AGAINST GLOBALIZATION

Buying blood diamonds and altering global capitalism. Mads Brügger as unruly artivist in The Ambassador

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Abstract
This article argues that it is necessary to distinguish between different modalities of globalisation to ensure that we do not simply equate globalisation with global capitalism. Following this, this article conducts a study of the way in which Mads Brügger’s documentary film The Ambassador challenges global inequality in relation to finance and mobility. This critique of global inequality is staged through a peculiar “unruly artivist” provocation. Mads Brügger fictionalises his character and over-identifies with the corrupt diplomat seeking to buy and trade blood diamonds. The film is unruly because it rejects any explicit ethical claims and norms of participation, thus reproducing the self-same patterns of inequality that it seeks to document. This article studies the film as an unruly documentary that applies satire, cartoon aesthetics, and culture jamming as its artivist strategy. This strategy is one of provocation. The provocation enters the mediatised public sphere, in which it simultaneously is condemned and works as a critique of the global mobility and financial inequality that it portrays.

Keywords: globalisation; multimodality; non-places; artivism; provocation; politics of nature; satiric documentary; overidentification; participation; culture jamming

In 2011, the journalist and filmmaker Mads Brügger bought diplomatic credentials and travelled to the Central African Republic (CAR) as a diplomat for Liberia. Officially, he was there to start a factory that produces matches, but unofficially he investigated how diplomats can travel unhindered with vast reserves of so-called blood diamonds. Brügger’s quest to become an ambassador and buy blood diamonds was simultaneously documented by Brügger in The Ambassador.1

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The film shows that it is possible to buy diplomatic passports, which not only enable easy global travel but also—with the right credentials—include privileges such as diplomatic immunity. The corrupt system of diplomacy and diamond trading exploits the resources of some of the poorest and most heavily indebted countries in the world. In the film, this exploitation is conducted not only by corrupt diplomats and politicians and the former colonial master, France, but also by the filmmaker himself.

Mads Brügger buys his diplomatic passport and credentials from Willem Tijssen, a Dutch dealer. After he receives the passport, he travels to CAR. Already at this point, he does not have to pass through airport security. However, throughout the film, we witness the difficulties he experiences with finalising the papers, which will constitute him as Liberia’s official representative in CAR and grant him further diplomatic privileges. The film is a documentary, but rather than unravelling a history of corruption, it documents Brügger’s attempt to become a diplomat by means of corruption. In the end, he is appointed “Honorary Consul General of the Republic Liberia to Bangui, Central Africa Republic.” President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signs the official papers (Figure 1).

In this article, I investigate the critical potential of Mads Brügger’s intervention and the documentation of this, and focus on two intertwined topics: first, the conceptualisation of “being against globalisation”; and, second, the film’s peculiar reproduction of global capitalist inequality.

To understand the critique raised by the film, the article argues that it is necessary not to adopt a blind rejection of globalisation as such. Rather, when approaching the topic “against globalisation,” it is necessary to distinguish between different modes of globalisation to ensure that we do not simply equate globalisation with global capitalism. When maintaining this distinction, it is possible to suggest that “another globalisation is possible.”

Thus, the article investigates The Ambassador as an attempt to alter global capitalist inequality, not from an anti-global communitarian principle but, rather, as an example of a critical approach to global inequality that overcomes “the great divide between globalisation and anti-globalisation.”

The Ambassador’s critique, the article suggests, represents an attempt to alter a specific mode of global capitalism by means of a peculiar strategy.

The film renders use of a peculiar and highly controversial strategy. Rather than presenting the viewer with an “authoritative documentary” that investigates a particular issue and poses an ethical claim, the film reproduces the self-same patterns of capitalist inequality that it seeks to document. This article suggests that the film is a derivation of the satiric documentary. The filmmaker becomes
the self-same character that he investigates, and he appropriates both a cartoon aesthetics and strategies from culture jamming. Finally, this article discusses the controversial strategy's political impact in relation to its mediatised reception and the negotiation of global capitalist inequality.

AFRICA’S APPENDIX

Mads Brügger investigates diplomacy, corruption, and the illegal diamond trading. In the CAR, Brügger establishes contact with the owner of a diamond mine, Monsieur Gilbert. Brügger invests in Monsieur Gilbert’s mine, which is not without problems, since the deal and the contract (of which Brügger never receives a copy) are illegal. Throughout the film, you wonder if Monsieur Gilbert will ever deliver the promised diamonds. In the end the diamonds are delivered, which officially turns Brügger into a diamond dealer. The trade is important because it reveals how a good profit is yielded while the local resources are exploited. Thus, the trade illustrates the problematic field of diamond trading in conflict areas.

Diamonds are an integrated part of the global capitalist market economy, and the annual diamond trade is worth approximately $7 billion. Diamonds are judged by the four C’s: carat, clarity, colour, and cut. However, there is another C at stake: conflict. Conflict or so-called blood diamonds are rough diamonds traded by rebels to finance armed conflicts. Blood diamonds have fuelled and funded wars, massive deaths, and refugee crises in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Côte d’Ivoire. Plenty of research documents the role of diamonds in fuelling warfare, and it is estimated that 4 million people have died in wars involving conflict diamonds over the past few decades. The controversial status of diamond mining is a concern of the United Nation’s Security Council, for which a panel of experts has conducted several reports.

