documentaries with statistics, the 'tip of the iceberg' strategy discussed at some length in Greg Spotts' making-of companion volume (2005). This strategy represents an attempt to effect both the passage from the personal to the political, and thus also the forging of broader conclusions on the part of spectators regarding the scale and prevalence of a problem that, a moment ago, appeared to involve only one individual or family. This may well be a problem, and one that is compounded when it comes to interview subjects who are less resourceful, resilient, or heroic than the likes of Glick, especially the ones who are less fleshed out in their full subjectivity.<sup>6</sup> Such subjects pose a risk to the films' strategies for spectator alignment, and can potentially fall into the kind of 'victimhood status' that Brian Winston (1988) has attacked in the more paternalistic mode of documentary advocacy championed by Grierson in the 1930s, and which has also animated debates about the ethics of Moore, most particularly for his use of widow Lila Lipscomb in *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

On the other hand, there are success stories too, characteristically reserved for inclusion in closing 'call to arms' segments, which aim to resist the kind of spectator complacency that can all too often result from images of 'victimhood'. The example of the Reverend Altagracia Perez and her leadership of a successful campaign to prevent the building of a Wal-Mart store in Inglewood is a case in point. The montage of her group's victory at the end of *Wal-Mart* is replete with uplifting music on the

soundtrack: first piano, then more up-tempo electric guitar, and finally an explosion of gospel-inflected harmonies accompanies an exponentially increasing montage of captions detailing local victories over the corporation. The soundtrack here serves as a counterpoint to the more melancholic accompaniment to much of the film's imagery, pointing towards an almost utopian sense of community and plenitude as the pay-off for the successful waging of the struggles documented elsewhere in the film. While some viewers may find this use of music a painful symbol of a certain naïve idealism, the Reverend Perez's success, at least, puts forward a practical model of successful organising and campaigning that, again ideally, will feed into and energise post-screening discussions.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, for the reasons outlined above as well as, potentially, many others, there remains the possibility that Greenwald's films, in attempting to reach out beyond the base constituency and avoid 'preaching to the choir', may well end up pleasing nobody. Greenwald himself is, however, sceptical about the chances of a single film effecting widespread social change, emphasising instead the role of the social networks that work in partnership with Brave New Films as 'the groups that are doing the heavy lifting.' Greenwald has certainly made some shrewd decisions when it comes to the forging of strategic alliances, capitalising on a wave of popular anti-war feeling with *Uncovered*, and timing the release of *Wal-Mart* to coincide with a series of events for 'Wal-Mart Week' in the autumn of 2005. Wal-Mart has been forced to curtail its expansionism, as a number of communities have taken action to dissuade local authorities from granting planning permission, still less to subsidise the building of new stores, which was common practice until very recently; and last autumn it was announced that there would be a series of hearings on the question of congressional oversight of contractors working in Iraq.<sup>8</sup>

Most central to Greenwald's success has been his relationship with the online grassroots 'progressive family' of activist organisations MoveOn.org, whose Eli Pariser first came up with the idea to distribute DVD copies of Greenwald's movies online. In conjunction with MoveOn.org, Greenwald's Brave New Theaters publicise and coordinate a wave of screenings and house parties, at which purchasers screen the film, open up the floor for questions and discussion following the closing credits, and perhaps even pass on their DVD copies to guests who might wish to organise their own parties elsewhere. In this respect, the work of Brave New Films has to be seen within the context of a tradition of alternative distribution and exhibition that flourished especially in the 1960s and 1970s, emblematised by the work of the Latin American Third Cinema movement, the Newsreel collective in the USA, and the Canadian Film Board's Challenge for Change movement led by George Stoney. All of these groups, alongside others subsumed under Barnouw's (1993) 'Guerrilla' classification, developed distribution and exhibition strategies focusing on community screenings and post-screening discussions within and beyond cinema clubs.<sup>9</sup> What is distinctive about Brave New Films in this tradition is their exploiting of the Internet, and the kinds of viral marketing and guerrilla or stealth promotion that have become techniques beloved of both corporations and the movements that seek to resist them, as outlined in Naomi Klein's bestseller *No Logo* (2000) and theorised by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their popular works of political philosophy

*Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004). This year, in fact, Brave New Films have released a series of short online viral movies, *Fox Attacks*.

