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Documentary narrative for a new understanding of a stigmatized public space

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Anstract : As an extension of fifteen years of audiovisual work carried out in suburbs in the South of France, the tourist sites are filmed in turn as part of a new documentary series, in order to seek to better understand through their narrative the daily life in these easily stigmatized territories.

Key words : Documentary, public space, communication, tourism

Introduction

The creative documentary proposes itself as an artistic object that will promote the knowledge and understanding of a situation (Niney, 2000 and 2002). If we strive to build in this way the representation of a particular territory, it will then offer the possibility of making it an experience through art (Dewey, 1915). This is what I have been trying to achieve for fifteen years by going with a camera to the streets of the french « *cités* » of the South of France¹. First in workshops to encourage exchange and establish a complicity with the inhabitants during the first ten years (in the heart of the Cité Berthe of La Seyne-sur-mer in particular), then by opening myself to other social housing in order to try as a documentary filmmaker to nuance the ways of life in these stigmatised territories. Indeed, in France, « *cités* » represent "no-right zones" that television reports easily caricature with stone throwing or other burning cars. If these images really exist, the idea was to go to the heart of the population in order to try to better understand the way of daily life in these spaces from an urban and social point of view : two times three lanes encircle the suburbs by isolating them from the rest of the city as "ghettos" when they are not railway lines, the population often comes from immigration and has difficulty finding work, behavioural codes are affirmed and then participate in a form of territorial identity that becomes claimant, etc. Through the production of a total of nine documentaries on four suburbs in the South of France, the inhabitants' comments were nuanced to allow the viewer to have a sensitive experience of this daily life in these particular territories. After this documentary series " *Living in the territory* " in the heart of the social housing, I decide to start now the series " *leaving the postcard* ". Once again, it is focusing on caricatured territories, this time tourist ones. By positioning myself mainly as an observer of this daily life, I try to use the picture of the postcard as a starting point, and to move my camera a little bit towards the people who live there every day. In this process, I try to measure the difference between what Jean - Didier Urbain (1991) calls the tourist to position me, and at the same time propose to the spectator to place himself as a "traveller" (Paquot,

¹ More informations on www.lacompaniedesembruns.com

2014) who seeks to better understand life from a more anthropological point of view in what has become a tourist cliché.

I therefore seek to understand how social representations can evolve with filmic representations, but more in line with the desire of the first film operators to explore. Today's tourism is questioning this. This new documentary series "*Leaving the postcard*" initiates this reflection which is an extension of the different levels of representation (filmic, social and individual) experienced in the series "*Living in the territory*" (Cyrulnik, 2016), while the way of approaching the territory is different... It is a question of going beyond clichés to an understanding of the more ethnographic tourist territories, The postcard from which it is necessary to leave becomes a new object of research, questioning at the same time the territory and its tourism, its apprehension, the social representations to be nuanced, while claiming an ethnographic approach artistically questioned through the images and sounds that will tell this through the documentary. Witness is no longer necessarily the way to meet and seek to understand the ways of living in these territories, which are always caricatured. Rather, it is the traces, the imprints left by man in a landscape that are represented this time. The comments made will be erased to give way to the articulation between images and sounds that will reveal "*sound landscapes*" (Murray Schafer, 1977), visual landscapes, ambiances ! These documentary films question a cinematographic approach that is both aesthetic and rhetorical (Soulez, 2011).

The ways of apprehending these territories, this time caricatured by postcards, are questioned by now filming the different ways of travelling, between the tourist and the traveller closer to the inhabitants, evoking the ethnologist (Augé, 1997; Paquot, 2014, or even Winkin, 2001, see Descola, 2005). It is about "*Leaving the postcard*" to better open up to the world.

1 Apprehending a public space through art

Jürgen Habermas (1978) describes a public space in a participatory logic that is at once interactive, deliberative and political, associating the power of the media with communicative considerations. Thierry Paquot (2009) in turn proposes a more physical and geographical point of view, in a philosophical and urban approach, speaking of public spaces, in the plural. But he also considers the newspaper as a means of making a place such as a neighbourhood collective, for example, by giving it a social and public dimension (Paquot, 2009 : 92). The media power, and therefore communicative power, of a newspaper makes it possible to explore the relationship between public space and territory. Connections, exchanges at different levels, sharing, circulation and relationships that are created would then be at the heart of the definition of all public spaces, in the plural as well as in the singular. What is therefore "*the over-determining function of the territory to think of the relationship of inhabitants to their environment (economic, political, social, cultural,...) in everyday life, to reason around the idea of the "instituent power" of territoriality to agree on a public space (without suggesting that it would only be understood in terms of a territory)*" (Raoul, 2013 : 75) ? How is the public space worked by the question of territory, and how does the documentary as a particular media object participate in it?