Despite the knowledge of the problematic character of blood diamonds, illegal trade is a major problem that continuously contributes to the exploitation of local economies. This is also the case in the countries where Brügger intervenes, Liberia and CAR. Brügger becomes the honorary consul general of the Republic of Liberia, a country that has a history of smuggling blood diamonds. Liberia was the first independent republic on the African continent. Freed slaves from the United States founded it in 1847, and the ties to the United States have remained strong. Historically, Liberia has been the route of choice for smuggling diamonds, primarily because of its use of the US dollar as its official currency. Liberia produces hardly any diamonds. But fictional mines act as a cover for the smuggling of diamonds from other countries. Throughout the 1990s, the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone channelled diamonds through Liberia. The diamonds were sold as Liberian in Belgium—despite Liberia’s lack of diamonds: “Between 1994 and 1998, over 31 million carat, worth US $1.96 billion—enough to pay off most of the Liberian national debt—were recorded at Belgian customs as Liberian.” The money was channelled into the wars in both Sierra Leone and Liberia.

When Ellen Johnson Sirleaf took office as president in 2006, Liberia was recovering from years of civil war, the national debt was in the neighbourhood of $3.8 billion, and the debt-to-export ratio was more than 2700 percent at the end of 2004. This is 18 times higher than what the International Monetary Fund finds to be sustainable. “This is a bit like saying that Liberia was in 18 times worse financial trouble than the average country on the verge of bankruptcy.” This obviously entails that Liberia is a state struggling to recover, but as becomes evident in The Ambassador, the recovery process is problematised further by a deeply corrupt political system. The mere appointment of Brügger indicates that Liberia does not have the international political representation that normally follows diplomatic assignments.

Rather than representing Liberia’s interests as a diplomat, Brügger pursues diamonds in the CAR, a country that, if possible, is in an even worse state than Liberia. In the words of Brügger, CAR is “Africa’s appendix,” a country that is “not even a failed state, because that would require that there had ever been a state.” CAR’s human development index (HDI) is 0.343, which gives the country a rank of 179 out of 187 countries with comparable data. Contrary to Liberia, CAR holds vast reserves of minerals and diamonds, but even after it became independent from France in 1958, it remained within the French Community. Afterwards, Bokassa, the
so-called cannibal emperor, led the country into an even worse state.

CAR suffers from both years of violent rule and continuous submission to its former colonial master, France. This is, in *The Ambassador*, documented through several meetings (filmed with hidden camera) with the head of national security (who is later assassinated). He continuously emphasises the French dominance, maintains that France uses CAR as its private warehouse, and claims that France “puts stones in the shoes” of CAR to prevent CAR from extracting the resources themselves. He also refers to France’s and French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s roles as the protectors of Bokassa, support that stopped only after Bokassa conducted a massacre on schoolchildren in April 1979.

When Brügger was in CAR, François Bozizé, who had been president since March 2003, ruled the country. In the film, Brügger pays Bozizé’s son Jean-François money, in a so-called envelope of happiness, to ensure that he will meet with Brügger. Thus, the film documents the corruption, underdevelopment, and nepotism that later, in 2012–2013, resulted in rebellion. The rebellion was led by the Séleka Coalition that overthrew Bozizé on 24 March 2013. Rebel leader Djotodia was elected president on 18 March 2013 and a new government was appointed. Yet he was not recognized by Affrican leaders, who on a meeting in Chad, on 3 April 2013, proposed a transitional council that should lead to an election in September 2013. Djotodia was elected transitional president. Thus CAR is currently characterized by interim government, heavy fighting and human rights violations.

Thus, Mads Brügger intervenes in a country that is tainted by its colonial past, has a history of violent rule, and is heavily indebted and in submission to structures of global capitalism. This obviously raises the important question of how to address globalisation and the attempt to alter certain structures of global inequality.

**AGAINST THE GLOBAL DIAMOND TRADE**

As mentioned in the introduction, I argue for a separation of the conceptual understanding of globalisation as an overall empirical process and different modes of global flows. When globalisation is understood as an overall empirical process, the key question is interconnectedness, and accordingly globalisation can be thought of as:

A process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – asserted in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interactions, and the exercise of power.\(^\text{15}\)

Interconnectedness, described as the flows of goods, people, symbols, and information, is nothing new. However, the contemporary epoch of globalisation is distinctive since it can be defined by a radical increase in the extensity, intensity, velocity, and impact propensity of global interconnectedness. This interconnectedness is an ordinary empirical procedure. Most scholars distinguish between several far-reaching processes of global interaction. Arjun Appadurai, for instance, posits five global scapes: (1) mediascapes, (2) ideoscapes, (3) technoscapes, (4) finanscapes, and (5) ethnoscapes.\(^\text{16}\) These typologies of global interconnectedness, which of course are intertwined, are the empirical driving forces of globalisation, out of which arises a new spatial and temporal geography. Accordingly, globalisation must be conceptualised and studied as a multimodal process of interconnectedness.

In the case of CAR, the multimodality of globalisation is crucial because it renders evident that CAR to a great extent is marginalised. *The Ambassador* thus shows that while Mads Brügger is a part of the ethnoscape that makes up the shifting global world and the finanscape that moves money across borders, the inhabitants of CAR are precluded from these global modalities. Thus CAR is currently characterized by interim government, heavy fighting and human rights violations.

