

Mixed Modes

An Exploration of the Similarities and Differences Between the Defining Characteristics of Documentary and Fiction

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Abstract

Scholarly discourse surrounding the moving image suggests the actuality of clearly defined filmic modes. Regarding the filmic mode of documentary; scholars focus on the debate between documentary's associations with 'actuality' and 'objectivity' versus the subjective nature of film as an artistic construction. According to Bill Nichols (2001: 38) documentary, unlike fiction, has the potential to influence due to our assumption that documentary images and sounds are an authentic representation of the world. Conversely, we assume fiction is a "fabrication" (Renov 1993: 7) that aims to project an illusion of the world. In the 21st century, we are witnessing the emergence of filmmakers who are vocally challenging the established characteristics that embody the documentary and fiction modes. In documentary, filmmakers are exploring the boundaries of categorisation by openly embracing subjective intentions and processes commonly associated with fiction. Fiction filmmakers have attempted to harness the 'truthfulness' of documentary; the byproduct of which being the manifestation of the docudrama sub-genre in popular culture. These new developments call for an investigation that leads to a better understanding of the fundamental reasons behind them. Drawing from a theoretical framework and the film component as a case study, this report investigates the characteristics that define these filmic modes and examines how these characteristics relate to objectivity, subjectivity and actuality. This paper interrogates the perceived differences in their defining characteristics, and explores the strong indications that documentary and fiction films are products of a similar intention and process.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the Masters of Arts to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before any other degree or examination to any other university.

13th Day of May 2015

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Zimema Mhone', is written on a light-colored background.

Zimema Mhone

Dedication

To my son Marcel, I hope you will discover a dream and do everything you can to see it become a reality.

Acknowledgments

I thank my supervisor; your professional guidance has been appreciated. My mother and sister, thank you for everything. This report could not have been successful without the support of my wife. Thank you all.

Contents

- 1 Introduction (Pages 7 – 8)
 - 1.1 Introduction
- 2 Documentary Characteristics (Pages 8 – 18)
 - 2.1 Etymological Origins
 - 2.2 Defining Documentary
 - 2.3 Objectivity and Subjectivity
 - 2.4 The Historical World
- 3 Fiction Characteristics (Pages 18 – 23)
 - 3.1 Etymological Origins
 - 3.2 Defining Fiction
 - 3.3 Author and Audience
 - 3.4 Fiction Realism
- 4 Docudrama Characteristics (Pages 24 – 29)
 - 4.1 Genre Origins
 - 4.2 Defining Docudrama
 - 4.3 Ethics
- 5 Film Findings and Conclusion (Pages 29 – 34)
 - 5.1 Broken Things – Methodology
 - 5.2 Broken Things - Concept, Filming and Editing
 - 5.3 Conclusion
- 6 References
- 7 Filmography

Introduction

A vast body of scholarly discourse has been written on documentary and its relation to fiction (Nichols, 1994, 2001; Bruzzi, 2000) and varied opinions, theories and suggestions as to what documentary is and is not in relation to fictional film abound (Nichols, 1991; Godmilow and Shapiro, 1997). This paper will examine characteristics that are commonly associated with the documentary and fiction genres respectively, and address discourse surrounding their strengths or weaknesses in supporting a continued distinction between the modes. It will develop its main argument that documentary should be categorised as fiction as it is ultimately a product of a similar process. This argument will claim that the documentary genre is elusive due to the fact that it does not have the ability to meet the requirements of the characteristics that define its differences from fiction. It will establish that these are requirements relating to issues surrounding objectivity and truth.

Jelle Mast (2009: 233) calls fiction and documentary “the most fundamental aesthetic dichotomy”. The public and academic perception of documentary is impregnated with associations with fullness and completion, knowledge and fact, and its ability to accurately explain the social and historical world. However, I argue that the documentary genre can also represent incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, with no transparent attempt to explain the social and historical world. It can be a reflection of personal worlds and their subsequent subjective construction. Platina (1997: 10) claims that the general public see documentary as “unmanipulated”, “transparent” and delivering the truth. However, Bruzzi (2000: 4) acknowledges that the viewer accepts that documentary is a “negotiation between reality and representation” and acknowledges its fictional elements; but this fact does not affect their categorisation of documentary as separate from fiction. Trevor Ponech (1999: 8) states:

“a wholly non-fictional motion picture (documentary) need not be wholly factual. It need not contain a single purely objective, unmanipulated representation or statement. It need not be on any particular kind of subject-matter; nor need that which it depicts really exist, more or less as depicted, ‘out there’ in off-screen reality. Nor is documentary... defined by the particular conventions of norms – pertaining to form, style, content, truth or objectivity – according to which it is produced, classified, and/or interpreted. A cinematic work is non-fiction if and only if its maker so intends it.”

Further opposing the notion that fiction and documentary are two distinct forms, Nichols claims, “documentary and fiction, social actor and social other, knowledge and doubt, concept and experience share boundaries that inescapably blur” (Nichols, 1994: 1). Renov (1993: 3) further illustrates that “documentary shares the status of all discursive forms with regard to its tropic or figurative character and employs many of the methods and devices of its fictional counterpart”.

Nichols' (2001: 20) claims that "documentary is not a reproduction of reality but a representation of it. It stands for a particular view of the world", and this notion supports my argument that documentary is, like fiction, a subjective representation of reality. In summary, this paper will examine the differences between "representing an imaginary world and the historical world, between, telling a story and making an argument, between establishing subjective character identification and establishing an impression of objectivity or responsibility toward a historical subject" (Nichols 1991: XV). Finally, this paper will look at the emergence of docudrama; an important case study of an attempt to simultaneously embody the positive elements of both documentary and fiction by combining their unique codes and conventions its production approach. I will explore its potential to provide insights into the future of documentary if it continues to experiment with fictional devices. The positive elements that were produced by innovative approaches to conventions may inspire similar approaches in documentary and fiction with proven positive effects.

Documentary Characteristics

2.1 Etymological Origins

It is important to look at etymology to give historical relevance to academic discourse and public perceptions that currently define documentary as a genre. To find etymological origins of the term *documentary*, one can examine the noun *document*. The term *document* originates from the mid-fifteenth century Latin word *docere*, which means to 'teach' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, online), and suggests an association with factuality from its origins. During the eighteenth century the term *document* also developed an association with written 'evidence' with regards to 'written instruction' and 'official paper' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, online). Furthermore, the process of 'documenting' constituted a means of objectifying evidence that could be presented as proof in a court of law. This suggests that the connection of the term *document*, and subsequently *documentary*, with objectivity and truth has been always been present.

Most academics attribute the current use of the term *documentary* to John Grierson, who stated in a review of Robert Flaherty's *Moana* (1926) that the film had "documentary value" (Grierson as cited in Rosen, 1993: 65). However, Carl Plantinga (1997: 26) claims the term *documentaire* was widely used in France in the 1920s before Grierson's review and the terms *documentary material* and *documentary works* were used in relation to nonfiction film as early as 1914. It is in the late twentieth century edition of the Oxford English Dictionary that the word *documentary* first appears as a noun in relation to nonfiction film: "factual, realistic, applied esp. to a film or literary work. Based on real events or circumstances, and intended primarily for instruction or record purposes". Based on the above research I acknowledge that, illustrated by its etymology, the original definitions of documentary are embedded within the rhetoric of objectivity and truth. However, I argue that the relevance of this relationship is diminished by my observation that etymology cannot convincingly adapt to contradictory evidence that emerges over time. Despite the ability to give important historical insight, this failure to universally agree on the origin of a term suggests etymology cannot provide a solid foundation for developing a definition of documentary and one must look at other sources in addition.

2.2 Defining Documentary

It is important to review relevant academic discourse that attempts to define the true essence and meaning of the documentary form. Ellis and McLane (2005: 1) state that the documentary can be defined by five characteristics that set it apart from fiction and these characteristics also adhere to objectivity. These characteristics (subjects, purposes, forms, production method and technique, and audience response) embody the common techniques and principles that are associated with documentary. In brief:

Subjects: Ellis and McLane (2005: 2) claim that documentaries usually involve “public matters rather than private ones” where “people and places in them are actual” and topics transcend individual concerns, feelings, relationships and actions.

Purposes: Documentaries can be defined by the notion that they are not created to entertain an audience and their aim is to inform with a hope that the viewer will consider making better decisions in their lives (Ellis and McLane, 2005: 2).