A political dimension is in fact asserted insofar as the documentary reflects a way of life of the inhabitants of a suburb on a daily basis. It participates in a form of civic engagement through participation, interactions, positions, deliberations, etc. But the documentary as a form of narrative of a territory is

also invested in the urban approach it proposes through what is filmed, what is articulated, what is put forward, etc. The strolls and encounters in the french « cités » of the films in the series "*Living in the territory*", combined with the comments on what is experienced on a daily basis, compose a discourse on this urban public space. Those in the series "*Leaving the postcard*" now focus on describing a tourist territory and trying to make it more sensitive through the capture of images of everyday life and the sounds that emanate from it. The crossroads between these two dimensions of public space places communication and human interaction at the heart of the system (associated with art through the form of creative documentary), and reveals a constituent interweaving of these territories.

Tourists take pictures of themselves on the bridge over a canal or on a fine sandy beach in Martigues, facing the Mucem or under the shade of the old port of Marseille, or in front of a medieval church or in the Provençal market of Brignoles. From these photos taken in the axis of a monument, the camera rotates and will film the daily life that takes place right next door : a little boy fishing with his landing net, a woman taking out a display case full of postcards from her store to put it on the street, a man with a small suitcase crossing in a hurry, etc.. A portrait of each of these particular spaces in these cities is emerging as we increasingly encounter what constitutes "*real*" life in these tourist areas. Based on examples taken in Martigues, Marseille or Brignoles, and then opening it up to other more distant territories, the tourist who took his picture in the axis of the monument becomes more and more a traveller who goes to meet the inhabitants. He is moving towards an approach that is increasingly sociological and artistic at the same time, as close as possible to a life as he did not necessarily see at first sight. He enters the city more and more to better understand what is at stake, this daily life, what it is ultimately.... His point of view is nuanced, he begins to understand in a sensitive way the life on this territory. The viewer will ultimately experience this during the debate at the end of the screening of these documentary films (Cyrulnik, 2015).

Public space is part of the creation of political public space. It is accompanied by modes of expression about the city (s). The public space thus takes shape. The behaviours, words, places and opinions that emerge constitute the public space as a whole. Jürgen Habermas (1978) establishes a direct link between the media and the public space. Bernard Miège updates this : "*The state of the media is ipso facto considered as an evaluation of the Public Space and the debates taking place there*" (2010 : 115). The documentary, in an almost ubiquitous media environment (*via* at least by using a mobile phone, if only to take pictures!), offers an alternative device.

In the case of the series "*Living the territory*", the public space is challenged in the films in all senses of the term (urban, political and media), insofar as the inhabitants are given the opportunity to express themselves and that they articulate among themselves (in the image during the shooting, or through the editing of the film) their thoughts about urban and human mutations. The public space is therefore questioned both in the subject of the film and in the representation given by the film. The series "*Leaving the postcard*" is based less on the strength of the testimony than on the more or less participating observation (Winkin, 2001: 156 - 165). Documentary in all its forms proposes itself as an alternative media form to experiment through art a particular territory in order to have a more sensitive and undoubtedly more accurate, or at least more nuanced, knowledge of it.

With this new representation of territories through documentary film, new social representations are emerging. Documentary as an alternative to the often highly

formatted reporting that the media convey (if only because it usually benefits from an immersion time that promotes the quality of subsequent exchanges!) is a relevant media and artistic genre for this type of stigmatized territory : " *The media participate (therefore) in the structuring of the public space beyond the forms and content of speech and information they disseminate there... The "gaps" in the media are then opportunities to make alternative discourses visible. In its historical approach, Habermas considers that media disruptions, invading public space, cause its decline. The links between territories and the media underline that the latter are likely to participate in a dynamic of discussion and argumentation* " (Gadras & Palliart, 2013: 31). These documentary series offer themselves precisely as an alternative that promotes this. The creative documentary offers another form of visibility, and with it recognition (Honneth, 2000) of these territorial specificities.