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Monetary Fund is highly unequal. The G7 countries hold 45.29% of the total votes, and other industrialised countries 15.5%. Africa only holds 5.67% of the total votes. Thus, given CAR’s lack of functioning state structures, it is a peripheral nation whose only means of representation is Africa as a peripheral region.

Yet, this perspective on CAR as a peripheral nation in a peripheral region does not fully account for the workings of globalisation. To understand the impact of globalisation, it is necessary to move beyond a mere ascertaining of empirical processes. Globalisation is multilayered, and the empirical processes of interconnectedness are objects of interpretation and cultural meaning production. This is in correspondence with a tradition within the study of globalisation that emphasises that global interconnectedness is accompanied by de-territorialisation, but that, in turn, it provokes a range of re-territorialisation processes. The perspective on globalisation is thus transformalist.

The reinforcement of the structural power of the industrialised world has led to a widespread idea that globalisation is inseparable from capitalism. Hardt and Negri, for instance, criticise Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls, Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, David Held, Joseph Stiglitz, and Thomas Friedman for preaching a reform of the global system “without ever calling into question the structures of capital and property.” Claiming that these theorists preach a social democratic vision that proposes a social reform that is merely another reinforcement of capitalism and the structures of the “republic of property,” Hardt and Negri claim that: “Reforming or perfecting the republic of property will never lead to equality and freedom but only perpetuate its structures of inequality and unfreedom.” Thus, for Hardt and Negri, any system that fails to renounce private property will exclude or subordinate those without property, because: “Private property creates subjectivities that are at once individual (in their competition with one another) and unified as a class to preserve their property (against the poor).”

The problem with concepts of globalisation as inherently capitalist is that the distinction between people of property and a multitude of the poor is not a condition inherently tied to globalisation. Capitalism, of course, a mode of globalisation, but it does not fully account for globalisation. The exclusive focus on globalisation as capitalism remains without much social content, and accordingly one realises that not only do other modes of globalisation exist but also it is possible to alter the particular mode of capitalist globalisation—exactly with reference to other modes of globalisation. It is thus necessary to hold open the possibility of another form of globalisation, which could aim to be more egalitarian, because, in the words of Doreen Massey, “another globalization is possible.” This prevents us from falling into easy dichotomies between the local as good and anti-capitalist and globalisation as damaging capitalist structures. Capitalism is not something that can simply be opposed by the local: first, because this too often results in nationalism, and, second, because it is simply impossible to maintain a local space untouched by global impulses. This does not, of course, entail that it is impossible to challenge modes of globalisation, such as global capitalist inequality, but this cannot be done from a naïve communitarian perspective. Thus, when investigating consequences of globalisation, it is necessary to identify the various modalities of globalisation and the particular involvements and processes of de- and re-territorialisation in that mode. In relation to CAR and The Ambassador, this entails identifying the “power-geometry of it all.” Massey suggests that different social groups and individuals are placed in different ways in relation to global flows and interconnections; some are more in charge of it than others, and some are effectively imprisoned by it. The strength in this argument is that it does not rely on a distinction between those who are globalised and those who are not. Furthermore, by maintaining a view not only to the various modalities but also to the way in which they are subjected to processes of de- and re-territorialisation, it becomes evident that global inequality can be challenged. Accordingly, CAR’s unequal power-geometry—evident in its ethno- and financescapes—is not only documented in The Ambassador but also countered through other global modalities (i.e. by activating alternative ideoescapes in the global mediascape).

**NON-PLACES INTERRUPTED**

As mentioned in this article, The Ambassador concerns an unequal power-geometry, particularly in relation to global mobility and finance, yet this can be specified further. The fact that Brügger
can travel without passing through airport security points at a particular modality of globalisation in which global mobility and finance constitute a non-place. Marc Augé identifies non-places as a result of super-modernity. These non-places designate two complementary realities: “spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces.”

The diplomat world in which Brügger intervenes is a non-place where spaces are formed in relation to the mending of international relations. Brügger has access to global mobility and finance, and he has the financial opportunity to access and bribe people in power. However, he can also leave the country when “Africa’s appendix” gets to be too much. He is thus a part of a diplomatic world of mobility; it is a dense network where “transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating.” Thus, diplomats have privileged access to the global network of mobility, and they rarely settle down permanently.

This privileged access to global mobility and finance does not only belong to diplomats and filmmakers. The politicians and high-ranking ministers in Liberia and CAR who receive money bribery throughout the film are also in some sense on the receiving end of the global financial system, or at least they manage to bend a system which disfavours their region. Also, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is at the receiving end of global capitalism in a complex manner. She has recently received the Nobel Peace Prize and is internationally renowned. Nevertheless, her access to the non-place of mobility and finance is restricted. She is the leader of a country on the verge of bankruptcy. Thus, she is somehow imprisoned by global inequality. Her influence in the International Monetary Fund is, for instance, almost non-existent (cf. the percentagewise voting power discussed in the “Against the Global Diamond Trade” section).