Greenwald himself emphasises the pragmatically driven origins of the distribution and exhibition strategies developed by Brave New Films and MoveOn.org, downplaying the problems associated with Wal-Mart's threat to cease retailing all products distributed by any company that might agree to handle the film, and focusing instead on the twin components of *timeliness* and *engagement*. While the element of timeliness (in the face of Greenwald's experience in the commercial realm, that 'the gatekeepers – be they good, bad, or indifferent – don't move quickly') facilitates the aim of the films 'to affect the political dialogue now', and certainly adds a sense of urgency to the ensuing discussions, the credit for the component of engagement goes, once again, to Brave New Films' partnering social networks, and the frameworks of local organisation and location that he sees – more than any particular textual strategy – as key to the film's potential to incite debate and action:

If it was just the film, we might have affected awareness. But the fact that with *Wal-Mart* we partnered with 120 groups, and that with *Iraq For Sale* we partnered with over a hundred groups, is, I think, critically important. Because otherwise you have a film, and it can be written about, or talked about, but you don't have a component of action... That's the crucial factor that led to the specificity of changes, certainly around *Wal-Mart*, and with the hearings too.... If it shows in a church, they're not checking your political agenda. If it's at a school, if it's at a union hall, if it's at a bowling parlor, if it's at a pizza parlor, if it's at a family gathering, it moves beyond the regular. And people are more likely to debate the issue—everyone has relatives they disagree with.

Greenwald's emphasis on contestation and debate here serves as a reminder that, for all the consensual impulses driving his filmmaking practice, a single film is unlikely to change many people's opinions without the specific context of a certain kind of viewing situation to frame its appeals.

To what extent have these strategies of distribution and exhibition enabled Greenwald's films to penetrate beyond his base constituency? The Brave New Theaters web pages, where details of forthcoming screenings are posted, and exhibitors and spectators are encouraged to blog their responses, provides some evidence on which to base an assessment. Although responses to screenings here tend toward the generic, there are reports of audience diversity, the more interesting among them detailing well organised panel discussions, and even recommending having as broad a range of perspectives as possible represented. Similarly, there appears to be a surprisingly broad range of groups who are hosting the screenings. While the distribution and exhibition strategies appear tailor made for traditional leftist activists, alongside the expected representatives of MoveOn.org, Anti-War and Women's groups, as well as Democrats hosting screenings on and off college campuses, there have been screenings organised by Amnesty International, the Sierra



Club, bookstores and coffee houses, an unexpectedly large number of churches and synagogues, as well as a handful of commerce groups and even a college business club.

Meanwhile, Greenwald's reference to bowling parlors further brings to mind Robert D. Putnam's influential article 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', first published in the *Journal of Democracy* early in 1995. Putnam analyses a medium term trend indicating a decline in 'civic engagement' in the USA of the late twentieth century, as measured by a range of factors, from voting in elections and trusting the government, to attending public meetings (including those of Parent-Teacher Associations), professing an affiliation with a particular religious institution or labor union, and volunteering for/active membership in civic and fraternal organisations, for example. The survey component of Putnam's argument concludes with the statistic that provides him with his title:

The most whimsical yet discomfoting bit of evidence of social disengagement in contemporary America that I have discovered is this: more Americans are bowling today than ever before, but bowling in organized leagues has plummeted in the last decade or so... The rise of solo bowling threatens the livelihood of bowling-lane proprietors because those who bowl as members of leagues consume three times as much beer and pizza as solo bowlers, and the money in bowling is in the beer and pizza, not the balls and shoes. The broader social significance, however, lies in the social interaction and even occasionally civic conversations over beer and pizza that solo bowlers forego. Whether or not bowling beats balloting in the eyes of most Americans, bowling teams illustrate yet another vanishing form of social capital. (Putnam 1995: 70)

When it comes to explanatory factors Putnam, in a perhaps overly pessimistic moment, turns his attention to the growth and popularisation of technological forms, pointing to both television and domestic video recorders as bound up with 'deep-seated technological trends... radically "privatizing" or "individualizing" our use of leisure time and thus disrupting many opportunities for social capital development', and asking, 'Is technology thus driving a wedge between our individual interests and our collective interests?' (1995: 75).<sup>10</sup> Greenwald, by contrast, is much more enthusiastic and optimistic about the rise of the Internet more generally, and especially sites such as YouTube.com, with its potential for instant worldwide moving-image communication.