Forms: Documentaries “do not employ plot or character development as means of organization as do fiction film makers”, but rather extract and arrange its content from life experiences (Ellis and McLane, 2005: 2).

Production method and technique: Realist methods and techniques such as shooting on location, using natural light and using non-professional actors define the documentary. The modus operandi and principles behind *how* the footage has been captured is of utmost important (Ellis and McLane, 2005: 2).

Audience response: Ellis and McLane (2005: 3) stress that documentaries can also be defined by the fact that they offer “an effect on attitudes, possibly leading to action” by going beyond delivering a purely “aesthetic experience”. The audience responds to the subject matter of the film rather than the artist or the maker of the film (Ellis and McLane, 2005: 3).

These characteristics embody the values, codes and conventions originally adopted by the Scottish filmmaker and theorist John Grierson, who is considered the father of documentary and the first to define the genre (Little, 2007). When Grierson began to formulate his stance some forms of nonfiction that existed in his time were actual film, ethnographic film, films of exploration, propaganda film, cinema variety and direct cinema. Grierson argued that all nonfiction films should not be called documentaries, however, he claims that all films must adhere to unique criteria (Grierson, 1966). To begin with, he argued that the documentary is, most importantly, defined by its unique ability to propagate social change by exposing social problems and injustices (Grierson, 1966: 82). Grierson argued that, unlike fiction, documentary

had the power to convince an apathetic mass public to actively engage in political activity (Little, 2007:4). He saw documentary as a form of social and political persuasion and an agent for social reform and education, potentially more influential in society and culture than church and school, servicing society as a whole and shaping public opinion (Little, 2007:3). He often refers to the mass public and was opposed to any value documentary would offer an individual, as he claimed, “individualism is a yahoo tradition largely responsible for our present anarchy” (Grierson, 1966: 82). Documentary would therefore be a “cross section of reality which would reveal the essentially co-operative or mass nature of society” (Grierson, 1966: 82).

In Grierson’s view documentary is a form of art that, as opposed to fiction, has a social obligation and, therefore, cannot afford the pursuit of pure entertainment or what he called “aesthetic decadence” (Grierson, 1966: 84). Grierson elaborates that “documentary, with its streets and cities and slums and markets and exchanges and factories has given itself the job of making poetry where no poet has gone before it, and where no ends, sufficient for the purposes of art, are easily observed” (Grierson, 1966: 84). Further in line with Ellis and McLane’s characteristics outlined above, Grierson (1966: 80) championed the use of non-actors and real locations. He asserts that the original scene and the original actor are the best guides to a film’s interpretation of the modern world, as the fictional counterpart is merely “in subject and approach a dramatized presentation of man’s relation to his institutional life” (Grierson, 1966: 80). However, I will argue against the validity of his convictions behind making this statement, when I point out in the next sub-section that Grierson, and other documentary pioneers, appear to contradict themselves by accepting the use of staged footage.

Grierson (1966: 84) claims that the camera has the ability to capture actuality as it unfolded. However, the statement also included that documentary is “the *creative* (my emphasis) treatment of actuality” (Grierson, 1966: 13). Grierson never fully explained the meaning behind the use of the word “creative”, making this statement controversial amongst academic discourse on documentary, as “creativity” or interpretation is considered to contradict the ability to accurately depict “actuality” or reality. Meaning, if a work of representational art is filtered through the consciousness of the artist, the final product will always reflect subjective elements via the applied use of creativity. However, Grierson may be referring to actuality in a way that the raw material used by the documentary filmmaker is, by nature, the visual record of visible elements of reality. This means he believed that, due to his codes and conventions, the truth is embedded in the material when it is filmed and this truth overpowers any associations with fiction. Perhaps the claim was only intended to offer an insightful artistic perspective on the distinction between “the fiction film (not thought to be primarily a treatment of actuality) and the nonfiction film (not thought to be creative or dramatic)” (Platinga, 2005: 105).

Inspired by Griersonian objective views on documentary, practitioners and academics have generated a lot of definitional activity within documentary discourse that support its claims to truth and argue for its individual categorisation. Douglas Gomery and Robert C. Allan (in Dirk Eitzen, 1995: 81) call it “the communication, not of imagined things, but of real things only”. Carl Platinga (1997: 13) claims documentary is “in technique, a subordination of form to content”. Richard Meran Barsam (in Dirk Eitzen, 1995: 81) defines documentary as “a film with a message”, while Michael Renov (1993: 13) simply describes documentary as “film of fact”.

Nichols states that documentary is essentially a product of various institutions and the finished product is molded by whatever “the organisations and institutions that produce them make” (Nichols, 2001: 23). He identifies these institutions and organisations as; the companies that commission them, the practitioners that produce them, the text and the audiences that watch them (Nichols, 2001: 23). Given the diversity of societies, this notion suggests that the definition of documentary will constantly change as it is redefined when new institutional and organisational values are adopted. Nichols is not alone in this view as John Ellis (2005: 1) suggests that “documentary is a slippery genre to define” and Jelle Mast (2009: 233) labels documentary “an open concept”.

Perhaps in response to the notion that documentary may be impossible to define, Nichols (2001) offers a possible solution with his stratification of documentary into six distinct modes. These modes (expository, poetic, reflexive, observatory, participatory and performative) offer definitions that account for varying production techniques and principles. Each mode emerged at a particular time period during the evolution of the documentary form and modified to changing notions regarding how a documentary should be made. As a result of their bond with current trends, some modes have fallen out of favour and some modes are currently being used. However, Stella Bruzzi (2000: 4) argues against their usefulness by claiming that such a “family tree cannot begin to do justice to the range of techniques displayed by the documentary”. Therefore, the Griersonian view that documentary can be adequately defined by a set of principles and techniques that differentiate it from fiction continues to be contested. However, I argue that we can still look back to John Grierson and acknowledge that the majority of his defining characteristics are still relevant, as they continue to influence the public and academic perception that “documentaries explore actual people and actual situations” (Rabiger, 1998: 1).

2.3 Objectivity and Subjectivity – From Robert Flaherty to Ari Folman

The debate regarding the influences of objectivity and subjectivity in documentary date back to the 19th century (Bruzzi 2006, 2000, Scheibler 1993, Renov 1993, Nichols 2001, Eitzen 1995, Winstons 1988, Rosenthal 1988 and Ruby 2005). Subjectivity is commonly associated with

fiction and documentary is commonly associated with a non-interventionist objective stance that delivers a “truth claim” (Barnouw, 1974, Scheibler, 1993). Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1990: 88) states that “a documentary film is shot with three cameras: 1) The camera in the technical sense; 2) the filmmaker’s mind; and 3) the generic patterns of the documentary film”. These three points suggests that the documentary can be as subjective as fiction. However, some documentary filmmakers appear to disregard the negative elements that subjectivity, in production and approach, embeds in their final products.

Early documentary filmmakers were criticised for the subjective methods they used in production. For example, Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) used staging with the subjects of the film who were asked to re-enact their daily routines. Staging events is an established method used in fiction and it embeds associations with artifice when used in documentary that contradict its truth claim. However, despite the negative associations it was given at the time, *Nanook of the North* (1922) has emerged as the originator of the documentary mode and is widely accepted as an objective portrayal of Eskimo life (Little 2007:6). I argue that this acceptance could be a result of early filmmakers insisting that their intentions had a superior motive and responsibility to society that justified using any means necessary. For Flaherty, the intention was “to bring inaccessible ethnographic, man versus nature exploration to cinema” (Little, 2007: 6). It can therefore be concluded that, regardless of the methods used, he succeeded in achieving his goal.