These restrictions in access to global mobility and finance are important because they reveal how non-places co-exist with anthropological spaces. Augé writes, “As anthropological places create the originally social, so non-places create solitary contractual.” This contractual solitude appears in The Ambassador, in which Brügger becomes increasingly isolated. He stays in his residency and—besides two Pygmy assistants—avoids personal encounters. However, the distinction between non-places and anthropological places, as Marc Augé originally proposed it, tends to be too all encompassing. According to Augé, only the latter is anchored historically, is relational, and concerns identity. Yet any locality is tainted with history, relations, and identity for those who live and work there. Thus, when I apply the concept of non-places to the study of global mobility and finance, I maintain that even though non-places signify a particular space of mobility and temporary abodes, they are also always a part of local spaces. Non-places and the local spaces are, in my perspective, mutually constitutive.

Despite non-places and hierarchical spaces being mutually constitutive, they often exist in hierarchical relations. In The Ambassador, Brügger holds a privileged position, while for instance the people who work in the diamond mines in CAR provide the diamonds and contribute to a huge and illegal industry, yet remain imprisoned by the time-space compression of global capitalism. But this hierarchical relation does not mean that local spaces cannot interrupt non-places. In the film, we witness a literal imprisonment when Brügger visits the mine in which he intends to invest. Monsieur Gilbert, the owner of the mine, has several wives, and one of the wives is “lent” (it is unclear how permanent the arrangement is) to a diamond dealer. When Monsieur Gilbert and Brügger are about to leave, she wants to leave with them but is not allowed. Monsieur Gilbert tells her not to “let these white men see this.” Later, it is explained that the wife is to ensure that the diamond trade flows smoothly. Thus, even her prostitution and imprisonment are in a disturbing way contributing to the global capitalist diamond trade. Yet her local, exploited appearance is also the most disturbing scene in the film. Her presence on the screen contradicts the extravagant nature of the diamonds that are traded illegally, and the indexicality of her body and her imprisonment create a reference to alternative global ideoscapes.

POLITICS OF NATURE

There has been a habit of saying that while politics is about conflict, nature and science involve certainty. However, this distinction between nature as a matter of fact and politics as a matter of concern is dissolving. Ecological issues are one of the hottest topics of public controversies and are
accordingly conflated with political conflicts. I raise this shift towards a politics of nature because *The Ambassador* continuously refers to CAR’s subsurface as rich in mineral resources such as diamonds, gold, uranium, and oil. This seems to confer that nature is a matter of concern and that when it comes to the politics of nature, everybody—even the filmmaker—is a subject of concern.

*The Ambassador* renders a conflict of mineral resources visible between the capitalist exploitation of areas of natural resources and the “local inhabitants” of CAR, who are prevented access to the resources of the land they inhabit. This conflict refers to both the former colonial status of CAR and contemporary attempts to extract the country’s resources. The conflict is evident when Brügger warns the Pygmies about the Chinese and the French. These people, Brügger says, are sneaky, evil, and oppressive, and they want to steal your resources. But Brügger similarly seeks to exploit CAR’s resources.

The conflict over natural resources is underlined by the use of Woody Guthrie’s famous folk tune “This Land Is My Land” (1940). The song accompanies a scene where Brügger sails with his two assigned Pygmy assistants, and it is rendered more than evident that the land—and especially its resources—does not belong to the Pygmies. This particular scene is furthermore of importance because it clarifies that we cannot assume that matters of fact are in fact facts. When it comes to the politics of nature, the divide is not between science and politics but rather between “trusted and not trusted representatives.” The question is thus: Who has an authoritative voice in a field where everyone can be accused of having a particular interest in the country and its natural resources? This is of importance because Brügger is a documentary filmmaker, yet he does not act obviously as a trusted representative; rather, he seems to reproduce the capitalist structures of inequality.

**THE UNRULY ARTIVIST: A JOURNALIST AND FILMMAKER WITH NO SCRUPLES**

Even though film has no transcendent authority in itself, the idea of the filmmaker as a trusted representative is a crucial aspect of the way we relate to film. This film is controversial exactly because we expect filmmakers to be well behaved. Brügger intentionally breaks with the institutional codes and norms as both a journalist and a filmmaker. The film quotes Isaac Goldberg as saying, “Diplomacy is to do and say the nastiest things in the nicest way.” Yet this quote is twisted. Brügger embodies the exploitative capitalist, and he, so to speak, tells us the nastiest things in a nasty way. This is the reason why the film, despite documenting problematic issues, is controversial. Brügger’s intentional provocations are the reason why I characterise him as an unruly artist. He deliberately stages and documents provocations, but the provocations question prevailing norms of global connectivity. The provocations can be interpreted as “struggles over symbolic power, as they attempt to overrule current standards and subvert authority and hegemonic positions.”

Thus, it is through the documentation of his provocation that Brügger exhibits resistance towards the norms of global financial inequality.