In general, the media are rather thought of as a means of advertising the territories. However, local newspapers or other public forms of expression of the inhabitants are born from a desire to claim ways of living on a daily basis in these places. It is therefore rather issues related to the territory that lead to the construction of media supports (Gadras & Pailliar, 2013 : 33). For her part, H  l  ne Nez (2011) highlights " *resident knowledge* " or " *citizen knowledge* " as being mobilizable in participatory urban planning. The idea is most of the time to strengthen the specificities of this territoriality. Documentary is a possible and alternative form of making these territories and their inhabitants visible. The discursive form of the documentary allows this new understanding of the territory (Cyrulnik, 2017: 154 - 158).

2 Tell a story about a territory

While the research object of this text is the documentary, more specifically about territories, the question of storytelling may seem less obvious at first sight than for a fictional film. However, it is this that will ultimately give rise to a representation. As soon as a film, and therefore a story, is composed, in connection with a space or not, a staging bias determines a storytelling. The simple fact of placing the camera in one place rather than another already implies a staging; the fact of choosing to make a close-up that would focus on a person, rather than a close-up that would place that person among the others, for example also; etc. The director's position, his posture with all the technical equipment in addition to what the cinema imposes (camera, microphone, headset, foot, etc.), already physically implies a staging bias, including for a documentary ! When Fran  ois Niny tries to identify the different gradations of documentary to fiction, he distinguishes " *three intertwined levels of the filmic device : turning of shots, shooting instructions, induced belief of the spectator* " (2009 : 54). He wants to mean that the way the director films, even if he intervenes as little as possible, already influences what he will ultimately show in the film. Even stolen images already tell a lot about the staging bias and what it implies for the viewer in the end ! The same goes for images captured as simply as possible, which imply a positioning, a way of telling the reality, the beginning of a story, or even a speech... The zero degree of staging cannot fully exist. Neutrality, or objectivity, therefore seems to be impossible to achieve with a camera, even if this is often what journalists claim !

The forms of documentary narrative are very varied : from simple observation, to testimony, to more or less documented fiction, to more or less documented territorial storytelling, to fictional documentary, to the involvement of an intimate or social biography in a territory. Documentary staging offers many forms of storytelling. Social psychology" *explores the subjective side of what*

happens in objective reality. By this you mean economic and social reality " (Moscovici, 1984: 12). In a way, it also corresponds to what documentary does, by playing with this borderline between the part of subjectivity and a desire to objectify subjects. Thus, the choice of the composition of the story goes hand in hand with the choice of the director's place, more or less marked, taking into account what it will engage for the spectator. The point of view, the director's bias that appears in the narrative composed of reality, involves the filmmaker but also his relationship with the viewer in the end (Niney, 2009: 54). The artistic dimension is essential, even if the " *relational aesthetics* " of which Nicolas Bourriaud speaks (2001) makes it possible to value human exchanges as an artistic priority as a choice of direction for a documentary, as is the case in particular with the documentary series " *Living the territory* " and in a way closer to observation to " *Leaving the postcard* ". The author's place is then to be repositioned in relation to the desire to objectify space; the relationship that is woven between the filmmaker and the filmmaker is already part of the film. The documentary, which necessarily comes from reality, determines reality according to its position : " *(The documentary) (...) considers its subject both as a personal investigation (which does not necessarily mean subjective) and a cinematographic production. There is an involvement of the author in the research of and on his subject, as to its content and the filming device to be applied to it. Each time, it is a question of finding the film forms best suited to embrace the meanders of the investigation, to make the places and protagonists speak, to restore to the editing the complexity and contradictions of the situation* " (Niney, 2009 : 121). A part of fiction is assumed in documentary ! (Cyrulnik, 2017: 96-99).

3 Fictionalizing a reality

Whether it is a politician, an urban planner, a geographer, a filmmaker, a tourist or a sidewalker across the street, the points of view give life to so many different ways of romanticizing reality. In the context of documentaries, it is precisely these possible worlds that count. Belief, ethics, the possibility of the presented world, summon a part of fiction in order to try to better understand what reality can be.