Central to the debates on the claim that documentary is the “creative treatment of actuality”(Grierson, 1933:8), is the notion that by using their creativity the filmmaker is making subjective decisions that will alter the final product. Winston (1995: 11) claims there is a contradiction within the phrase because “the supposition that any “actuality” left after “creative treatment” can now be seen as being at best naive and at worst a mark of duplicity”. However, Grierson (in Paget 1998:117) states that documentary has “no such background in the story and the stage as the studio product so glibly possesses”. This statement suggests that he never intended creativity to be associated with fiction, as he does not consider fiction to be in the same universe as documentary making a common use of methods impossible. I argue that creativity is influenced by the environment that the artist experiences everyday and these influences create an ideology. Nichols (1981) asserts that there is an ideology that exists within processes of communication and operates as a constraint, limiting people to certain positions. Nichols further asserts that:

“Ideology is how the existing ensemble of social relations represents itself to individuals; it is the image a society gives of itself in order to perpetuate itself. These representations serve to constrain us necessarily; they establish fixed places for us to occupy that work to guarantee coherent social actions over time. Ideology uses fabrication of images and the processes of representation

to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have” (Nichols 1981:1)

Ideology is a construct of the imagination and is an individual’s representation of the society they live in. Society and culture act as limitations and constraints that create an ideology with no fixed definitions and meanings (Hall 2007:1). I argue that these structures influence the fundamental ideas an individual has about their existence and these ideas are what creativity uses to make a decision.

My main argument is strongly contested when Nichols (1991) claims that documentary is defined by an epistemological longing in human nature, as it satisfies a desire for knowledge. Objectivity determines the accuracy of facts represented in the discourse on subject matters a film addresses. Winston (1988:23) argues

“It is all methods of recording on celluloid any aspect of reality interpreted either by factual shooting or by sincere and justifiable reconstruction, so as to appeal either to reason or emotion, for the purpose of stimulating the desire for, and the widening of human knowledge and understanding, and truthfully posing problems and their solutions in the sphere of economics, culture, human relations”

By satisfying the human need for knowledge, documentary creates an emotional bond with its audience by delivering feelings of empowerment associated with education. As observed by Nichols (1991: x) this is illustrated by the fact that viewers, after having seen a documentary that offers an education by increasing knowledge will only discuss the subject matter of the film and never the documentary itself. The strength of any bond with human instinct suggest that the relationship between documentary and objectivity will perpetually reassert itself in public opinion by an automatic mechanism powered by human nature that will resist modification. By accepting these claims, a strong argument for maintaining a clear distinction between documentary and fiction is presented.

However, Nichols acknowledges the difficulties in achieving a truly objective representation and he argues that his subjective modes (participatory, reflexive and performative) give the filmmaker opportunities to fully embrace subjective values and techniques (Nichols, 2001: 101). Modern filmmakers appear to have embraced these modes and are testing their limits. This new era of experimentation is defined by the transparent use of subjective methodology that successfully avoids associations with artifice that threaten to categorise their films as fiction. Films that cross the fiction and documentary boundaries include *Sous Les Bombes* (2007) by Philippe Aractingi, *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) by Errol Morris, *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) by Michael Moore and *Waltz With Bashir* (2007) by Ari Folman. For example, *Waltz with Bashir* (2007) is a documentary about an Israeli soldier who struggles to reconstruct his memory of the 1982 war in Lebanon and Beirut. This film represents a historical event through the sole use of animation,

which, by all definitions should categorise it as fiction, but it has managed to maintain a documentary status. When Nichols (1994) suggests it is difficult to separate documentary and fiction, he agrees with my claim that this is because they are simply products of the same process. Grierson agrees that the “only world in which documentary can hope to achieve the ordinary virtues of an art (is when) we pass from the plain descriptions of natural material, to arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of it” (Grierson as cited in Hair 2006:242).

2.4 Representing Reality

Despite the arguments against documentary’s ability to achieve an “truth claim”, academic discourse supporting the actuality in documentary realism abound. Philip Rosen (in Renov, 1993: 235) refers to documentary as “an arena of meaning centering on the authority of the real”. Renov (1993: 22) addresses the efficiency in its use of semiotics and says that the documentary sign is similar to the referent and is also indexical, thus, accurately reflecting real people and events. Renov (1993: 8) adds that reality as the signified is the ultimate achievement of the documentary, suggesting documentary achieves impressions of authenticity and believability through the iconography of the real. However, supporting my main argument, Nichols (2001: 20) claims “documentary is not a reproduction of reality but a representation of it. It stands for a particular view of the world”. Meaning, that the nature of representational art is artificial and will be molded to reflect the view of the filmmaker. Plantinga (1997: 17) agrees that the reality documentary depicts is made subjective by the act of taking an assertive stance towards its projected state of affairs. Torben Grodal (in Jerslev, 2002: 83) agrees that all filmic presentations make assertions of existence, “any framing or presentation is in principle an assertion”. However, Eitzen (1995: 86) argues that an assertive stance “cannot be put into a text by the producer, once for all time. It is not something that is built into texts at all”. However, Nichols (2001: 4) states that the act of representation is to make an argument in itself, suggesting that, no matter how accurate; it will always offer reasons for contention.

Audiences experiencing the first films ever made were affected by the impression of realism they imparted. The advent of photography took realism to new levels with the indexical nature of the relationship between the photographic image and its referent, its similarity to the object it reproduces, giving the photograph an affective power (Van der Vliet, 2009: 9). This *vraisemblance* or reality effect increases in film, where the rapid series of photographic images gives an impression of life-like motion. French film theorist André Bazin suggested in his essay on the nature of photography, *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*, that humans’ enduring quest to mirror reality through the arts had finally been made possible by the advent of film. For Bazin, film’s ability to capture reality was the “preservation of life by a representation of

life" (Bazin, 1967: 10). He identifies a "mummy complex", a desire to preserve oneself and one's world for posterity, as being the foundation of the arts, and observes the "duplication of the world outside as evidence of humanity's desperate drive to record and preserve the world through its replication in the visual arts" (Bazin, 1967: 10). Therefore, by providing faithful photographic representations of its subjects in motion, it could ultimately satisfy the human appetite for self-reproduction. For Bazin (1967: 12), the camera presented a way in which this enduring need to record and preserve the world could be met supposedly without human intervention, by "mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part". He further asserts "for the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man" (Bazin, 1967: 14).

Searle argues against the above notion and argues for the positive use of creative interference by man. He states that the filmmaker negotiates a universe governed by laws of physics, where:

"We live in a world made up entirely of physical particles in the field of force. Some of these are organised into systems. Some of these systems are living systems and some of these living systems have evolved consciousness. With consciousness comes intentionality, the capacity of the organism to represent objects and states of affairs in the world to itself" (Searle, 1995: 7)

This gives the filmmaker an advantage of evolved consciousness and an ability to represent reality that is logical and ordered. Searle goes on to suggest that there are two types of reality:

"In a sense, there are things that exist only because we believe them to exist. I'm thinking of things like money, property, government, and marriages. Yet, many facts regarding these things are objective facts in the sense that they are not a matter of your or my preferences, evaluations, or moral attitudes. I'm thinking of such facts as that I am a citizen of the United States that the pieces of paper in my pocket is a five dollar bill, that my younger sister got married on December 14th, that I own a piece of property in Berkeley, and that the New York Giants won the 1991 super bowl. These contrast with facts that Mount Ernest has snow and ice near the summit or that hydrogen atoms have one electron, which are facts independent of any human opinion" (Searle, 1995: 1).

Searle divides facts into "institutional facts" and "non-institutional facts" (Searle, 1995:1). Institutional facts (beauty, ugliness, madness, wealth, poverty, money, buildings and so on) rely on human agreements while non-institutional facts, which are not influenced by human opinion and attitudes, exist independently of human agreement (Searle, 1995:1). However, Eitzen (1995:82) argues that non-institutional facts are still subjectively influenced by our beliefs, assumptions, goals, and desires.

Brian Winston argues for a “truth claim” when he equates the camera with the scientific instrument, because of “the long history of pictorial representation as mode of scientific evidence” and the “tendency of modern science to produce data via instruments of inscription whose operation are analogous to the camera” (Winston as cited in Renov, 1993: 37). Nichols (2001: 39) also observes a scientific element in documentary, which he calls “a discourse of sobriety in our society” offering “ways of speaking directly about social and historical reality such as science, economics, medicine, military strategy, foreign policy and educational policy”. Winston states, “the work of science is to create setups, arrays which produce inscriptions which can be used in texts and scientific papers” (Winston as cited in Renov, 1993: 37). Therefore, the accuracy in the equivalent film text that documentary achieves can equate to results in science and the use of creative means to achieve these results does not diminish their value. Comparing the role of the filmmaker to the scientist by illustrating their importance in applying meaning to data it produces, where scientific data must be accompanied by the scientist who offers verbal commentary, thus creating an “audiovisual spectacle” (Winston as cited in Renov, 1993: 41). Winston (in Renov, 1993: 42) claims reality can be achieved by making use of the text (visual), re-producing scientific instrument (camera) and accompanied by the scientist (filmmaker) interpreter who makes commentary.

