

TATE FILM

Peter Wakins: The Journey



Peter Wakins, *The Journey* 1987. Courtesy the artist.

Peter Watkins: The Journey Starr Auditorium, Tate Modern Friday 17 May – Sunday 19 May 2013 £10 / £8 concessions inclusive

The Journey

Peter Watkins, Sweden, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Soviet Union, Mexico, Japan, Scotland, Polynesia, Mozambique, Denmark, France, Norway, West Germany and USA, 1987, 16mm, 870 min

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

Following Tate Modern’s 2012 retrospective of Peter Watkins’ work, this special screening event offers the unique opportunity to see Watkins’ monumental film *The Journey* in its complete duration of 14 hours and 30 minutes. *The Journey* traces the systemic impact of the global nuclear regime across 12 countries, building an intricate series of connections between the state of the arms trade, military expenditure, the environment and gender politics that are more relevant than ever.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

Working collaboratively with activist groups from around the world over three years, *The Journey* is an astonishing epic that succeeds in expanding documentary’s powers of polemic, reflexivity and inspiration.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

Support groups debate the peace process, families discuss their fears of nuclear threat and the cost of world hunger, survivors recall the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki while Watkins analyses the role played by mainstream media in normalising conflict. Peter Watkins’ vision of a political cinema that emerges from and documents the collaborative process which it analyses, reaches its most elaborated form in *The Journey* which is structured in 19 intricately edited chapters. The result is an unprecedented cinematic constellation whose inspiration and importance has only increased since its release in 1986.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

Since the late 1950s, Peter Watkins’ films such as *Culloden* 1964, *The War Game* 1966, *Punishment Park* 1970, *Edvard Munch* 1973 and *La Commune* 1999, have reinvented historical drama and future speculation into impassioned, insurgent political cinema. And yet *The Journey* 1987, Watkins’ most sustained experiment with documentary, has not been screened in London since its LUX screening in 2003. In the wake of the partial meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant on 11 March 2011, the critical relevance of *The Journey* can be neither doubted nor overlooked.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

Presented by Tate Film in collaboration with The Otolith Collective. Introduced by The Otolith Collective, with guest speakers and audience discussion after the screening.

Schedule

Friday 17 May 2013
18.00–22.00: Chapters 1–4

Saturday 18 May 2013
11.00–13.00: Chapters 5–6
14.00–18.00: Chapters 7–9
19.00–22.00: Chapters 10–13

Sunday 19 May 2013
11.00–13.00: Chapters 14–15
14.00–18.00: Chapters 16–19

On the point of irrational detonation: Peter Watkins’ *The Journey*, 1987 Kodwo Eshun

What we endure in the present is historically formed and to that degree subject to rational analysis, but it exists now as a critical mass on the point of irrational detonation.

EP Thompson

‘Notes on Exterminism, The Last Stage of Civilization’ *New Left Review* 1/121, May–June 1980

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

As an experiment with the form, the force and the performance of documentary, the fourteen hours and thirty three minutes of *The Journey* 1987, is the culmination of Watkins’ exploration of the nuclear state that began with the visionary annihilationism of *The War Game* 1965 and continued into the rarely screened dramas *The Trap* 1975 and *Evening Land* 1976. *The Journey* accordingly revisits earlier fictional signatures such as the statistical reports of Culloden 1964 and the youth interviews of *The Seventies People* 1974 replaying them as documentary positions that seek to make sense of the exterminist logic of Cold War politics during the 1980s. Conceived in Stockholm in late May 1983, filmed in twelve countries and edited in Canada, *The Journey* was finally premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in February 1987.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

In *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* 1988, Guy Debord argued that ‘nuclear practices, both military and civil demands a far higher dose of secrecy than in other fields.’¹ *The Journey* endorses this verdict and effectively envisions the far-reaching extent of a ‘society built on secrecy’.² The occult mood of the 1980s was powerfully evident in the BBC nuclear conspiracy drama *Edge of Darkness* 1986, scripted by dramatist Troy Kennedy Martin. Here state security and big business converged in the sinister organisational complex of the Northmoor nuclear waste plant in the North of England.