Brügger’s provocations are manifold. For one thing, he is committing a criminal act by buying blood diamonds, but the main concern, raised by critics, is the way in which he interacts with his subjects. In the participatory documentary mode, the viewers are often left with the sense that they “are witness to a form of dialogue between filmmaker and subject that stresses situated engagement, negotiated interaction, and emotion-laden encounter.” These negotiated interactions do not occur in *The Ambassador* because Brügger does not reveal his motive to his subjects and because the subjects are rarely aware that they are being filmed: “As a dedicated diplomat I had no problems with filming my meetings in secret.” In a sense, the film carries traits from the observational documentary mode: It does not provide a linear explanation or analysis. On the contrary, it provides an open-ended documentation of its topic. But this observational mode is disturbed because Brügger does not “appear to be invisible and non-participatory.” Rather, he is the central character, and his interactions are deliberately provocative. The intentional provocation and the fact that meetings are filmed in secret comprise a risky strategy. It usually “compels the provocateur to initiate the provocation, which is a conflict, in such a way that the third parties do not blame him/her for the outbreak.” However, because Brügger imitates structures of global inequalities, he does not avoid being blamed.
On 19 March 2012, I received an email from Willem Tijssen, the broker through whose agency Brügger acquired his diplomatic passport (Figure 2). The email links to a blog written by Tijssen.37 In the blog, he calls for justice and claims to be a victim of media violation and that his supposed crime is not proved: “The irony is that Brugger and his team acted corruptly to make a film about invented, not proved, corruption.”38 Tijssen also attempts to explain Brügger’s motive:

It cannot only be a desperate quest for fame and money. There must be more behind his pretenses—a deeper meaning. For example, why does he insult Africa and ridicules the TWA Pygme people? Maybe the following theory gives an explanation. The film is made with public money from the Danish Filminstitute [sic] and produced with a budget of €1 million by Lars von Trier (Zentropa), a controversial Danish film-director who admitted to journalists at the Cannes Film Festival in 2011 to being a Nazi, understanding Hitler […] Maybe under influence of Von Trier’s ideology, Brugger purposefully took several steps beyond the rules, both written and unwritten. With misplaced intellectual superiority Brugger windbags the TWA with a sick Hitler joke about champagne and forces them to listen to whale sounds.39

Tijssen’s blog is obviously an attempt to clear his name and reputation. In a similar manner, the Liberian top lawyer and chairman of the ruling Unity Party, Varney Sherman—in the Danish newspaper Politiken—defends the 35,000 dollars that he received. He claims that he, as a lobbyist, did his best to get the appointment for Brügger, but terminated the working relationship and returned the money. Sherman thus accuses Brügger of bad journalism, a claim that Politiken supports.40

The film has, however, also raised other controversies. In various reviews—particularly in the Danish media—the relation to the Pygmy people has been a topic of concern. Brügger, for instance, informs the Pygmies that he wants to start a match factory while being fully aware that this is only a cover story. Thus, Brügger’s attitude is problematized in several reviews:

But is it okay that Mads Brügger travels into an African country as diplomat, when he records his experiences and thus simultaneously becomes a documentary filmmaker and journalist? Is it okay that Brügger obviously lives out an old fetishist boyhood dream about tramping around in long leather boots and cigarette pipes in the dark Africa? Of course it is not. This is why ‘The Ambassador’ is so incisive. (my translation)41

Between the blacks, who are either stupid or sly, and the whites, who without exception are shabby and sneaky, Mads Brügger is left to shine and play the part as sprechstallmeister in his own absurd circus, while the pygmies are left in a mess. (my translation)42

As these quotes indicate, the critique of the film concerns two main issues: its dealings with its
subjects and its “journalistic form.” Furthermore, the reviews indicate that The Ambassador abandons the traditional notion of film as inhabiting an ethical superior space untainted by the power structures of global financial inequality. This reveals that we expect that filmmakers take on an anti-capitalist position or provide positive models for cooperation. If they do not follow these expectations, they are believed to confirm an unequal dialogue, a mistake that Grant Kester calls dialogical determinism. Brügger is an unruly artivist. He does commit dialogical determinism, but this is not merely an expression of a fallacy but a particular strategy for political intervention. I do not argue that Brügger’s project is unproblematic. But we need to investigate it as being something more than simply a matter of either a good or a bad representation.

**POLITICAL SATIRE**

As mentioned in this article, The Ambassador was critiqued for exhibiting bad journalism. This criticism is—I would argue—at least partly due to a particular fictionalised strategy. So far, I have referred to Mads Brügger. But this is imprecise. In Liberia, in CAR, and in his other interactions documented in the film, he uses his middle name, Cortzen, as his surname. It is as Mr Cortzen and not as Mads Brügger that he impersonates a big-time criminal. As Mr Cortzen, he abandons notions of journalism: “From this point there is no going back. Here ends my life as a Danish journalist.”

The use of hoaxes is often conceptualised as fiction that renders use of documentary discourse through the terms of mock-documentaries, or fake documentaries. As such, the film is perceived as “a fiction film received as a documentary with a twist” and primarily viewed as a self-reflexive film about the documentary film process. The Ambassador “can easily educate viewers about the uncertain links among objectivity, knowledge, and power,” but it is not fiction. Brügger might stage the filmed event, and the events might not have occurred without his presence, but this does not make it into fiction. But neither does it entail that fictional elements do not occur. Mr Cortzen has intents, such as buying and trading blood diamonds, which one must assume is not shared by Mads Brügger. As such, the film uses fictionalisation as a rhetorical strategy. Brügger fictionalises his own character, yet the people with whom Mr Cortzen trades do not recognise this fictionalisation. The viewers of the film will, however, probably recognise that Mr Cortzen is a fictionalisation of Mads Brügger and interpret the film as a documentary that applies a fictional strategy.

The transformation into Mr Cortzen points to what Amber Day describes as a renaissance in the realm of political satire. Day defines the satiric documentary:

> The satiric documentary, as I have termed it, combines a playful, satiric style with unabashed polemic, resulting in a product rooted simultaneously in mass culture entertainment and political activism, guerrilla theatre and documentary exposé. These elements are brought together through a narrative centered around the filmmaker's own personal quest, tracking his interactions and explorations.