Pierre Bourdieu nuances reality and the words to tell it : " *Some ethnologists go so far as to say that what we consider a reality is a fiction, constructed in particular through the lexicon we receive from the social world to name it* " (1994 : 135). Fiction is our reality.

" (...) Documentary cinema, cinema dedicated to "reality" is (...) capable of a fictional invention stronger than "fiction" cinema, easily dedicated to a certain stereotype of actions and characters. It is not a question of saying that everything is fiction. The point is to note that the fiction of the aesthetic age has defined models of connection between the presentation of facts and forms of intelligibility that blur the boundary between the reason for the facts and the reason for the fiction, and that these modes of connection have been taken up by historians and social reality analysts " (Rancière, 2010 : 60 - 61).

There is not one social representation, but several. And the very terms that can be used to describe them are part of the story that makes up this reality. Fiction and documentary are linked. William Guynn, in deciding to call his book " *a non-fiction cinema* " (2001), meant that it was not a question of opposing these two genres, but on the contrary of defining them in relation to each other. Christian Metz said that " *every film is a fiction film* " (1975: 31 - 32). And Guy Gauthier, more precisely on the question of territories, even evokes the fact that

fiction often makes it possible to romanticize a reality in order to better understand it; but the documentary would then only have to position itself as an exercise in truth (Gauthier, 2010: 12), which is reductive, by denigrating a part of creation. While the subject of this article is documentary cinema, it is necessary to value all the utopia and imagination that fiction conveys in order to better understand the capture of a territorial reality in the end. The reality described, including in a documentary, is both semi-physical and half-imaginary (Moscovici, 1984 : 7). How does a social representation become the most " *fair* " possible film représentation ? (Cyrulnik, 2017: 111 - 112). Art proposes itself as another experience of the world (Dewey, 1915). The artistic dimension of documentary makes it possible to enter a world that values the experience lived, while offering a part of a dream...

4 A more or less imaginary journey

Far from considerations directly related to the public space, it was necessary to study the composition of a story and its interaction games in order to better understand the different ways of telling, staging and plotting. In this logic, for example, Italo Calvino chose, in " *Les villes invisibles* " (1984), to tell about dreamed, invented, fictional spaces, etc., by approaching the cities described according to feelings. This marked art form encourages us to evoke spaces in a sensitive way : for each of the cities described, it tells us something about ourselves and others... The interest of documentary on a territory is present in this articulation between fiction and diction (Genette, 1991). What we say about it, and what we make it say, puts into perspective the different levels of interpretation of a territory.

This is precisely what happens at a tourist site : the expectations of tourists are particular. A collective imagination would tend to say what to see and where to see it from. In China, for example, Chinese tourists line up to take the same picture in the axis of the monument to be captured with the loved one in the foreground² ! It's a must ! Marc Augé's " *L'impossible voyage* " (1997a) tells how an ethnologist confronts images of tourists in certain emblematic places. He stereotypes and shifts the point of view of these places in order to identify what he calls " *urban fiction* ". This is indeed part of the territory. It is a way of seeing it, of appropriating it, which must also be taken into account, and which is very often done in an economic logic. Images of tourists invade a world already full of images. One feeds the other; they transform each other. It is a meeting of a different type than the one based on human relations, dear to documentary. These images tell in their own way the territory photographed or filmed. If Roger Odin (1995) insists on " *family films* " made as " *amateurs* ", and that this dimension is very important to take into account in relation to the relationship that man establishes with a place, what the tourist weaves in turn is easily a little caricatural since he often does what is expected of him (a certain type of tourist, obviously, not the " *traveller* " of Thierry Paquot, 2014) ! It is the mixing of the architect's imagination with the reactions of spectators that makes the visitor perceive a different image or way of living (Augé, 1997 : 105). This is what the series " *Leaving the postcard* " questions.