In his article *Ontology and Appearing: Documentary Realism as a Mathematical Thought*, Hair (2006) makes a more specific relationship that aligns documentary with science, when he claims a relationship between the thought processes of a documentary filmmaker and the logic of mathematical science, while also addressing the ordering logic of realism. Hair argues, “analogous to the case of foundational mathematical orientations, being is established following a particular axiomatic decision that shapes the presented universe in the light of certain artistic convictions” (Hair, 2006:241). Therefore, the artist must create a referent similar to what they actually refer to, using an established system in their signs that corresponds to a logical system the audience understands. If they do not correspond, the audience will have no reference points to help them believe what they are seeing is real or constructed.

Hair (2006:242) further argues for the positive influence of subjectivity, when he asserts that “the infinity of the material world to be represented is given order or form as a result of the artistic conviction or vision, which can be understood as an ontological decision that orients the production of a truth that structures the particular being-there of the world produced by the documentary”. This statement is addressing the important role of the filmmaker in making sense of the infinite possibilities. By applying vision in the thought process of making a decision, the filmmaker will adhere to mathematical methods that can be effectively applied to achieve realism.

Nichols (1991: 165) argues that realism in documentary is a set of conventions for visual representation that all documentary text subscribes to, being the negotiation of an agreement made by the viewer between the text and the historical referent. Renov (1993: 2) adds that referents in “every documentary claims for itself an anchorage in history; the referent of the nonfiction sign is meant to be a piece of the (real) world”. These statements suggest that documentary realism differs from fiction realism and exhibits its own characteristics that should be acknowledged. Whereas fiction realism aims to “make a plausible world seem real” by veiling the method of its construction; documentary realism serves to “make an argument about the historical world” with the filmmakers intentions intertwined in the text (Nichols 1991: 165).

Type of cinema	Type of world	Authorial address via	Viewer works to interpret
Fiction	Imaginary	Style and Plot, Realism	A Singular Moral
Documentary	Historical	Commentary and Perspective, Rhetoric	An Argument

Figure 1 (adapted from Nichols 1991: 166)

Figure 1 illustrates how fiction realism has aesthetic concerns and primarily relates to sensibility and form, using a combination of objective and subjective voices to convey a sense of moral ambiguity (Nichols 1991: 166). Nichols (1991: 166) claims that a key distinction from fiction is documentary’s use of an “economy of logic”, that suggests a rational approach to re-create a structured world that has been ordered by reason which elevates its generally perceived status, a status above a film governed by aesthetics. It can be argued that documentary realism, when taking into consideration its claim to present accurate and thought provoking experiences by means of logic and rationalism using familiar referents to a reality the audience understands, makes it a “professional code, an ethic, and a ritual” (Nichols 1991: 166).

However, Godmilow (Godmilow and Shapiro, 1997: 81) asserts that documentaries do not educate, as much as they “edify” and challenges documentary filmmakers to “acknowledge their interpretative intentions” that are influencing their work. Dirk Eitzen (1995: 86) argues that claims to truth are never embedded in the text of a documentary film and documentaries are perceived to make “truth claims” due to a unique set of visual codes. Bruzzi (2000: 4) calls documentaries “performative acts predicated upon dialectical relationship between aspiration and potential tension” and that these acts are illustrated in three levels which make problematic documentaries ability to representing reality truthfully. The first level is where subjects, aware of being filmed, perform for the camera. The second level is one where the filmmaker directly addresses the camera. The final level arises during the editing stage, where

shots are carefully selected to offer an intentional reading. Therefore, arguing that documentary realism is a construct that is influenced by a desire to perform for the camera in the subjects being filmed, and the desire of the filmmaker to perform for the audience in the production and editing decisions made.

However, Bruzzi (2000: 3) suggests documentary must continue to fight for its truth claim, as “sometimes it seems necessary to remind writers on documentary that reality does exist and it can be represented”. Nichols (2001: 39) further suggests that we should accept that documentary achieves the most truthful representation of reality that can be found in the visual arts, when he asks: “if we cannot take its images as visible evidence of the nature of a particular part of the historical world, of what can we take them?”. I conclude that discourse on realism in documentary makes a strong argument for the continuation of a distinction between documentary and fiction. However, as I will discuss later, their similarities are presented when I observe that fiction also attempts to make “truth claims” of its own.

Fiction Characteristics

3.1 Etymological Origins

This paper will again briefly review the etymology of a word, in this instance: *fiction*. According to *Oxford English Dictionary* the word *fiction* finds its origins in the 14th century Latin term *fictio*, a derivative of the verb *fingere*, which means to “shape” or “make”. However, it can also be associated with the 13th century term *ficcio*, which means “invention”. The *Oxford English Dictionary* goes on to claim fiction is “a false belief or statement, accepted as true because such acceptance is considered expedient”. These definitions suggest that the term *fiction* has always been intertwined with the notion of fabrication and illusion.

3.2 Defining Fiction

Fiction provides an illusion of an ordered world and is “an essentially classical structure based upon a fixed plot, defined characters and a satisfyingly predictable ending” (Candeloro, 2000: 16). Generally, any given film belongs to a defined sub-genre (i.e. western, horror, musical or science-fiction) that displays different codes and convention that are “opposed to experimentation, novelty, or tampering with the given order of things” (Candeloro, 2000: 16). I argue that, though variables may exist within these sub-genres, the audience expects familiar referents that are bound by a strict set of conventions these sub-genres provide and loyalty to conventions, rather than reality as in documentary, is of paramount importance. Fiction film is a visual result of how elements of narrative, structure, character and conflict are carefully combined. However, Robert McKee (1997) addresses these limitations by suggesting that these limitations are vital and inspire creativity.

In film theory, fiction films are seen as creating and projecting an illusion of the world (Noel 1996: 78). This illusion is not the same kind that manifests in the mentally ill but speaks to a particular trickery that the viewer uses in his psychological state of mind. Johannes Rii (in Jerslev, 2002: 103) calls this illusion an “aesthetic illusion” rather than an “epistemic” illusion. This last statement makes two defining claims: 1) the state of mind invoked by fiction is an indulgence in the aesthetics or beauty of the film, rather than, 2) satisfying a desire for knowledge regarding the subject matter being addressed by the film text or discourse. I argue that fiction does invoke an epistemic desire in the audience that is similar to documentary. However, the desire for knowledge about the subject matter is sidelined by a desire for knowledge required to comprehend the developments of the narrative or story and knowledge needed to be satisfied with its resolution.

According to Noel there is a paradox in the way audiences experience fiction films. He calls it a “paradox of fiction” whereby propositions which, when combined, reveal a contradiction: we are genuinely moved by fiction, we know that which is portrayed in fictions is not actual, however, we are genuinely moved only by what we believe is actual” (Noel 1996). This means fiction film crafts and projects a world that entices us into believing it exists without claiming that such events shown actually happened in the real world. Plantinga (1997: 17) claims the documentary issues a truth claim that the events projected actually happened in the real world but the fiction film invites us to suspend disbelief for the sake of events so as to encourage our senses to indulge in the craft of the created illusion.

Narrative plays an important role when defining fiction. Nichols (1981) claims a narrative can simply be described as the product of successful negotiations between the conventions and codes used by the “diegesis” (narrative or story). Pam Cook observes that by the 1930s “a particular set of cinematic codes through which film narratives were constructed and articulated was already firmly in place” (Cook as cited in Sakota-Kokot 2013: 212). Nichols (1981) elaborates that narrative is created when these specific codes, such as lighting, costume, camera angle, composition (framing), mise-en-scene (movement within the frame), editing, music, are utilised within the limitations of running time (film length) and the two-dimensionality of the actual image. This “constellation of codes” can be compared to stars in the solar system, such as the North Star, that can act as reference points for positioning the audience (Nichols 1981: 70). The result is a classical narrative discourse or text, where the mechanisms through which the fiction film is constructed become concealed. At the same time, the fiction narrative asks the viewer to suspend disbelief and to be transported to an imaginary realm. According to Nichols, classical fiction narrative “normally presents itself as singular... closed... transparent... it affords pleasure ... and allows identification” (Nichols 1981: 85). Thus, it can be deduced that fiction narrative is a linear arrangement of space and time organised

using continuity editing (a technique used to minimise the noticeability of cuts), with a clear textual discourse, which in turn satisfies an epistemic desire in the audience.