The Journey, by contrast, marshals the powers of audiovisual montage against the covert forces of what Austrian critic Robert Jungk named the ‘nuclear state’ in 1979. Watkins’ teams train their cameras onto rural geographies and idyllic views that seem, on first sight, to be pleasingly picturesque. These perspectives are revealed, gradually, as environments cloaked and weaponised against unsuspecting civilians. The peaceful landscapes of Norway and Northern Germany and the serene shoreline of the Pacific Islands turn out to provide aesthetic cover for intensely militarised terrains that hide nuclear weapons and conceal atomic detonations. These occluded yet pervasive nuclear geographies create a duplicity at the level of landscape that becomes deceptive and suspect.

The Journey aims to visualize capitalist and communist societies as two forms of a single transnational system that critic Sabu Kohso has named the ‘global nuclear regime’, a system whose powers of occultation can be revealed and resisted by the powers of cine-education. Through photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki victims, the television-critique of Canadian evening news, information displays, comparative statistics, animations, discussions with families in Mexico, Norway, Germany, Russia, Japan, Scotland, America and Australia, community meetings in Mozambique, France, Scotland and Tahiti, interviews with World War II survivors in Japan and Germany, emergency evacuations reenacted in Australia, Norway and America and states of emergency enacted in Britain, *The Journey* operates as an exhaustive experiment in localised long distance cine-politics that aims to alert audiences and participants to the scale of what Watkins calls the ‘militarization of the planet’.

Peter Watkins

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

Throughout the film, we watch families looking at enlarged images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki victims. These appalling black and white photographs of peeling skins, charred corpses and scattered skulls bring the impact of 1945 into the kitchen tables and front rooms of 1986. The cowed silence produced by these images speaks of a delayed reaction, as if these families, have until now, managed to evade any sustained sensorial confrontation with the impact of the atomic bomb. What the camera reveals is the struggle to respond. It watches as mothers, fathers, grandmothers and teenagers of varying ages and nationalities look away from the photographs and shrink from the camera’s gaze. The film weaves these painful hesitations, inadequate articulations and shared silences into versions of what philosopher Günther Anders called ‘Promethean shame’.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

Over time, the family, the workplace, television and school emerge as social factories that reproduce and reinforce the incapacities of the interviewees to interpret or to make judgements. Confronted with pictures, probed by questions, each interviewee seems to slowly awaken from an intangible somnambulism. When an American man recounts his dawning realisation that he, like everyone working at his company Hollywell, manufactures parts for nuclear weapons, his wife nods sympathetically, announcing, in a tone of near wonder, that ‘I was living in oblivion...’ What becomes apparent is that the militarization of the planet has not, in the words of Alexander Kluge, become ‘an experience capable of public decipherment.’³

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

Although Watkins insistently questions his interviewees, there are multiple instances in which his questions take the form of words transcribed onto the screen like a blackboard. They address the viewer as a student participating in a classroom discussion. Indeed, *The Journey* was conceived in nineteen ‘units,’ each lasting approximately forty five minutes and concluding with a question mark, designed to be screened by community groups, adult education classes and in small public screenings. In 1990, Watkins and his collaborator Vida Urbanavicius completed a 339 page Users Guide that proposed ways of utilizing *The Journey* as one possible ‘model of an alternative future relationship’ between the public and mass media.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

Watkins’ role is to draw responses from different families, to screen video recordings of families responding to earlier discussions to other families, and then to film the former as they respond to the latter. This incremental feedback aims to create a skeptical self-awareness in the participant and the viewer, each of whom is encouraged to become aware of their role within the communication matrix that organises their society. *The Journey* transposes and inverts the televisual structure of The Peace Games first seen in *The Gladiators* 1968. Instead of pitting soldiers against each other for entertainment as in *The Gladiators*, *The Journey* functions as a form of peace education that alerts viewers to the ways in which television operates as a war game played by corporations upon its viewers.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

The Journey performs its own media critique by studying the ways in which television shapes the common sense of political events. Watkins’ Canadian production films television crews preparing for the so-called Shamrock Summit of Reagan and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada in 1986. It observes and analyses the anti-Summit demonstrations and continually contrasts Quebec’s evening news broadcasts with its own footage.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

The Journey’s instructional aesthetic underlines the controlling capacity of the media. The film is populated by guides whose role is to help the viewer navigate its elaborately plaited montage. Photographer Bob Del Tredici performs the first such role. By

pointing to details inside his enlarged black and white aerial perspectives, Tredici exactlyngly reconstructs the far-reaching scale of America’s ‘nuclear weapons production complex’ circa 1986. Throughout *The Journey*, he reappears to narrate the stages by which two hundred separate parts converge upon the Pantax Nuclear Weapons Final Assembly Plant in Amarillo, Texas to be assembled into a nuclear bomb.