The importance of 'social capital' –the 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' – for Putnam, is demonstrated by his extensive comparative research into regional governments in Italy, which indicated 'that the quality of governance was determined by longstanding traditions of civic engagement (or its absence)... that these networks of organized reciprocity and civic solidarity, far from being an epiphenomenon of socioeconomic modernization, were a precondition for it.' (1995: 66) Most significantly in this context, of the many benefits of living 'in a community

blessed with a substantial stock of social capital', Putnam argues that '[s]uch networks facilitate coordination and communication... and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved', adding further that 'dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the "I" into the "we"' (1995: 67).

I have already suggested one or two ways in which the textual strategies of Greenwald's documentaries strive to articulate an "I" into a "we"; at this point it is worth considering the ways in which the strategies of distribution and exhibition developed for these films aim towards a similar effect. Firstly, these strategies are articulated within more or less dense networks of interaction, the mobilisation of online communities and grassroots organisations without which they make little sense and are rendered ineffective. Perhaps more significantly, an ethos of participation permeates the process of distribution, which relies not only on social justice networks promoting and mailing out copies of the films, but also on those who buy them (or may have even donated funding for them)<sup>11</sup> organising and promoting their own screenings. In a way that is a little more complex – because of the particular contingencies of given screening venues, each spectator's location, prior knowledge of specific campaigns, more general experience of documentaries, and thus expectations framing the screenings and discussions – I would nonetheless suggest that the house parties set up for the exhibition of Brave New Films documentaries are similarly founded on a participatory ethic.<sup>12</sup>

If, as I hope to have demonstrated, there is a certain tension at the heart of Greenwald's films, between the twin requirements of appealing to the centre ground while still holding onto the base constituency, Brave New Films' strategies of distribution and exhibition appear to aim for a certain framing of the context of reception, so as to facilitate a broadened acceptance of their left-leaning messages. On the other hand, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions regarding the efficacy of either the textual or distribution strategies developed by Greenwald and Brave New Films. Conspicuous successes over Wal-Mart and the public hearings on congressional oversight of contractors working in Iraq should not lead to allotting too much of a determining role to the films. Campaigns may have been kick-started, spurred on or lent succour by the appearance of *Wal-Mart*, but Altagracia Perez's group in Inglewood, like the Friends of Queen's Market in East London, were actively campaigning long before Greenwald's team rolled up to document their efforts. Similarly, hearings on congressional oversight were being called for well before any US Senators may or may not have attended an *Iraq For Sale* house party. It has to be remembered that Greenwald's "I" is always part of a broader "we", that each of his films form just one of a multiplicity of elements in a wider and much more complex social assemblage, which is informed by an ethos of participation. On the other hand, and whether or not one approves of their more liberal sentiments, it is not unreasonable to give some credit to the work of Brave New Films both for their attempts to break a Republican monopoly on powerful and affecting symbols, such as the individual, the family and the nation, and, perhaps less equivocally, for playing their role in the attempt to rebuild depleted stocks of social capital in contemporary US society.

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<sup>1</sup> Details of the panel and their various credentials are available from one of the film's web pages: <http://www.truthuncovered.com/interviews.php>

<sup>2</sup> I say 'for the most part', because Greenwald is not entirely immune: in a recent interview he claims that Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* labelled him a 'Nazi propagandist', an accusation he laughs off, saying 'I'm from New York – I've heard worse!' (Haynes and Littler 2007). Unless otherwise noted in the text, all quotes from Greenwald are taken from this interview, conducted at Thanksgiving in 2006.

<sup>3</sup> One version of the full exchange, posted on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), has (as at the time of writing in July 2007) been viewed more than 134,000 times in the past sixteen months, and includes O'Reilly's comments when he returns after the forced commercial break: 'I have to apologise, if I knew that guy Jeremy Glick was going to be like that I never would have brought him in here. I feel bad for his family, I really do.' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BAFb97L3KU>.