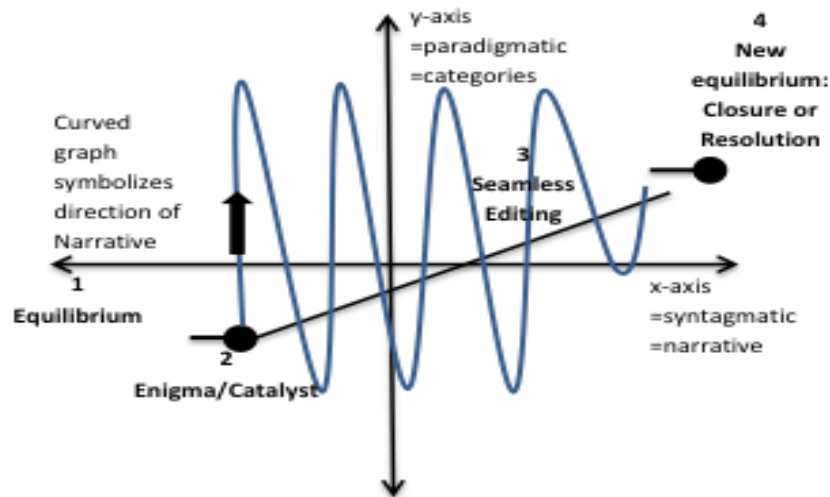


Figure 2 (Image from Sakota-Kokot, 2013: 213)

As illustrated above, Sakota-Kokot (2013: 213) shows how classical fiction (or Hollywood) narrative begins with a state of equilibrium (1), which is subsequently made problematic by an enigma (2). The enigma invokes epistemic desire (the audience asks internal questions, such as, “Will the hero overcome this problem?”), introduces the main character and begins the emotional journey (as shown by the arrow). However, enigmas can also be found in smaller sequences throughout the film (Nichols 1981: 90). Using seamless (or continuity) editing (3), the narrative moves towards a satisfying closure or resolution. Closure implies some questions remain unanswered and resolution suggests all enigmas have been resolved (Cook as cited in Sakota-Kokot 2013: 213). A fiction, I conclude, is defined by 1) a narrative which has a plot with a beginning (followed shortly by an inciting incident or enigma), middle and end, with each of these elements; 2) constructed by the filmmaker under specific limitations within the given sub-genre (such as horror, musical or science fiction); with 3) an overall aim to satisfy aesthetic and epistemic (knowledge needed for mental closure, as opposed to knowledge desired on subject matter in documentary) audience desires.

3.3 The Filmmaker as Author and the Audience

With regards to audience desires and the author (referring to the filmmaker as the artist and “writer” of a film’s text) intentions, fiction departs from documentary by not only promoting

activity with regards to imagination, but by also producing a specific attitude the audience adopts towards a film. In *The Nature of Fiction*, Gregory Currie (1990: 18) states that what distinguishes a “fictive utterance” from a documentary one is the speaker’s deliberate intention that the audience will respond in different ways in these different cases. In the case of fiction, I argue, the author generally wants the audience to be entertained by staged actions and events. The author of fiction intends that the viewer take a certain attitude toward the proposition that “an author... communicates to an audience by way of indicating that the audience is intended to respond to his or her text... in a certain way, where the reason that the audience has for mobilising the response or the stance in question is the audience’s recognition of the sender’s intention that they do so” (Carroll, 1999: 181). Carroll (1999) asserts that the viewer is intended, by the author, to “make-believe” that the story being told is true and, in return, to “make-believe” allows the audience to satisfyingly achieve in imagination what is denied by their individual “reality”. The author’s intention that the audience takes the attitude of “make-believe” to his story can also be called the author’s “fictive intention” (Carroll 1999). Carroll (Carroll, 1999: 181) elaborates that a fictive intention is “the intention of the author, filmmaker, or sender of a structure of sense bearing signs that the audience imagine the content of the story in question on the basis of their recognition that this is what the sender intends them to do”. The mental state of the audience is one of imagining, rather than of believing, because the audience recognises that the author intends them to imagine rather than to believe that what they see is real. What this notion is acknowledging is the existence of complex relationships between author intention, audience belief, audience desire, aesthetic experience, mental sensation, and “make-believe”.

Plantinga refers to the notion of indexing where producers, writers, directors, distributors and exhibitors label films, and where these labels index the films as fiction or documentary the audience has immediate access to the information about the fictive or assertoric intentions of the filmmaker (Plantinga, 1996). The audience has access to the author’s assertoric intentions in many ways (such as press releases, advertisements, television interviews, previews, critical reviews and word of mouth). The particular indexing of a film mobilises expectations and activities on the part of the viewer. For example, a film indexed as documentary leads the spectator to expect a discourse that makes assertions about actuality. In this instance, Plantinga (1996: 311) states, “the spectator will take a different attitude toward those states of affairs presented, since they are taken to represent the actual, and not a fictional, world”. However, the film’s index is not simply an inference by the spectator, but a property or element of the text within its “historical context” (Plantinga, 1997: 19). Plantinga (1998: 20) argues that indexing is influenced by social convention when he states that “no index is indelible; all may change with time, since social conventions change. The point is that indexing is a social phenomenon, and to a degree is independent of individual uses of the film”. In relation to the

main argument in this paper, this means that a film will be accepted as a fiction or a documentary based on whatever society believes them to be at that particular point in time.

3.4 Fiction Realism

As opposed to documentary, fiction has various identifiable realism movements that have been established and have evolved over time. All movements have contributed to the repertoire of realist techniques and conventions, which are mostly still applicable in modern production. However, I argue they are constantly questioned as our era becomes increasingly suspicious of artifice in film due to new technology and other advances in style and technique. Some examples of these fiction movements are *Kino Pravda*, meaning “film truth” and it was conceived and propagated by filmmaker Dziga Vertov in 1923. This influenced *Poetic Realism*, which originated in France during the 1930s build up to World War II. *Poetic Realism* was defined by eliciting a sense of nostalgia and fatality, using highly aesthetic and poetic imagery, and the use of depressing conclusions. It addressed issues such as war, class conflict, economic conditions and the changing role of women in society. *Neorealism* originated in Italy in 1945 and is characterised by the use of actual locations, non-professional actors and its narratives focused on ordinary people who find unhappy or unsatisfactory resolutions to their problems or “enigmas”. However, this paper will exclude *Avant Garde* as a fiction realism movement due to my observation during research that it is mainly associated with documentary. Despite this dominant association with documentary, many members of the public commonly categorise experimental fiction films as *Avant Garde*. Films such as Chris Marker’s *La Jette* (1962), which I have consistently heard categorised as fiction, by academics and artists alike, in my personal experience studying film that spans over a decade. If *Avant Garde* is to be even considered as a fiction realism movement, it would originate as early as 1900 and categorise any film using experimental techniques, or techniques experimental for their time historically. It would include most films that go against the embodiment of their current notions of, or limitations regarding, how society and culture are commonly represented in film. *La Jette* is a purely fictional account of a post-apocalyptic world using real photographs of historical events and placing them out of their historical context to create an alternate reality. I use this realism technique in my film *Broken Things*, which I conclude to have produced varying results, and will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

To examine one realism movement in more detail, one can look at Dziga Vertov’s approach with *Kino Pravda*. I argue it is the first realism movement in fiction film history and theory. However, supporting my main argument, it is also consistent with later “objective” approaches to realism that can be found in documentary further suggesting there is no separation between documentary and fiction. Vertov wrote with great passion of the camera’s ability to be objective “eye”, a mobile mechanical “eye”, with the flexibility to travel virtually anywhere it

pleases and capture “life caught unawares” (Vertov as cited in Michelson 1984: 41). This is also similar to the views of Andre Bazin, which I have discussed earlier. Vertov claims in his 1923 manifesto:

“I am the mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it. Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility, I am in constant motion, I draw near, then away from objects, I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse, I plunge full speed into a crowd, I outstrip running soldiers, I fall on my back, I ascend with an airplane, I plunge and soar together with plunging and soaring bodies” (Vertov as cited in Michelson 1984: 17)

Drawing considerable amounts of inspiration from the montage technique, a method established in 1920s fiction film production and made famous by Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, Vertov’s manifesto illustrates his fascination with film’s “congruous” capacity for optical illusion and its ability to produce revelations regarding social reality (Michelson 1984). *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), his most prominent film, is most notable in this regard for its inclusion of superimposed footage and animation alongside “actual” or unstaged footage of everyday working life in Moscow. He also reflexively uses footage of the construction of the film itself. For example, he uses footage of the editor “splicing” reels or, in other words, cutting the actual material footage is captured on and physically placing the material into sequences that aid narrative progression.