This process is only the first of many journeys that constitute *The Journey*; the film is made of journeys of each of its families which are interrupted, revisited, elaborated and sustained across the film. The journey described by Del Tredici is continued by American peace activist Shelly Douglas who identifies the white trains that transport the assembled nuclear warheads from the trainyard at Amarillo, Texas across America to the Trident nuclear submarine base in Bangor, Washington, outside Seattle, where she lives.

Duval explains how she alerted friends to the imminent arrival of the train until a ‘chain of little communities’ grows up ‘all along these railroad tracks.’ These strangely apologetic protests are glimpsed throughout *The Journey*. A woman in a red blouse and long black skirt walks slowly towards the track. A middle aged man in a white hardhat intercepts her path by clasping her left arm. A second man arrives followed by a third and a fourth. The five whites stare as the great white train fills the foreground, like a moving wall, its bell clanging.

See also: Peter Watkins: The Journey

The protestors do not throw themselves in front of the great white train. They congregate as if to announce that ‘we are here and we are watching.’ The protest makes their helplessness public. It helps them to manage the fear which they must have felt at the indifferent movement of the train. As if to atone for this sense of dread, the camera returns to walk alongside and inside the railtracks towards the gates of the base at Bangor. Banks of grass loom on either side. Footsteps press forwards, aiming at the vanishing point of the railroad. This journey, split into scenes and matched with the white male voices of the American military, feels like a pilgrimage undertaken to remind viewers of the existence of the great white train.

The Journey is an epic directed against forgetting that has itself been largely forgotten. Its duration has prevented its entry into popular awareness. As a result, its accretional montage, its communicative ethics, its stricken silences, its faith in the power of image and its premonitory sound design remain latent, still to be encountered. Its heroic project of ensuring the implications of atomic explosion enters into what WG Sebald called the ‘internal constitution’ of this country, still lies ahead: untested, unproven, unresolved.⁴

^[1] Guy Debord, ‘Thesis XIII’, Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, trans. Malcolm Imrie, London 1988, p.35.

^[2] Debord, ‘Thesis XVIII’, Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, p.47.

^[3] Alexander Kluge, Geschichte und Eigensinn, quoted in WG Sebald, ‘Air War and Literature’, On the Natural History of Destruction, trans. Anthea Bell, New York 2004, p.4.

^[4] WG Sebald, On the Natural History of Destruction, 2004, p.4.

Chapter summaries 1–19

Kodwo Eshun

Peter Watkins, *The Journey* 1987. Courtesy the artist.

Chapter 1: film reels 1 & 2 (50 min 32 sec)

The Journey begins by explaining its principle of representation. In a voice that pauses for emphasis, Watkins articulates the artistic principles that organise *The Journey*: ‘I do hope you will not feel that there is anything objective about the information I’ll give you. Certainly, all of us working on *The Journey* have tried very hard with our research to make our information as accurate as possible. But I must emphasise that our presentation of the information is biased, due to our very strong feelings about the subject of this film.’ The two Canadian translators introduce themselves and the different nationalities each will voice. Figures that will reappear throughout the film such as the community group based in the island of Lewis in the Scottish Highlands, Ms Saeki, a Hiroshima survivor who is seen entering the crypt below Hiroshima Peace Park, the American photographer Bob Del Tredici, the American activist Shelly Douglas and the Lukas family from Tahiti narrate their local perspectives on the geopolitics of militarization.

Chapter 2: film reels 3 & 4 (40 min 26 sec)

The 25th of September Women’s Co-operative, based outside Maputo, Mozambique explain their lack of resources within the context of armed struggle against guerrillas supported by the South African government. Chapter 2 links Ms Saeki’s recollection of the explosion at Hiroshima with the movement of the great white train from Amarillo, Texas. Animal testing at Moruroa in the Pacific Islands is connected to community frustration at the function of a new runway at the military airfield at Stornaway in the Scottish Highlands. Canadian television broadcasts scenes of Ronald Reagan surviving an assassination. The title of *The Journey* is written in several languages to underline the transnational ambition of the film. Watkins’ locates weapons development in the context of quality of life and compares expenditure of the US with that of the USSR. This chapter begins the film’s study of the ways television news brings the military into the domestic space of the family. *The Journey’s* Canadian camera team captures cameramen shooting a reporter preparing her outside broadcast for Radio Canada.