Tourists' expectations also influence what is seen or visited; just as the director thinks about what can be seen or (re)presented. The cinematographic language in terms of images and sounds also " *tells* " the territory. For example, Michelangelo Antonioni explains that he had to justify himself in order to get

² This example is particularly present in the first images of Michelangelo Antonioni's film on China, " *Chung kuo, china* " (1972, 220'). It still works like that today, it's cultural.

people to accept the fact of filming close-ups to shoot his documentary " *Chung Kuo, Cina* " (1972, 220'), whereas close-ups exist very rarely in Chinese painting, except by Buddhists (Antonioni, 1972)³. He also admits that his method of shooting was sometimes illegal, which he hopes to justify from a Western point of view in relation to the difficulties of shooting in China (even though it was precisely the Chinese government that invited him to come and film) : " *It is perfectly true that Antonioni, probably exasperated by multiple prohibitions, bragged in his film that he had managed to avoid surveillance. The viewer tends to applaud : the Western tourist visiting countries suspicious of photographers always has an irresistible desire to photograph what is forbidden - even if it is totally uninteresting. A question of civilization, culture, morality and politics : the camera is par excellence in our countries a voyeur's tool, to such an extent that it has been necessary to develop a whole body of legislation to protect the rights of the individual* " (Gauthier, 2010 : 119). The positioning of the viewer would therefore be important in the method of discovering a country through documentary. For his part, Joris Ivens, an iconic figure in documentary filmmaking, and even more so about those who deal with territory since he filmed China for many years, testifies to the difficulty of finding his place there : " *From one end of my stay to the other, I remained a foreigner condemned to film a conventional China at a distance. I had tried to avoid exoticism : not too many rice fields, not too many bamboos and horn roofs, and when, on rare occasions, I had come closer to the reality of life, I had not been able to stop and stay and try to deepen it. Yet I had touched China and it had touched me* " (Destamque & Ivens, 1982: 188). He wanted to move away from a tourism approach, while making it as sensitive and fair as possible. The director's positioning as a man who comes to a new country places him as a traveller (Paquot, 2014).

This distinction between a tourist or a traveller proposed by Thierry Paquot (2014) presents two different ways of meeting a territory; it also suggests two ways of apprehending it before being on the ground, of referring to it. The imagination that prevails before coming to these distant lands influences the apprehension of the country to be discovered. The fiction of novels or films is also part of the imagination of cities. " *Marcel Proust and Thomas Mann are part of Venice. Many Italian cities will always have something Stendhalian for those who visit them* " (Augé, 1997: 131). Poets and novelists exchange with the space of these cities. These territories are understood in a subjective and social way at the same time. The cinema also participates in it⁴ ! " *Poetry* " comes from the Greek " *poïen* " : " *to do* ", " *to create* ". The creative action is valid for the filmmaker as well as for the spectator or visitor. The city and its imagination shape an urban fabric and a social space that is recounted throughout the world (Augé, 1997 : 134). Thus, the multitude of screens that can overlap in St. Mark's Square in Venice, for example, or in millions of other emblematic places of tourism, come to constitute themselves another image of the city, between the imaginary and the virtual. This global and intangible vision modifies a more

³ In terms of cinematographic language influenced by the territory, Guy Gauthier also explains, with regard to Raymond Depardon, who often films the désert : " *The film* " within walls " *testifies to an opposite concern : they are films of speech, in which sound recording takes the predominant place. Films limited by the horizon are on the contrary films where the image unfolds all its powers. Speech is rare, sound comes back to the atmosphere* " (Gauthier, 2010 : 226). The territory is approached here in terms of sound, further away from the image of the postcard that tourists often evoke. The sound atmosphere depicts the territory (Murray Schafer, 1977).

⁴ A city like Arrezzo in Umbria, for example, has installed explanatory panels in all the squares where Roberto Benigni's " *La vita é bella* " (1997, 116') was shot, thus playing on this link between cinema, city and tourism...

local approach to these tourist territories. Yves Winkin even comes to speak of the " *enchantment* " of the place for the tourist : " *One could suggest that if the euphoria is related to interaction, and limited like this in time and space, the enchantment would refer to places and landscapes created with the intention of inducing a state of euphoria in those who frequent them* " (Winkin, 2001 : 215 - 216).