<sup>4</sup> Greenwald is keen to stress the power of such testimonies to affect audiences of all political persuasions, emphasising that his interview subjects 'weren't people with a partisan politics: they were people who worked at all levels of the company... You can attack the film, you can attack me – that's all fine – but I don't think you can attack the *authenticity* of the people who were speaking.'

<sup>5</sup> Drawing on both Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and the 'post-Marxism' of Laclau and Mouffe, Žizek designates as 'quilting points' key 'master signifiers' presumed as stable and capable of conferring meaning on a disparate array of elements in a given social field.

<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, different strands of documentary theory appear to support the idea of such an extrapolation. Nichols (1991: 29) argues, for instance, that documentary spectatorship always already involves an expectation that specific instances will open onto a more generalised argument; from a phenomenological perspective that defines documentary film not as an object, but as 'a subjective relationship to a cinematic object', Vivian Sobchack (1999: 251) similarly suggests that 'documentary consciousness' always involves a component of learning.

<sup>7</sup> My own (admittedly subjective) interpretation of the use of decidedly 'middle of the road' music in the closing segments, most particularly the extended guitar and piano coda to Eric Clapton's *Layla* at the end of *Outfoxed*, is that it is emblematic of the films' attempts to reach beyond a narrow base constituency and appeal to the centre ground.

<sup>8</sup> Close to my home, Wal-Mart announced their withdrawal last summer from a redevelopment scheme in East London that would have seen the closure of Queen's Market in Upton Park, a campaign that was included in the version of the movie screened as a UK theatrical première to an audience including invited stallholders at the Stratford Picturehouse cinema last spring, although relegated to 'Bonus Feature' status for the DVD release. Details of this campaign, including the newsletter reproduced below, are available from <http://www.friendsofqueensmarket.org.uk/>

**Friends of Queen's Market NEWSLETTER** 1 NIL SPECIAL: June 2006

**Friends of Queen's Market: 1 Asda/ Walmart: 0** WE'VE SCORED

**ASDA IS KICKED OUT OF QUEEN'S MARKET**

This week, after over 3 years of pushing the campaign barrel, Asda/Wal-Mart finally decided to push off somewhere else, amid mounting national pressure against its plans to destroy 100 year old, much loved Queen's Market in Upton Park.

**WELL DONE EVERYONE!**

Letters, emails, signature petitions and phone calls from people from across the world expressed their concern on this issue which is so important to local people in Upton Park.

The film *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Prices* featuring Queen's Market and its local traders was recommended in the Metro newspaper's top five films to watch, describing the film as a 'shocking revelation' of Wal-Mart's practice and its policy towards its own staff.

Newham's Mayor Sir Robbin' Walmart-Wailes has to admit his Asda idea was a rotten egg, but he has not as yet apologised. Wailes should ~~stop wasting public money~~ on St. Modwen and listen to what we need for our local area. He's even lost his entire Green Street West ward Councillors to RESPECT in recent local elections...

**LONG LIVE QUEEN'S MARKET!**

**EAST END vs CULTURE VULTURES**

Third-rate Developers From Hell, St. Modwen are still lurking behind the meat wagon waiting to pounce on the market, still wanting to "attract another major retailer to the project" (Council website). Market-in-malls and multi-national developments are being rejected by people across the country because they are at the expense of local trade and local shops. The clone-town nightmare has not ended yet and dead-spaces continue to degrade communities. Our recent success of defeating the biggest corporation in the world will help other causes across the country.

St. Modwen's track record on destroying markets like poor old Edmonton Market is extremely concerning because it's this lack of experience and cultural insensitivity that fuels mistrust in people. Inexperienced developers who are dealing with family businesses and livelihoods in an area where they have no connection are understanding..... **St. Modwen deserve an ASBO**

The NEF (New Economics Foundation) **REPORT** delivers a strong blow to Developer's undeveloped plans

The New Economics Foundation report commissioned by Friends of Queen's Market to look into the economic benefits of the market as it currently stands found that the market offers more to local people than any supermarket ever could.

Newham Council said the development would create 300 new jobs but the NEF research found Queen's Market currently provides over 500 jobs to people. They are wanting to make more people jobless.

The NEF said the market currently allows for new businesses and local entrepreneurs which is vital for the local economy and any affect on it will spell danger.