Chapter 3: film reels 5 & 6 (50 min 22 sec)

The chapter develops the relationship between military and the media through its concentration on the manufacture of evening news. The Canadian team looks at television crews from CNN, CBS and NBC television and compares coverage of anti-Reagan

demonstrations in Quebec. It watches Radio-Canada producers at a breakfast meeting as they discuss the forthcoming visit of Reagan to Quebec. Different families respond to photos of victims of Hiroshima. Each family reflects upon the lack of discussion about the scale of the atomic bomb and the impact of nuclear war. The great white train continues to travel through the American countryside as families express their ignorance of its existence.

Chapter 4: film reels 7 & 8 (43 min 54 sec)

Different families sit at tables and struggle to respond to enlarged photographs of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Ortegas, a Mexican family are introduced. A Tahitian group analyses the secrecy of French nuclear tests in the Pacific. This policy is linked to the ways in which French government have allowed Polynesian workers to be exposed to high levels of external radiation. A discussion group in a television studio in Toulouse is introduced. On the walls of the studio can be seen maps depicting nuclear military sites throughout France.

Chapter 5: film reels 9 & 10 (44 min 32 sec)

As television producers prepare for the so called Shamrock Summit between Reagan and Mulroney in Quebec City, anti Reagan demonstrations intensify. A Scottish group that meets to discuss the role of American military bases in Gaelic is introduced. Watkins shows families a dot graph that visualizes the total number of nuclear bombs in the world. He describes Americans plans to install nuclear weapons in a number of unsuspecting countries. The Smillies, a family based in Dumbarton, Scotland, express their opposition to the Trident submarine.

Chapter 6: film reels 11 & 12 (46 min 21 sec)

The community group in Lewis in Scottish Highlands express a growing sense of frustration against nuclear bases. By contrast, Alexander Kolosov from the Kolosov family in Leningrad feels protected by the armed forces in the USSR although he acknowledges that this safety comes at a great cost to the country. The difference between the American approach to intervention abroad and its response to problems within Middle America is raised. In Norway, the Vikan family participate in a mass enactment of an emergency evacuation, leaving their home to drive north towards their local evacuation centre in a high school.

Chapter 7: film reels 13 & 14 (39 min 35 sec)

Canadian television broadcasts the Shamrock Summit in Quebec. The film returns to the Pacific Ocean. The Crippen family discuss the lack of available information on nuclear weapons. Ron Crippen, the husband reflects upon his ignorance about the work he does at the Honeywell factory. Ms Saeki recalls popular Japanese support for war. Her recollection is contextualized by the activist Jikkon Le, the Chairman of the Korean Hibakusha Association in Hiroshima. Le asserts that Japan’s imperialist aggression provoked the atomic annihilation of its cities. He reminds viewers that Japan unilaterally invaded and occupied Korea in 1910 and that many of the Koreans forced to work in Hiroshima under armed guard died in 1945. The Hendricks, an African American family is introduced as they prepare to participate in an emergency evacuation exercise in upstate New York. Mr Hamada, another Hiroshima survivor, is introduced recalls his journey to find his missing father in Hiroshima.

Peter Watkins, *The Journey* 1987. Courtesy the artist.

Chapter 8: film reels 15 & 16 (44 min 37 sec)

This chapter links forms of structural violence with anti Summit protests in Vancouver. A young woman from the 25th September Co-operative describes the importance of education while Gerard and Ouiza, an Algerian couple analyse the division between classical Arabic spoken on television and Arabic spoken in everyday life that is excluded by the former. Mrs Bierman, a survivor of the Allied bombing of Hamburg in July 1943 is introduced. The film alternates between scenes of the Hendricks in New York and the Vikans in Norway as they negotiate the emergency evacuation procedures. Mr Hamada’s recollections are matched with footage of an underground nuclear bunker in Hamburg. *The Journey* switches perspective by cutting to the 64 acre Piskaryovskoye memorial cemetery in Leningrad. It shows Russians enjoying a stroll along the wide boulevards. On either side of the concrete path are grass mounds indicating mass graves of 10,000 bodies, victims of the during the German army’s Siege of Leningrad from 1941 to 1944. The Hendricks tries to leave the school evacuation. The camera follows two children running in panic towards a school; these are revealed to be the Vikan children participating in the evacuation exercise by running towards an underground bomb shelter in their school.