The imagination linked to tourism offers a way to fictionalize the city. In this context, territorial storytelling is a particular facet that tends to go towards territorial marketing. This time, it is another way of looking at a territory, closer to the economic and tourist dimensions, which also influence its development. Storytelling sets up " *narrative gears, whereby individuals are led to identify with models and conform to protocols* " (Salmon, 2007 : 16 - 17). Political communication champions or marketing strategists use them to catalogue a precise territorial vision to be put forward for development. However, the critical mind develops with the writing or reading of any story. A " *narrative responsibility* ", dear to Paul Ricoeur, is affirmed for the author as well as for the reader or spectator who decides whether or not to believe in it. This form of territorial storytelling has been a little too common; however, it reveals communicative realities for understanding a territory. Roland Barthes (1957) already denounced the alienating dimension of media stories. Web 2.0, and the participatory situations it multiplies, as new media forms, would tend to enhance emancipation, while at the same time, this approach to mass media inhibits. It is then a question of trying to interpret and distance a narrative in order to humanize and democratize the public narrative space, even if it becomes fragmented. " *The model of imposing a narrative imposing its vision of the world, as conceived by Salmon, would now be outdated, as the multiple circulating narratives can be captured in diverse environments by users used to interact with the fragments of narratives they collect in a fragmented way on multimedia media* " (Lits, 2015 : 36). Territorial storytelling, if it is a way of reciting space in a very coded and chaotic way at the same time, raises the question of the most appropriate narrative format according to the territories and what one can (wants) to say about it.

G rard Genette defined the notion of narrative as " *the representation of an event or series of events, real or fictional, by means of language, and more particularly written language* " (Genette 1966 : 152). In line with this territorial storytelling approach," (...) *we propose not to see a break in territorial communication strategies by moving from discourse to narrative, but rather to consider the narrative as a marker of the recomposition of the communities' discourse. Indeed, G rard Genette points out that while these two terms are theoretically opposed (discourse is characterized by being attached to a transmitter, while in the narrative, no one speaks, so the reader does not wonder who speaks to receive the meaning), in most literary texts, this dichotomy is not observed. The insertion of narrative elements into the discourse does not, however, make it possible to remove any reference to a speaker, who remains present in the background (Genette 1966 : 161)* " (Le Corf, 2015 : 148). The story about a territory is rather transformed into a discourse through the words of the inhabitants. While storytelling has valued a form of territorial narrative, it finally appears that it is the fact that it is carried by a person in a documentary that makes it possible to better embody the described space. Interactions and the affirmation of point of view determine the territorial approach to them. The more specific example of the tourist who travels supports this. Storytelling is a technique used to promote this economic windfall on which local authorities rely to increase their budgets. The definition of who comes as a tourist rather than a

true traveller (Paquot, 2014) contributes to the evolution of the territory in terms of development, as well as in terms of social, psychological, economic and heritage representation, etc.

Conclusion

So fiction is in our reality. Whether it reveals a true imagination or helps to romanticize the world, it contributes to a better understanding of the world. It even leads tourists, in the form of a very coded imagination, to believe that they can " *travel the world* "! From fiction as the mimetic art of a reality, to an individual or collective imagination that is easily locked into social representations, the presentation of the territories covered already tells many stories. Storytelling involves a staging or plotting that the documentary film will affirm. " (...) *Every narrative, every account, every speech, is a discourse. What delimits a discourse from the rest of the world, and at the same time contrasts it with the " real " world, is that it is necessarily held by someone* " (Colleyn, 1993: 113). Starting from the territory, the story that is made of it becomes decisive. The human being is the only one who can compose a narrative because he is able to make a neurological representation of time and to verbalize. To understand a story is to conceive a representation of the world. And formulating it in a group takes an even greater part in this representation of the world that we would build together, whether during the shooting or during the debate at the end of the screening of the documentary film between all the spectators (Cyrulnik, 2015).

It is then a question of constantly redefining the place of creation (*poïen*) insofar as speaking of a territory is always a bit like fictionalizing it, if only through the subjectivity of the words spoken : " (...) *By sticking to the discourse and its production, we have a better understanding of the nature of the relationships it maintains with its other, the real. Doesn't language have the status of involving, but of posing as other than itself, the reality of which it speaks ?* " (De Certeau, 1975 : 38). The incarnation of the person who holds the speech on the place (verbal or not), filmed it, with all his will to describe a reality as well as possible, thus suggests a distance that transforms the narrative into a " *re-présentation* " (Bougnoux, 2006: 53).

While the political dimension was valued from the beginning with the definition of public space, it is now returning through the affirmation of the participant in this cinematographic adventure (whether he is a filmmaker, filmed or spectator). The status of citizen is essential by taking a critical look at a site that may seem cliché *a priori*, whether suburbs or tourist places, and that the documentary film helps to better understand.

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