Despite the existence of these and other realism movements, I argue that this fact does not take away from the notion that fiction is a purely fabricated form and, like documentary, is a subjective construct. I conclude that realism in fiction is mainly demarcated by periods that have evolved due to audience expectations that are driven by a desire for innovation in form and content. These are periods or eras where techniques and subject matter that was previously the sole domain of documentary became widely used in fiction production, such as, the use of natural light, socially relevant subject matter or unsatisfying resolutions that mimic the reality of human existence. I use an unsatisfying resolution in my film *Broken Things* and I argue that this, and other documentary elements used in fiction, is used with the main motivation to deliver a film that is aesthetically pleasing and innovative effect within the genre constraints. I argue that, despite calling these eras’ realism movements, the creative motivations ultimately overpower any truthful or iconic referents to the historical world that may or may not have been present in the finished product.

Docudrama Characteristics

4.1 Genre Origins

The real expansion of the docudrama genre dates back to the thirties and can be divided into areas of study such as experiments in film form of the documentary filmmakers, television docudrama of the early sixties and recent Hollywood docudrama (Rosenthal 1999). The use of docudrama as way to address issues with a sense of cultural importance began in the Second World War, where the idea was to take a social and political themes solely used by documentary, such as the socially relevant issue at the time surrounding the use of the submarine in war, and mold its actual sequences of events to the structure of the traditional fiction narrative with its use of professional actors (Rosenthal 1999).

Television and film currently reflect the prominence of productions which meld the conventions of fiction and documentary, on television the “historical dramas, ‘biopics’ (filmed accounts of the lives of famous and infamous people), dramas constructed around incidents from news headlines, dramatic plays which replicate the visual styles of documentary and journalistic inquiries which include dramatic re- enactments, are all a part of this popular global televisual practice” (Beattie 2004: 146). The film industry also produces work in this field, most notably filmed biographies and historical dramas including *JFK* (1991), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Braveheart* (1995), *Michael Collins* (1996), *Hurricane* (1999), *Pearl Harbor* (2000), *Iris* (2001), *Ali* (2001) and *Pollock* (2002). As docudrama has expanded on cinema and television screens, so have the questions proliferated about its form.

4.2 Defining Docudrama

At its core, the docudrama incorporates historical fact with narrative techniques in order to create a story that is entertaining depiction of an actual event. I have concluded, through the limited general discourse on the subject, that it is a sub-genre of fiction and is currently used in re-enactment based television programs and Hollywood productions. Oliver Stone’s *JFK* (1991) being a good example of a popular and controversial Hollywood attempt at producing a docudrama. It is also the genre that best fits my film *Broken Things*. It can also be said that when producing a docudrama, it is necessary to provide important facts but also create a narrative that will maintain the audience’s enjoyable engagement with the story, whilst imparting a greater understanding of the issues at hand. In this regard, a docudrama:

“... relies on dramatic codes and conventions for the basis of a fictional narrative that makes reference to factual or possible situations, people and events. (It) draws heavily on ... a ‘documentary look’, a style which creates the impression of facticity within a fiction by replicating the visual language of documentary film through techniques such as shaky camera shots and a reliance on natural lighting” (Beattie 2004:148)

In its most definitive sense, docudrama is simply a hybrid film and television genre that floats uneasily between fact and fiction (Rosenthal, 1999). By using a mix of real and staged footage, *Broken Things* attempts to achieve this.

Docudrama suggests a parallel between fiction and documentary that, in audience terms, is provocative because the audience is challenged to reconstruct its mental model of reality by means of production codes both documentary and fictional, and they are expected to negotiate the contradicting emotions required for enjoyment in learning facts (epistemology) and simply enjoying the aesthetics of an illusion (Candeloro, 2000: 143). Scholars argue a definite and methodical distinction between documentary (which represents the historical world) and fiction (which represents the historical world metaphorically), and prohibit any consideration of the truth claim for docudrama, since its re-enactments, or re-creations, relegate the form to the domain of fiction. However, I argue that docudrama still puts forth convincing arguments about actual subjects, events and places, thus exhibiting elements of documentary that are not necessarily diluted by its use of fiction methodology.

Paget (1998: 134) has created an illustration of two columns that separate documentary and fiction features that is “intended to help rethink the docudrama as an intertextual form, negotiating (and provoking or encouraging negotiation) between the documentary and the drama (fiction) columns”. Paget (1998) claims intertextuality promotes an idea that the more texts the audience knows, the more likely that new texts will present themselves or evolve. Thus, the audience does not seek originality, but confirmation that certain modes of representation, in theory and in practice, are still useful in making sense of their lives (Paget 1998).

Table of “documentary” and “drama” features

Documentary	Drama
<i>Theoretical categories</i>	
Realm of “non-fiction”	Realm of “fiction”
Heavy emphasis on “fact”	Light emphasis on “fact”
Sobriety	Entertainment
Rationality	Imagination
Authenticity	Credibility
The prior referent	Imitation of an action
Objectivity	Subjectivity
Particular truth	Essential truth
<i>Practice</i>	
Author’s assertoric intention	Author’s fictive intention
Research/accuracy	Invention/creativity
The journalist/researcher	The writer/creator
Unrehearsed pro-filmic events	Rehearsed pro-filmic events
Real-world individual	Character
Behaviour	Acting
Commentary/statement	Dialogue
Exegesis (e.g. captions)	Diagnosis
Montage	Mise-en-scène
Location/non-design	Setting/design
Natural light	Key light
Location (messy) sound	“Balanced” (clean) sound
<i>Audience</i>	
Assertoric stance	Fictive stance
Belief	Make-belief (i.e. suspension of disbelief)
Consideration of issues	Identification/empathy
Comprehension (through the mind)	Apprehension (through the senses)
Distance	Closeness

A docudrama relies on dramatic codes and conventions, as illustrated above, with the foundation of a fictional narrative that refers to factual situations, people and events and combines indexical and unstaged images into a “quasi-indexical narrative” (Lipkin, 1994: 370).

In fiction films it is possible to accept that the constraining conventions are the condition on which a negotiation with “make-believe” be made. I argue there is audience satisfaction to be found in any set of conventions with proven emotional journeys made by the audience that are universally understood and shared, as I have discussed earlier.

Candelero (2000: 73) argues that docudrama shares a semiotic similarity with documentary, whereby the documentary image functions as an index and the comparable imagery in docudrama remains “iconic”, which means docudrama imagery ultimately adheres to aesthetic concerns, but can also bear a significant importance which has the same power to invoke change as in a pure documentary. However, Candelero (2000: 74) goes on to suggest that the ability to reconstruct strong resemblance to actual people, places, actions and events in docudrama’s imagery combines characteristics of iconic and indexical signs, creating “indexical icons”. This means that these “indexical icons” are empty signs with regards to their bearing of information, but achieve the illusion of importance by *mimicking* direct and strongly motivated resemblances to their actual referents. Candelero (2000: 46) states that the docudrama is “an inherently indexical form” which points more towards its origins in the real world than other kinds of “pure” fiction. However, he goes on to state that their importance is ultimately diminished by the fact that the audience first sees the artifice of this dramatic pointing before they see the place pointed to (Candelero 2000:46). This means that the audience is, first and foremost, aware that the events are staged. Bill Nichols addresses this dilemma by observing that the indexical distinctions between fact and fiction “blurs when claims about reality get cast as narratives” (Nichols 1994: IX.). The audience has to negotiate between a world that hovers between a world it recognises as a fragment of their own and one that is fabricated from these fragments; between indexical (authentic) signs of reality and cinematic (invented) interpretations of reality (Candelero, 2000: 46). I argue this characteristic threatens to dissipate the enjoyment of the experience and the pleasure of the emotional journey undertaken when watching a film in this sub-genre.