Chapter 9: film reels 17 & 18 (44 min 15 sec)

Demonstrators burn the US flag during the protest against Reagan’s visit to Quebec City, this brief event dominates Radio Canada’s evening news coverage. *The Journey* visits La Trobe valley outside Melbourne. Its camera travels across the epic vista of smoke emitting from the chimney stacks of the local nuclear power plant in La Trobe. The Barnes, an Australian family, is introduced looking at Hiroshima images. Channel 10 in Melbourne shows demonstrators protesting the uranium mining at the Roxby Downs mine in Australia.

Chapter 10: film reels 19 & 20 (43 min 52 sec)

Archival footage of anatomic detonation plays as the ITN newsreader explains that Aboriginal claims about exposure to radiation fallout from atomic testing during the 1950s have been vindicated by the British government who have finally admitted responsibility. The Barnes family discusses nuclear testing in Australia. The film watches the Tahiti group as they study a video recording of the discussion by the Toulouse group on the history of French atomic testing in Polynesia. Watkins discusses the extent of Soviet bases in Afghanistan and shows a map of American bases in Australia and Japan to the Crippen family. Ellen Crippen is surprised at the number of US troops in Japan and the UK. Yoriko Shinya of the Mori family in Tokyo describes her love for the piano and plays the first of several compositions heard throughout *The Journey*.

Chapter 11: film reels 21 & 22 (48 min 45 sec)

Yoriko Shinya’s piano provides a soundtrack for scenes of the nuclear powerplant at La Trobe Valley. The film introduces locals based in Morwell, Australia, playing the role of survivors in a post-nuclear world. Smudged white faces lit by the wavering circles of battery powered torches, emerge from the darkness of the cellar. This enactment takes on a heightened expressionist quality as people confess their fears and reflect upon their pre-nuclear lives. The Vikans are redirected towards another evacuation centre. This ongoing enactment is linked to an ongoing discussion about the role of the teacher within contemporary school system. Martina Duvel, from the Duvel family in Germany, is critical of her local teachers’ efforts to retain neutrality during a discussion.

Chapter 12: film reels 23 & 24 (44 min 55 sec)

The Journey follows the Hendricks family into the chaos of the evacuation in upstate New York. The journey of the Vikans towards their central evacuation point is scored with the voices of Caspar Weinberger, Secretary of State for Defence justifying the USA’s need to pursue its strategic modernisation programme in order to avoid ‘conceding its inferiority’ to the Soviet Union. Watkins links this rationale for military expenditure is linked with the state of education in the US. He confronts American families with maps that list American colleges receiving military contracts. The continued lack of knowledge on the scale of American presence in the Marshall Islands of the Pacific Polynesia and the scale of French nuclear testing in so-called French Polynesia is attested to by the introduction of the Samwela family in Tahiti and by the discussion among the Smillie family in Dumbarton. Canadian television coverage of the Reagans and the Mulroneys at a gala performance is contrasted with Christian Vikan walking towards the excavation centre and the return to the passage in the tracks of the white train.

Chapter 13: film reels 25 & 26 (42 min 12 sec)

Mr Himada recalls finding his dying father in a first aid station in Hiroshima. He recalls the radio broadcast of the unconditional surrender of the Emperor: ‘The emperor spoke of having endured every kind of hardship, of having been patient and now it was defeat and unconditional surrender. My father cried and asked me to take him to the lavatory. There it was as if everything in his body came out. Among his last words, I still remember, ‘Why did we fight such a silly war?’ In the underground bunker in Hamburg, we watch hands turning giant wheels that power the emergency air system. In the chaos of the evacuation centre in upstate New York, a policewoman pushes Elisabeth Hendricks and her daughter back into their car and several policemen manhandle her husband Bill Hendricks for reasons unknown. Throughout these scenes, an anonymous white male voice recites an endless list of products required during an emergency evacuation. Scenes from the presidential Gala are contrasted with recollections of Portuguese colonialism by an elderly woman from the 25th of September Co-operative. The film cuts from the scene of the co-operative working their land to the ingratiating spectacle of a Canadian country and Western singer looking towards the Reagans and Mulroneys. Seated in the Royal Box, they look down at her and us. Jikken Li recalls that by 1945, 2.4 million Koreans were working in Japan as forced labour under armed guard. *The Journey* notes the location of the memorial to the Korean victims of the nuclear bombs; it is distanced from all the memorials to the Japanese fatalities in Hiroshima Peace Park.