**WHAT THIS REVEALS...** THE COUNCIL'S POLICY TO PUT MULTI-NATIONALS BEFORE LOCAL NEEDS > LOCAL DEMOCRACY IS FAILING THE VOTER > HOW INEPT OUR COUNCIL IS WITH ITS PAID ADVISORS > RAISES SERIOUS QUESTIONS ON THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS.

'Don't be fooled by St. Modwen's new mask in giving us a coffee-shop library and service centre (which both already exist in Green Street). Asda may have taken a back seat for now but be cautious of more disguises which hide more big deals at our expenses. Their forever changing "conceptual" plans will have many rough edges. WE WILL FIGHT 'TIL THEY LEAVE.'

Our website has already had 5,000 visitors. The world is listening and it's an international issue.

Features include Evening Standard's "Save Our Small Shops" campaign and Observer's Food Supplement.

**WWW.FRIENDSOFOQUEENSMARKET.ORG.UK**

**GET READY FOR THE SECOND HALF: DEFEATING BIG BROTHER'S LITTLE BROTHER- ST. MODWEN**

IN YOUR NEXT PUBLICATION

Produced by BAP on behalf of Friends of Queen's Market

Nonetheless, Wal-Mart continues to dominate global retail, and as John Lanchester (2006) points out, there is a real problem that victories over the corporation remain distinctly local, and often driven purely by self-interest. Progress regarding the war profiteering issue appears more promising, however: Greenwald was himself called to testify to the hearings on oversight in Iraq that took place in May of this year, the exchanges are posted online at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsNM5zbe4Pk&v3>. Finally, as this article was being revised for publication, news arrived that the House had passed a 'War Profiteering Prevention Act'. The Brave New Films announcement is available at <http://bravenewfilms.org/blog/15453-the-house-passes-the-war-profiteering-prevention-act> (accessed 11th October, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Challenge for Change went so far as to equip their documentary subjects with the technology and skills to make their own films. At the beginning of this year, company offshoot Brave New Foundation announced the production of their online *Iraq Memorial Quilt*, a compendium of 2-3 minute films

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submitted by relatives of the war dead. The announcement can be found at <http://rg.bravenewfilms.org/blog/467-announcing-the-iraq-veterans-memorial>; the memorial itself is available at <http://iraqmemorial.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> In subsequent works, Putnam is more cautiously optimistic about the Internet, although he stresses the need for web-based communities to act as a reinforcement, rather than a replacement, for face-to-face meetings (Putnam 2000: 169-80, 410-11; Putnam and Feldstein 2003: 225-40, 292-3). The distribution and exhibition strategies developed by Brave New Theaters appear to fulfil this requirement. Putnam (2000: 22) further distinguishes between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ forms of social capital, suggesting that former ‘are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups’, whereas the latter, by contrast, ‘are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages.’ The invitation on the Brave New Theaters web pages to host screenings, ‘We screen movies for friends and strangers’, suggests that Greenwald’s group are at least attempting to contribute to social capital formation of both kinds. See <http://bravenewtheaters.com:80/people>.

<sup>11</sup> Brave New Films have developed the strategy of online fundraising through their partner organisations; along with Greenwald’s use of a broad network of ‘field producers’ to monitor, on a local basis, the announcements and strategies of corporations, as well as to shoot and submit footage for inclusion in the finished films, such a strategy indicates that it is not only with the *Iraq Memorial Quilt* that what I am referring to here as an ‘ethos of participation’ further imbricates itself at the stage of production.

<sup>12</sup> Of particular interest here is the ways in which those expectations may take into account the contingencies of specific types of viewing situation, especially as they may move, in Greenwald’s words, ‘beyond the regular.’ Michael Renov is the figure most closely associated with the attempt to bring the insights of psychoanalytic theory to bear on the domain of subjectivity in relation to documentary; in an article on the Newsreel collective that first appeared in 1987, and was reprinted in *The Subject of Documentary* (2004), he cites a tantalising quote from John Hunt in the September 1969 edition of *Leviathan* that touches on this topic: ‘Many times the films of Newsreel, the movement’s only organized film producers... give us a sense of action taking place, involving us rather than forcing us to involve ourselves’ (Renov 2004: 6).

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