In many ways, The Ambassador fits this definition of the satiric documentary. It does combine mass culture entertainment and political activism, and it does centre on the filmmaker, Brügger/Cortzen. It is a uniquely performative form that injects Brügger’s body (as Cortzen) into the traditional political world, as he “physically engages, interrogates, and interacts with the real.” Mr Cortzen imitates the structures that the film investigates. By becoming a corrupt diplomat, he can enter places that he would not be allowed into as a journalist. Rather than trying to enter the world of diplomacy and blood diamonds as a journalist or to be a fly on the wall, Mr Cortzen is “a pterosaur on the wall,” and as such the film reproduces that which it resists. Brügger simply over-identifies with the corrupt diplomat. Yet this is also a political strategy: “sometimes, at least—overidentifying with the explicit power discourse—ignoring this inherent obscene underside and simply taking the power discourse at its (public) word, acting as if it really means what it explicitly says (and promises)—can be the most effective way of disturbing its smooth functioning.”

Thus, Brügger simply acts as if global financial inequality is a matter of fact, and this over-identification is not only what grants him access to the diplomatic world but also what points out the flaws of the system.
The idea of overidentification is interesting as a strategy related both to the documentary and to human interaction as such. Social reality is a process of negotiation, which is based on the premise that everything passes through a system of cultural recognisability. Thus, it is a point that one cannot avoid expressing: Even if you seek to avoid making any claims and insist on remaining an objective observer, you are still a part of the negotiation of the social reality. This realisation is, in *The Ambassador*, taken to the extreme. Mr Cortzen does not attempt to be neutral; rather, he performs the extreme version of a capitalist.

The prominent role of the filmmaker is not unusual in the satiric documentary. Yet whereas Day describes satiric documentaries as mostly being structured around a first-person narrator, who places himself in front of the camera as the everyman stand-in for the audience, Brügger places himself/Mr Cortzen in front of the camera as a stand-in for what he wants to reveal. Usually, the filmmaker in satiric documentaries plays two roles: on-screen, he plays the fool asking the most revealing questions, while, as the filmmaker, he also gets to be the preacher, providing the context and framing for how these interactions will be interpreted. However, there might be a split between Brügger and Mr Cortzen, but none of these acts as “the preacher.” This is (another) reason why the film is controversial: By removing “the preacher” from the equation, the film removes a stable point of identification for the audience. Instead, we are presented with a world in which everyone is accountable and no one, not even the filmmaker, acts as a trusted representative.

**CINEMATIC COMIC AESTHETICS: DRESSING UP AS A NEO-IMPERIALIST**

The film’s fictionalised and satiric elements are not restricted to the name Mr Cortzen. As mentioned, he embodies the stereotypical capitalist. This embodiment is dependent on a particular “cinematic comic aesthetics.” As Cortzen, he becomes the image of excess. He dresses up in long leather boots, smokes and drinks, and makes other people carry his umbrella. Even though the movie is a documentary, it renders use of so-called cartooning. This is most evident in Mr Cortzen’s overidentification with the global villain. By wearing leather boots, Mr Cortzen resembles Dr Mueller, a villain from the *Tintin* cartoons. In *Tintin*, Dr Mueller supports the Nazis and is involved in controversies regarding fuel and oil. Cortzen also wears the Phantom’s good ring. The good ring supposedly marks those who are under the Phantom’s protection. But the ring bears resemblance with the Nazi swastika, and you cannot help but wonder if the people in CAR are really under his protection. This comic aesthetic contributes to creating Mr Cortzen at the haughty villain and reaffirms that he is not a representative to be trusted. This is underlined at a “Pygmy Party”—hosted by Minister Gaston. The Pygmies—including the children—have been served alcohol to make them more cooperative. When the Pygmies are dancing, Cortzen states: “This is what the NGOs don’t understand: you can really have fun in Africa” (Figure 3).

Mads Brügger’s identity is fictionalised in Mr Cortzen. This identity correction and overidentification with global inequality question the people with whom Mr Cortzen meets. These people include CAR’s Minister of Defence (and son of

![Figure 3. Mr Cortzen at the “Pygmy Party”](image-url)
President Bozizé) Jean-François Bozizé; Liberia’s Foreign Minister Toga McIntosh, who appoints his honorary consulship; and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who signs the appointment (Figure 4).

Furthermore, the trade with diplomatic papers is proven to be extensive. This entails that the notion of diplomacy undergoes an identity correction. The type of diplomacy that Mr Cortzen represents does not represent any interests besides its own.

By means of imitating and interacting with figures of corruption, The Ambassador can be understood as appropriating culture jamming. Culture jamming is a strategy that turns power structures against themselves by re-contextualising meaning. Culture jamming takes the form of popular or capitalist culture, but with the intent of subverting that culture. Leah A. Lievrouw has considered how culture jamming has moved from street art to online activism. In this perspective, The Ambassador has appropriated street art and online activism. But The Ambassador appropriates culture jamming without subverting capitalism; rather, it reproduces the capitalist structures of inequality. The question is, of course, if this reproduction holds any critical potential.