Chapter 14: film reels 27 & 28 (45 min 24 secs)

In a state of emergency, Watkins explains, the British army would be granted sweeping powers to control the civilian population. The BBC would become the official mouthpiece of the emergency, offering neutral information that simultaneously legitimises that rule. *The Journey* shows the frame of the portable television monitor in which a newsreader waits to read the news. The title theme tune begins, followed by the newsreader's grave delivery: 'Late last night, her majesty's government decided to enact the dormant Emergency Powers Act legislation...' In this near future scenario, councillors in Glasgow emerge from a town hall meeting to be met by police and forcibly walked into police vans. At the gala, the singer sycophantically calls on Reagan and Mulroney to join her onstage to sing 'Irish Eyes are Smiling'. *The Journey* compares its own footage of the gala at the side of the stage with the evening news broadcast of the same event in order to reveal decisions made by the latter, prompting the question: 'How much do we know about the language system of TV?' Martina Duvel from Germany continues to discuss the difficulties that teachers face in presenting information in a neutral manner. This is connected to the Smilley family's recognition of the struggle required to resist, as exemplified by the protest camp at Greenham Common. This feminist struggle is contrasted with the figure of Ouiza Safou in Paris who analyses the subordinated position of women in contemporary Algeria.

Chapter 15: film reels 29 & 30 (48 min 51 sec)

In the cellar in Morwell, Australia, a teacher recalls class discussions on life after the bomb. As the white train continues its journey towards the rural town of Shelton, Washington, Watkins discusses nuclear testing in different countries. The film compares the attitude of professionals from the Canadian Broadcasting Company towards bias with local activists interviewed by Watkins Canadian team in Quebec City. The relationship between the arms race and social spending is discussed by American families and is linked by the Ortega family, to the underdevelopment of Mexico. The Tahiti group questions the ability of any political elite to take the long term effects of military expenditure into account. The chapter ends with feminist perspectives articulated by Melita from the 25th of September Co-operative reflecting upon the structural violence of colonisation in Mozambique and Ouiza Safou discussing the sanctioned secondariness of girls and women reproduced by the family structure in contemporary Algeria.

Chapter 16: film reels 31 & 32 (55 min 42 sec)

The railtrack walk concludes at the gates of the base in Bangor. The footage of the white train arriving at Bangor is slowed down until the clash between protestors and federal agents takes on a ritual dimension. American families discuss the corporate exploitation of Mexico and Central America and the media's role in supporting endemic corporate racism. As two newsreaders from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation discuss the process of reporting the Shamrock Summit, a hand reaches out to place a Polaroid photograph of a Canadian politician onto the television screen thereby obscuring the face of the newsreader. This gesture of defacement is restricted to the evening news. The film follows a camera pool as it jockeys for a good position on a crowded media dais from which Reagan and Mulroney could be observed, walking together. Yoriko Shinya plays a piano composition that continues over the footage of Mulroney and Reagan, acting as a derisive commentary on the image. The Crippens sit at home, surrounded by brown paper bags. The bags visualise a single family's tax expenditure on the new MX atomic missile. An NBC clip shows

Reagan intent on acquiring this missile. On a portable television, the Kolosovs in Leningrad watch a video-message from the Smillies in Dumbarton. Chapter 16 concludes by asking how the geopolitical distance between the two families might be closed.

Chapter 17: film reels 33 & 34 (49 min 47 sec)

The light is switched on in the cellar at Morwell to reveal a powerfully composed portrait of faces, each of whom articulates their reactions to the experience. At the school at Frosta that played the role of the evacuation centre, Watkins asks the local Norwegians to discuss their experience at the mock-evacuation exercise and to analyse the role of Civil Defence measures in an actual emergency. One woman dismisses the entire enactment as 'senseless, totally senseless, its madness to transport people to this place.' The chapter enters into a sequence of long distance messaging. At home, different families watch an excerpt of the recorded interview with the Kolosov family in the USSR. Elena Ortega and her family in Mexico City, the Mori family in Tokyo, the Crippen family in the US, the discussion group in Toulouse, the Tahiti group and the Hendricks family, each watches the Kolosovs explain their fear of war. The camera returns to the Kolosovs in Leningrad to watch them formulating a response to the Smillies. It reverses direction to go to Dumbarton to watch the Smillie family, watching the last section of the interview with the Kolosovs on their television and recording a new response. The process of one family sending and replying to a video message that is watched in turn by other families turns the geopolitical distance between families into a shared understanding of the processes of separation. The main title of *The Journey* is repeated which begins in silence. Each family discusses, many for the first time, their experiences of seeing and listening to a discussion by a Soviet family in a domestic setting.