Candelero (2000: 49) claims “the camera’s ability to go anywhere and see anything is both borrowed from documentary on behalf of the drama and extended by the drama on behalf of documentary”. This means that the combined limitations in documentary and fiction conventions ultimately exploit the diversity of the camera’s technical abilities, which are needed to execute the increase in technical demands made by docudrama’s aspirations. However, “the camera’s promise cannot be fully delivered in actuality since there are places either where it cannot go or where it can no more go” (Candelero, 2000: 50). In the docudrama, events which the camera cannot capture in real time can still be displayed, but at a price. The audience who accepts the extension of the camera’s documentary ability, do so within the context of “make-believing”. I argue that, by using docudrama’s codes and conventions, following the moment of reception the mechanism of belief in audience psychology is

continually shutting itself down as fast as it is enabled. Nichols (1994: 97) summarises this dilemma by stating this paradox in action “generates a distinct tension between performance and document, between the personal and the typical, the embodied and disembodied, between, in short, history and science”. In other words, certain docudrama elements draw attention to themselves and others garner no such inspections that will eventually result in demands for transparency. In sum, the docudrama is constantly negotiating between the aesthetic and emotional, and the evidential and referential.

It can be concluded that the convergence of fact and fiction results in either the disruption of claims to truth, or, an innovative and truthful representations of reality (Beattie, 2004: 146).

David Elgar states:

“I would defend docudrama as a form in which important things can be said in a uniquely an authoritative and credible way. But the form also has to be defended, as the presence of docudrama in the schedules is an active encouragement to the audiences to think critically about all the programs they watch” (Elgar as cited in Rosenthal, 1999: 11)

Therefore, I argue that docudrama is an innovative mode and can be a tool, when its codes and conventions are used successfully, to provide clear and necessary observations about the historical world.

4.3 Ethics

If a hierarchy of truth in film actually exists, then I argue that documentary would exist on a higher level than fiction. Docudrama aspires to be on this culturally significant higher ground; however, ethical issues surrounding its depiction of fact by means of fiction threaten its truth claim. In most instances this is not cause for concern, as “the audience perceives, for the most part, what is fact and what is fiction and where license with fact has been taken” (Candeloro, 2000: 75). However, there are situations where the mixing of fact with fiction can develop associations with being deceptive. Lipkin (1994: 379) addresses this deception by stating that “the fusion of documentary and narrative stylistics has rhetorical objective easily confused with a literal claim to historical truth” and this “claim” is an ethical burden on the docudrama”. This statement also highlights the contentious reciprocity between indexical and indexically iconic materials, as I have previously discussed. So, in relation to ethics, what can be said on the effects of such ambiguous or non-existent indexing on the audience? Criticism suggests docudrama will create pessimistic viewers because its structure is directly reflective of the audience's frustrating search for their own historical truths. The form also challenges the audience's desire for recognisable boundaries regarding whether to hold an assertive or fictive

stance. In this respect, docudrama asks the audience to question what to believe and where be entertained, which can result in confusion or distraction.

In addressing questions of accuracy and credibility, producers and broadcast regulators have implemented procedures and approaches, which emphasise the distinction between factual and fictive elements in docudrama. Promotions will often stress the factual basis of the content and the production will be grounded in detailed research and the verification of sources. Broadcast regulators have implemented codes of practice, which contain details concerning the production and scheduling of docudrama. The UK based Independent Television Commission's Programme Code states that:

"A clear distinction should be drawn between plays based on fact and dramatised documentaries (docudramas) which seek to reconstruct actual events. Much confusion may be avoided if plays based on current or very recent events are carefully labelled as such, so that fictional elements are not misleadingly presented as fact... care should be taken in scheduling drama and drama-documentary programmes portraying controversial matters... Impartiality may need to be secured by providing an opportunity for opposing viewpoints to be expressed" (ITC Code as cited in Petley, 1996: 20)

Such a code seeks to directly address the potential for confusion pertaining to historical accuracy and ethical concerns surrounding docudrama.

The claim that docudrama's use of re-enactments are misleading carries with it the implication that a more accurate representation is available through "traditional" documentary and that a more enjoyable form of escapism can be found in "pure" fiction. As it has been pointed out earlier, Grierson's definition of documentary as the creative treatment of actuality admitted dramatic reconstruction as a legitimate component of representation, and the practices of reconstruction have continued to be used. It has also been argued earlier that a docudrama can offer a pleasurable form of escapism. I argue that the notion of the existence of a mode entirely devoid of fiction techniques is redundant. However, this does not release docudrama from the ethical requirements of meeting standards of accuracy that it is expected to uphold. David Rosenthal (1999: 23) argues for the ethical validity of docudrama, by stating that docudrama excels in "its capacity to show us not that certain events occurred or even, perhaps, why they occurred... but *how* they occurred: *how* recognisable human beings rule, fight, judge, meet, negotiate, suppress and overthrow". Despite ethical concerns, docudrama will always provide a powerful means of representation when there are no other methods to narrate historical events (Rosenthal 1999).

Film Findings and Conclusion

5.1 Broken Things – Methodology

This self-reflexive study explores documentary as a film form and how it may enhance representation by embodying fiction characteristics, which essentially manipulates ‘creativity’ to achieve documentary realism. This study employs film representation as a qualitative research method mainly because an analysis depends on the interpretation and not the statistical procedures employed by the quantitative research (Strauss and Corbin,1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that qualitative research refers to research about stories, persons’ lives and behaviour. This study therefore conforms to qualitative research because it deals with the representation of an individual’s personal struggle as a result of the consequences of their destructive behaviour. Strauss and Corbin (1990:19) state that the topic of the research problem dictates the method that the research will adopt. The film addresses the question of documentary as a vehicle for representing a personal experience creatively. It also touches upon issues surrounding coping with loss and the mental illness of addiction. Strauss and Corbin (1990:19) say “some areas of study naturally lend themselves more to qualitative types of research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons’ experiences with a phenomenon like illness, religious conventions, or addiction. Qualitative methods can also be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known”. Therefore, describing the research report and film as qualitative methods is suitable because in order to address the question of documentary’s ability to represent reality creatively, an appropriate approach is to create an example of such a documentary and then produce an investigative report in unison.

In *Broken Things*, a number of fiction characteristics have been employed. This ‘creative treatment’ intends to create a fluid fictional and non-fictional illusion of the ‘real’. The ‘creative treatment’ in this instance refers to the use of staged re-enactments to represent what could not be filmed in real-time. The use of staged material is not intended to diminish the viewing experience, but rather to enhance it. As it has been previously discussed, the nature of the creative input depends partly on the available resources and the goal of the filmmaker. The intention here is to simply conduct a filmic representation of an individual who is struggling with the effects of alcoholism, whereby direction and re-enactment of sequences are the visual re-constitution of memory. Memory is subjective and is affected by a variety of influences, in this instance the most relevant being the filmmaker’s intentions. These intentions are governed by the ‘agreement’ between the filmmaker and the audience regarding aesthetics and ethics.

With regards to ethics, I argue that the methodology behind *Broken Things* falls in line the methodology of docudrama. On reflection, *Broken Things* embodies contradictory indicators that may confuse the audience. As discussed in the previous sub-section, my film raises similar ethical questions to those surrounding docudrama productions. Lipkin (1994: 379) suggests that the mixing of truth and fiction leaves the audience feeling victim to ‘deception’. However, I argue that the solutions that were adopted, such as the ITC Code, could not be leveraged for my production. Without any means for indexing my intentions and processes with the

audience, *Broken Things* could not be “carefully labeled... so that fictional elements are not misleadingly presented as fact” (ITC Code as cited in Petley, 1996: 20). I take liberty as an artist to allow for ambiguity, as elements used in the production, such as found footage, were my own and I do not need to justify my decision to share them with my audience. I argue, that the questions that may arise from viewing *Broken Things* offer a practical case study that reflects key notions that are explored in the body of this paper. *Broken Things* originated as a documentary, but its audience may find the final product difficult to categorise.