CONCLUSION: AGAINST GLOBALISATION AND THE CRITICAL POTENTIAL OF THE AMBASSADOR

As this article has suggested, critiquing globalisation is not simply a matter of globalisation versus anti-globalisation. We need to identify different modalities of globalisation, and if we attempt to challenge specific modes of globalisation, we need to identify the behaviour and interaction of various agencies. The article has investigated Mads Brügger’s attempt to buy diplomatic credentials and blood diamonds as a specific intervention in a modality of global mobility and finance. The film documents that global mobility and finance constitute a peculiar non-place, which is intertwined in hierarchical relations with the “local inhabitants” of Liberia and CAR. This particular mode of global capitalism is concerned with mineral resources. Bruno Latour has suggested that it is necessary to distinguish between “trusted and not trusted representatives.” However, The Ambassador makes it evident that there is no authoritative voice to be trusted in the politics of nature—not even the filmmaker.

Mads Brügger applies a fictionalised strategy in which he, as Mr Cortzen, over-identifies with the world of global finance, mobility, and inequality. Yet, analysis of The Ambassador shows that this is a satiric, artistic strategy that appropriates culture jamming to expose the flawed system of global finance and mobility. Brügger’s unruly strategy relies on intentional provocation. He is a filmmaker, and he reproduces capitalist patterns of inequality. This entails that Brügger is “a ‘between between’ in a single system.”60 This potentially leaves the audience between the expectation that documentary filmmakers must not exploit people and the realisation that this is merely a reproduction of reoccurring patterns of inequality. Thus, the film potentially generates dissensus. According to Jacques Rancière, “Dissensus is a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or ‘bodies’.”61 Dissensus is a political strategy because it reframes the given and because we cannot avoid redistributing and negotiating between the expectation that the filmmaker abide to ethical codes and the actual dealings in CAR. This redistribution

Figure 4. Mr Cortzen and Foreign Minister Toga McIntosh and Minister of Defense Jean-François Bozizé.
is problematic because we cannot identify with Brügger. Identification always centres on both similarities and differences. But in The Ambassador, there is no way to identify through similarities. We cannot simply identify with the good guy, Mads Brügger, because he is inseparable from Mr Cortzen, who is awful.

The film also holds a political potential because it is mediatised (i.e. its form is adapted to accommodating media logics such as news criteria and circulation). Thus, the film is not only screened in cinemas, but also documented and discussed in news media around the world. It is difficult to predict the impact of mediatisation. When The Ambassador was released in 2011, it appeared as if it was an example of a mediatised documentary that would pass by unnoticed. As mentioned in this article, it was discussed and also critiqued in the Danish media. But in July 2012, the film came in the limelight in Liberia. The Liberian government released a press statement saying:

The government of Liberia finds this action by Mr. Cortzen to not only be immoral but criminal and offensive to the government and people of Liberia.

The Liberian government threatened to institute legal actions against Mr Cortzen but simultaneously promised to investigate the diplomatic network:

[The Government of Liberia is seriously reviewing all appointments of honorary counsels, and shall immediately revoke the commission of anyone who is suspected of having acquired same under false pretenses.]

Thus, one of the consequences of Brügger’s intervention is a public statement promising to correct the misdeeds. Promises are easily made, but The Ambassador has been caught by various Liberian media. Thus, a consequence of the mediatisation of The Ambassador is that it is circulated and taken in different directions. The Liberian media take the case in two directions: (1) The Ambassador is inscribed in a broader critique of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who is accused of placing family and friends in high-ranking positions (the appointment of her son as president of the national oil company is, for instance, critiqued on the same page as problems with corruption that are exemplified by The Ambassador); and (2) the Press Union of Liberia focuses more specifically on the diplomatic scandals—exemplified by The Ambassador—and urges the government not to downplay the issues and to take action:

It should make a lot of sense for the government to primarily institute swift action against those within its borders to dismiss any notion that it is engaged in diversionary tactics to evade the alleged wrongdoing of its officials.

This indicates that The Ambassador cannot be dismissed as merely a documentary film of entertainment. Rather, satiric media texts “have become part of (and a preoccupation of) mainstream political coverage, thereby making satirists legitimate players in a serious political dialogue.”

Thus, The Ambassador can be interpreted as readjusting the posing of empire and globalisation as contradictory explanations of the current conjuncture and as challenging the distribution of global capitalist inequality. Yet the stakes are high: The strategy reproduces inequality, and if this reproduction is to be justified, it must be embedded in dissensus and be mediatised. That is, the success of the project depends on its circulation and mediatised afterlife.

Notes
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3. David Held and Anthony McGrew, Globalization/Anti-Globalization: Beyond the Great Divide (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 161.
4. Ib Bondebjerg, Virkelighedens fortællinger. Den danske tv-dokumentarismes historie [Narratives of reality. The history of Danish TV-documentary] (København: Samfundslitteratur, 2008).
5. Franziska Bieri, From Blood Diamonds to the Kimberley Process: How NGOs Cleaned up the Global Diamond Industry (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.; Jakkie and Christian Dietrich, Angola’s War Economy: The Role of Oil and Diamonds (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2000); Ian Smillie, Dirty Diamonds: Armed Conflict and the Trade in Rough Diamonds (Oslo: Fafo Institute for Applied
Buying blood diamonds and altering global capitalism

25. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 94.
26. Ibid., 78.
27. Ibid., 94.
28. Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, 112; and Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture* (London: Sage, 1995), 94.
29. Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011 [2004]).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Unruly documentary artivism is a strategy that is applied, in different ways, by filmmakers such as Renzo Marthen, *The Yes Men*, Jafar Panahi, Michael Moore, Bill Maher, Sascha Baron Cohen, Rithy Panh, and Joshua Oppenheimer. The concept is developed further in Selmin Kara and Camilla Møhring Reestorff, “Unruly Documentary Artivism,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 2014, forthcoming.
33. Olivier Driessens, “Do (Not) Go to Vote! Media Provocation Explained,” *European Journal of Communication*: 4, http://sagepub.com/content/early/2013/07/10/0267323113493253 (accessed July 12, 2013).
34. Bill Nicholls, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 123.
35. Ibid., 112.
36. Driessens, “Do (Not) Go to Vote!”
37. Willem Tijsen, http://bruggertheambassador.blogspot.com (accessed March 20, 2012); the blog has since been removed.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Andreas Lindquist, “Liberisk topadvokat anklager Mads Brügger for journalistisk fusk [Liberian top-lawyer accuses Mads Brügger of dubious journalism],” *Politiken*, August 16, 2012, http://politiken.dk/kultur/film/EC1719489/iberisk-topadvokat-anklager-mads-brgger-for-journalistisk-fusk/; and “Dokumentation: Løs emalene mellem Brügger og advokaten her [Documentation: Read the emails between Brügger and the lawyer here],” *Politiken*, August 16, 2012, http://politiken.dk/kultur/fakta_kultur/EC1720384/dokumentation-laes-emalene-mellem-brgger-og-advokaten-her/.
41. Per Juul Carlsen, “Langt hinsides stregen [Far beyond the limits],” *DR Filmland*, October 5, 2011. http://www.dr.dk/P1/Filmland/Anmeldelser/2010/Ambassadoren.htm; the original quote: “Men er det i orden, at Mads Brügger rejser ind i et afrikansk land som diplomat, når han filmer sine oplevelser og dermed samtidig bliver en dokumentarist og journalist? Er det i orden, at Brügger tydeligvis udelver en gammel fetichistisk drøne-drom om at rendre rundt med lange ridestøvler og cigarettrør i det mørke Afrika? Selvfølgelig er det ikke det. Det er lige præcis derfor ’Ambassadoren’ rammer så hårdt.”
42. Kim Skotte, “Komiker farer vild i Afrikas Blindtarm [Comedian gets lost in Africa’s Appendix],” Politiken, October 4, 2011. http://politiken.dk/ibyen/film/anmeldelser/ECE1412086/komiker-farer-vild-i-afrikas-blindtarm/. Original quote: “Midt mellem de sorte, som enten er dumme eller bondesnu, og de hvide, som uden undtagelse er nogle lurvede luskepetere, kan Mads Brügger sole sig i rollen som spechstallmeister i sit eget absurde cirkus, mens pygmæerne sejler deres egen sø.”

43. Grant H. Kester, Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

44. Brügger, The Ambassador, 2.54.

45. Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Reality (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

46. Alexandre Juhasz and Jesse Lerner, F Is for Phony. Fake Documentaries and Truth’s Undoing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2006), 8.

47. Ibid., 12.

48. Louise Brix Jacobsen, Stefan Kierkegaard, Rikke Andersen Kraglund, Henrik Skov Nielsen, Carsten Stage, and Camilla Mahring Reestorff, Fiktionalitet (Copenhagen: Samfundslitteratur, 2013), 83.

49. Amber Day, Satire and Dissent: Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 1.

50. Ibid., 99.

51. Ibid., 2.

52. Brügger described his strategy as “the pterosaur on the wall” at a talk at Aarhus Filmmøkk on January 12, 2012.

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55. Amber Day, Satire and Dissent: Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 99.

56. Michael Cohen, “Dick Tracey: In Pursuit of a Comic Book Aesthetics,” in Film and Comic Books, ed. Ian Gordon, Mark Jancovich, and Matthew P. McAllister (Mississippi, Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 13–37.

57. Ibid.

58. Brügger, The Ambassador, 36.36.

59. Leah A. Lievrouw, Alternative and Activist New Media (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 73.

60. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, Posthuman Bodies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 10.

61. Jacques Rancière, Dissensus (New York: Continuum International, 2010).

62. Richard Jenkins, Social Identity, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008).

63. Stig Hjarvard, En verden af medier. Medialiseringen af politik, sprog, religion og leg [A World of Media. The mediatization of politics, language, religion and play] (Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur, 2008); and Manuel Castells, Communication Power (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

64. Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism, “Liberia Condemns Danish Journalist’s ‘Diplomat’ Documentary Detailing Corruption,” Frontpage Africa, July 30, 2012, http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3744:liberia-condemns-danish-journalists-diplomat-documentary-detailing-corruption&catid=67:news&Itemid=144 (accessed August 29, 2012).

65. Ibid.

66. Rodney D. Sieh, “I Am Not a Vindictive Person: Prez Sirleaf Opens up on Family, Critics, Legacy,” Frontpage Africa, August 7, 2012, http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3802:im-not-a-vindictive-person-prez-sirleaf-opens-up-on-family-critics-legacy&catid=58:interview&Itemid=118 (accessed August 29, 2012).

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68. Day, Satire and Dissent, 1.

69. Ibid., 2.