Chapter 18: film reel 35 (31 min 12 sec)

American families reflect upon their exposure to the Kolosov family and to the Ortega family from Mexico. The German survivors of the Hamburg bombing and the Vikan family draw conclusions from their experience, speaking of different peoples to support the peace movement. Hinano Lucas of the Tahitian family reflects upon the difficult economic conditions facing Pacific Islanders. Ouiza and Gerard, the Algerian couple analyse the long term effects of colonisation and emphasise the disenfranchisement of women in Algeria.

Chapter 19: film reels 36, 37 & 38 (57 min 39 sec)

In Leningrad, the Kolosov family watches the second videotape of messages recorded by each of the Smillie family in Dumbarton. Masha, the daughter, Lidia, the mother and Alexander the father responds in turn. The film moves between pointing towards future challenges, explained by women from the 25th of September collective to the problems of memory faced by Mrs Biermann, survivor of the Hamburg firestorm. *The Journey* returns to the scene of Yoriko Shinaka playing piano for the last time. Watkins requests audiences watch the credits as they have been edited to form an arrangement of the 'sounds and images of our planet, the people of our planet, at this crucial moment in time.' Musical refrains from earlier chapters are replayed, this time interrupted by the blackness of closing credits, disrupted by sudden silences and by concluding scenes filmed near windows and curtains that throw an unexpected brightness into the film. What emerges is a finale of voices, light, words, musics, gestures and darkness, that draws together all the journeys undertaken by differing families and community groups throughout *The Journey*.

Excerpt from *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies, 1993* Scott MacDonald



Peter Watkins, *The Journey* 1987. Courtesy the artist.

The 14½ hours of *The Journey* are organized into an immense filmic weave that includes candid discussions with 'ordinary people' from many countries; community dramatizations; a variety of forms of deconstructive analysis of conventional media practices; presentations of art works by others; portraits of people and places; and a wealth of specific information about the knot of contemporary issues that includes the world arms race and military expenditures in general, world hunger, the environment, gender politics, the relationship of the violent past and the present, and, especially, the role of the media and of modern educational systems with regard to international issues...

The actual filming of the family discussions was extended and private, and I would guess that no one except Watkins understood the depth of his commitment to them. In conventional documentaries, and even more so in standard news coverage, interviews are rigorously edited: the amount of recorded interview that finds its way into a finished film or news item is determined by the director's assumption about the usefulness or impact of what is said. This is especially the case when the interviewer is not an expert, the subject of the film, or a crucial witness to the actions of an 'important' person: interviews with the so-called man-on-the-street are usually little more than decoration. The focus of *The Journey*, however is the thoughts and experiences of average people, and Watkins' commitment to the people who agreed to talk with him was nearly absolute. He was determined to provide them with an opportunity to respond to his questions and to treat the responses with respect, not simply in a metaphoric sense, but literally, in the overall allocation of screen time and in his use of continuous, unedited shots...

As is true in a number of the films discussed earlier in this volume, the most fundamental and pervasive structural dimension of *The Journey* is the network of interconnections among layers of image and sound. Early in the film, for example, when Watkins is introducing the (CBC) coverage of the Shamrock Summit, he juxtaposes a visual of a Canadian newsperson ... doing a 'topo' [a news summary which is either an item in its own right, or which functions as an introduction or conclusion to the filmed and edited main news item - usually delivered while standing and facing the camera] with a voice-over translation of what [the newsperson] says: 'Wrapped in a thick cloak of protocol and reception, the Mulroney-Reagan Summit has a full agenda...' The image of [the newsperson] is framed so that, at first, she is seen surrounded by darkness [she was filmed standing in the street on a bleak winter evening in Quebec City] - her face is visible through the space between a technician's arm and body [this scene was filmed by the Canadian Support Group for *The Journey*, who followed the Canadian coverage of the Summit]: She is surrounded by a 'thick coat' of media protocol and reception. In fact, the documentation of the topo reveals that the primary concern for [the newsperson] and those responsible for recording her is not the issues of the summit, but how she looks and sounds [she was very concerned not only about her speaking rhythm, but also about her makeup, and whether her hair was mussed-up by the wind]; the topo is redone several times, not to provide increased information, but to package the obvious more 'professionally.' This concern with appearance, with 'cloaking' information in a specialized, elite language is not only parallel to the summit itself, it reveals how fully the commercial media is an arm to the government systems, functioning within the limited spaces and times determined by the government...