However, I argue that *Broken Things* is a documentary because “every film is a documentary” (Nichols, 2001: 1). Nichols (2001: 1) suggests that *all* moving image has some form of documentary value and therefore *all* film can be an agent for cultural change by providing a truthful representation of society. Nichols goes on to contend that the fiction genre does not exist and what we refer to as fiction is, rather, a “documentary of wish-fulfillment” (Nichols 2001: 1). Nichols (2001: 1) further explains that this particular type of documentary gives expression to the “wishes and dreams” of the audience by presenting truths from other worlds of “infinite possibility”. The audience is invited to revel in the pleasure of being momentarily removed from the harsh realities of the world they experience every day (Nichols, 2001: 1). Nichols argues that there is only one other type of film and that is the “documentary of social representation” (Nichols 2001: 2). This film’s main characteristic is its ability to “give a tangible representation to aspects of the world we already inhabit and share” (Nichols, 2001: 2). This is the type of film that we traditionally consider to be a documentary. With *Broken Things*, I apply some aspects of fictive traditions in areas, such as re-enactment, where I feel such strategies are needed because my methodology is already subjective.

5.2 Broken Things – Concept, Filming and Editing

The concept behind the short film *Broken Things* is to produce a docudrama that employed characteristics of both fiction and documentary that I have outlined in this paper. With regards to documentary, this would be the use of real images and subject matter that is based on events that have actually occurred in the historical world. With regards to fiction characteristics, this would include a traditional linear narrative and the use of dramatisation. The film supplements the theoretical framework by providing a possible case study for many of the arguments raised. The film is extremely personal, as it documents a period in my life that I am not extremely proud of or intend to relive. My main motivation in making this film is that I would therapeutically face harsh realities about my past and hopefully create a film that serves as a cautionary tale for the audience. Based on my own personal experience, the story revolves around a series of events in the life of a man struggling with alcoholism and depression. It begins by explaining the history leading up to a point in his life where he sees no other option but to seek help for his alcohol abuse. After spending some time in a rehabilitation clinic we reach the climax of the film where the main character must decide if he is going to continue down a path to sobriety or revert back to his old ways.

The film opens with a photomontage of the main character as he grows from childhood into an adult. The images slowly build to a close up of the main characters father. This sequence alerts the audience to the fact that they are viewing a true story and foreshadows a tragedy with dark

underlying score. The following sequence continues in the documentary mode, as the viewer shown a memorial service and subsequent funeral of the main characters father. By using found footage, the viewer does not question that these events did in fact take place. The shots of the funeral procession are shaky and the jump-cuts disorientate the viewer, adding to the sense of anxiety and grief the filmmaker is inviting the viewer to experience. We are then taken, by way of title cards, to a much later date in the trajectory of the main characters on-screen life. The film begins to introduce fictive elements, as we see an extreme close up of the main character drinking alcohol in successive long take. This sequence climaxes in a photomontage of a car accident and the destruction that it caused, both material and physical. The remainder of the film is staged footage, with a brief flashback in the form of a photomontage. With a combination of medium, close and extreme close up shots; we are taken into the solitary, disheveled and claustrophobic world of an alcoholic. We are given the 'inciting incident', a super imposed letter from his wife, which pushes the character towards drastic change. The closing shot is an extreme close up of the main character as he has to make a choice; does he continue down the path to sobriety or does he relapse and lose everything? The film cuts to black before giving the audience an answer. This is intended to highlight the many unanswered questions people may have about the nature of addiction, mental illness, truth and fiction.

As previously discussed, Nichols (1981) states that classic fiction narrative is created when codes, such as lighting, costume, camera angle, composition (framing), *mise-en-scene* (movement within the frame), editing, music, are utilised within the limitations of running time (film length) and the two-dimensionality of the actual image. With *Broken Things*, the plot is intended to unfold naturally, increasing the viewer's desire for knowledge about what is developing on screen and resulting in audience satisfaction with the resolution. In this sense, *Broken Things* can be described as a fiction film. As such, I use continuity editing in an attempt to produce an entertaining story that is as truthful as possible to my own personal historical world, but at the same time provide entertainment. In this instance, entertainment can be found if the audience successfully engages with the staged action and events. Carroll (1999) asserts that the viewer is intended, by the filmmaker, to "make-believe" that the story being told is true and, in return, to "make-believe" allows the audience to satisfyingly achieve in imagination what is denied by their individual "reality". In addition, the film plot must unfold naturally, complimenting increases in the viewer's desire for knowledge about what is developing on screen and results in audience satisfaction with the resolution.

5.3 Conclusion

Within this research report, I establish through a number of examples and theorists that the documentary form can make use of techniques normally associated with the fiction form. *Broken Things* is a film made with such a realisation in mind. The aim of which being to test how many formal transfusions the documentary film can take before it loses believability and its associations with truth. Plantinga (1997: 38) argues that documentary films can be as expressive as their fictional counterparts. He adds: "if we see non-fiction film as fundamentally a genre of rhetoric rather than one of imitation, then whether its representations are embodied

in a stylistically spare and 'objective' discourse or an expressive and 'subjective' discourse is irrelevant to its status as non-fiction" (Plantinga, 1997: 38). Therefore, the argument transcends whether documentary should or should not utilise fictional characteristics. The debate may not be resolved by analysing the extent to which documentary can assimilate techniques of foreign filmic modes. By establishing that documentary is an artistic construction, with claims to all filmic devices it chooses to adopt, then the question becomes: what agreement must a documentary make with the audience to maintain its integrity, whilst continuing its experimentation with fiction methodology?

This question of integrity is of significant cultural importance, as Riis (in Jerslev, 2002: 72) states that documentary texts possess a persuasive power to overwhelm and convince, to persuade or dissuade. Plantinga (1997: 14) adds that non-fiction films can be prototypes, which embody the entire spectrum of elements central to the traditional documentary category and there are non-fiction films that embody only a few; these are open-ended concepts with "family resemblances". Perhaps a documentary can maintain its integrity as long as the number of traditional conventions out-weigh experimental ones. In experimenting with different modal characteristics, *Broken Things* might have simply become a peripheral addition to the documentary 'family'.

This brings us to the notion of indexing. Noel (1996: 78) suggests the responsibility of assigning a film to a category lies solely with the filmmaking entity. Films are 'indexed' by producers, directors, distributors, and exhibitors before they are viewed by the audience. Plantinga (1997: 16) suggests that indexing is a social phenomenon and an understanding or agreement between the audience and filmmaker is already on display. Plantinga (1997: 16) asserts that in order to define documentary, one can simply look at films that have been previously indexed as a documentary in any given culture. Eitzen disagrees, and states that not all films are simply indexed as fiction or documentary, as some films are extremely difficult to categorise:

"Texts like *Daughter Rite* and *No Lies*, and even well-known and popular texts like *JFK* and episodes of *A Current Affair*, are not neatly indexed in one way or the other. They are ambiguously indexed or indexed in a way that allows them to be read as either documentary or fiction or intermittently as one then the other." (Eitzen 1995: 96).

I argue in this paper that this argument is currently being explored in the docudrama genre. However, Riis claims "the way in which we experience a film is not determined by the way it is categorised" (Riis as cited in Jerslev, 2002: 111). If we are to truly discover the diverse ways in which the audience receives and understands documentaries as a singular text, then we must investigate individual idiosyncratic readings (Eitzen 1995: 95). These statements suggest that a consensus of the audience also determines which films are indexed as documentaries. Plantinga (1997: 16) agrees, "the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is not based solely on intrinsic textual properties but also on the extrinsic textual context of production, distribution and *reception*" (emphasis mine). The viewers are therefore integral to the indexing of any film production.

Finally, Noels (1996: 255) says that any film indexed as a documentary should still be assessed against standards of truthfulness. He adds that “when measured against such standards, a film that has been indexed a nonfiction may turn out to be false” (Noel, 1996: 255). Eitzen (1995: 89) provides a definition of documentary as “any film, video, or TV program that could, in principle, be perceived to lie”, which urges us to assess any film that seeks to align itself with notions of truthfulness. Within this context, fiction films are therefore exempt, as they do not attempt to align themselves with any truthful representation of reality.

“It is so good that whether it is fact or fiction becomes secondary” (Karin Barber, 14:2009).

I came across this quotation by Barber and, albeit taken from a different context, it can be applied to the filmmaker intension when producing *Broken Things*. I understand this quote to imply that the filmmaker intends to produce a films that resonates with the audience, whether fact or fiction. In this research report, I try to put forth an argument that the fundamental connection between documentary and fiction films is their quest truthfulness. To achieve this goal, both forms utilise fiction and documentary characteristics. Perhaps the success of failure of the film is tied not to its categorization, but to the integrity of the filmmaker’s intentions. I demonstrate this hypothesis through a short documentary film *Broken Things*.

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