The more one fully attends to *The Journey*, the more the coherence of its vision becomes apparent. At first, the film seems to jump abruptly from one place and time to another, but by the end of the film, Watkins has made clear a belief that has been one of the foundations of all his work: that fundamentally, all places are simultaneously distinct and part of one place; all times are special and part of one time; all issues are important for themselves and as parts of a single, interlocking global issue. *The Journey* creates a cinematic space in which the viewer's consciousness circles the earth continually, explores particular families and places, and discovers how each detail ultimately suggests the entire context within which it has meaning. Like the other films [described in *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies*], but more fully than any of them, Watkins' film develops in the direction not of narrative climax and resolution, but of an expanded consciousness of the world.

Film credits

Produced by the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (SPAS), Stockholm, Sweden, National Film Board of Canada (NFB) (post-production) and international public funding (1983–86)

Directed by
Peter Watkins

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Peter Katadotis, Daniel Pinard, Tamara Lynch (NFB)

Film editing (NFB)
Peter Watkins, Petra Valier, Manfred Becker

Art Department (NFB)
Joan Churchill, Jane Churchill

Producers, production managers, fund-raisers
Anders Nilsson (Mocambique); Tillmann Scholl (Germany);
David Rosen (Seattle, Washington); Yamagami Hiromi (Japan);
Roberto Lopez Marquez, Nora Wayman (Mexico); Daniel Scharf,
Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, Bengt Danielsson, Oscar Temaru (Tahiti);
Guy Cavagnac, Jean-Jacques Hocquard (France); Jan-Erik Gamleng,
Ragnhild Thorvik, Brita Steig (Norway); Duncan MacLeod,
Malcolm MacLeod, Angus MacKormack (Isle of Lewis, Scotland);
Scott MacDonald, Don Tracy, Patricia O'Connor, Robert Baber
(Utica, New York); Madlen Aboyan, Mikhail Ilyin (Soviet Union);
Penny Robins, Neil Courtney, Joanne Lee Dow, Richard Tanter,
Eugene Schlusser, Jim Tzannes (Australia); Dagmar Fagerholt,
Tina Bryld (Denmark); Marian Hancock, Hedy Barta, Kate Boanas
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Gary Payne (Seattle, USA) Kim Dok Chul (Japan) Migual Garzon
(Mexico) Jaems Grant (Tahiti & Australia) Christian Guillon (France)
Odd-Geir Saether (Norway) Skip Roessel (Utica, New York) Leif Nybom
(Soviet Union) Eric Edwards (Portland, Oregon) Martin Duckworth
(Canada) Jan Pester (Glasgow & Isle of Lewis, Scotland)

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Thank you

Peter Watkins (born 1935)
Award-winning pioneer of the docudrama, typified by his combined use of fictional and documentary elements to dissect historical events. His work has been crucial to a critical understanding of mass media. For more info visit <http://pwwatkins.mnsi.net>

The Otolith Collective
The name adopted by The Otolith Group for its public programme of curatorial projects, screenings, seminars, discussions and workshops. The public programme by The Otolith Collective includes the ongoing screening series *The Militant Image* from 2011 at the International Institute of Visual Arts; the exhibition *On Vanishing Land by Mark Fisher and Justin Barton* at The Showroom in 2013; *Harun Farocki: 21 Films* at Tate Modern in 2009; and *The Ghosts of Songs: A Retrospective of the Black Audio Film Collective 1982–1998* at FACT, Liverpool and Arnolfini, Bristol in 2007. In July 2013, the first British Retrospective of the films of Anand Patwardhan will be curated by The Otolith Collective at Tate Modern.

The Otolith Group has featured in solo exhibitions at Redcat, Los Angeles, Project 88, Mumbai, MAXXI, Rome and MACBA, Barcelona and group exhibitions at Haus der Kunst, Munich, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, documenta 13, Kassel, 29th Sao Paulo Biennial and Manifesta 8, Murcia. In 2010, The Otolith Group was nominated for the Turner Prize.

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