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THE DOCUMENTARY INTERIOR

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A commentary submitted in
partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of
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Abstract

This PhD by publication derives from a body of research which examines how material drawn from reality –that is, subjects, images or stories founded in ‘documentary’- can be used to visualise and interpret unrepresented subjective spaces -thoughts, feelings, dreams- which I term the ‘Documentary Interior’. My work asks how can ethical creative intervention via an expressive conceptualisation of the historical/factual world be redeployed to create a documentary aesthetic that reveals interior space on screen?

Over the last decade my research has utilised a range of creative arts practice and filmmaking methodologies covering production (*Camrex*, *TRANS*, *Funny Onion*, photographic works) and exhibition (*The Invisible and the Real*). This internationally-exhibited body of work provides the foundation and determines the trajectory of research as I move towards my first feature film (*Truant*). Whilst there is an extensive history of scholarly discourse concerning the documentary film, relatively little has focused on its aesthetic properties. John Corner (2008) suggested that the documentary has traditionally been associated more with the knowledge systems rather than aesthetics, and consequently is ‘widely seen to lack the symbolic richness of narrative cinema both in its visual design and its textual organisation.’ However, Michael Renov (2013) has repeatedly emphasised documentary’s capacity for expressivity and its close relationship to fictional works, arguing for the kind of aesthetic innovation found in the work of Vertov, et al. Renov’s belief that this formal paradigm is inseparable from the documentary’s rhetorical function underpins his proposition that, ‘The formal regime is the very portal of sense-making; it determines the viewer’s access to the expression of ideas.’

My research explores the potential of the aesthetic realm to present non-physical and internal spaces previously thought to be out of bounds for the documentary camera and where an articulation of the ‘Documentary Interior’ might be presented: thus extending the critical context concerning nonfiction and the formal mutations of creative arts practice (Renov (various), Beattie (2008), Hongisto (2015)) and aligning the work with the methodologies of art cinema practitioners whose work

is built upon the raw material of reality, such as Pedro Costa, Roberto Minervini and Clio Barnard.

This PhD by Publication will map, contextualise and critically examine my practice in light of the uses of nonfiction methodologies within an art cinema context in order to engage with the world around us from the inside out and as such render private, personal spaces as ethical and political ones.

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A Dropbox link to a folder entitled 'THE DOCUMENTARY INTERIOR_MARK CHAPMAN' which contains relevant documents on each publication can be accessed [here](#)

The folder contains nine individual project folders:

PROJECT 1_FUNNY ONION

PROJECT 2_THE INVISIBLE AND THE REAL

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Author's Declaration

I declare that no outputs submitted for this degree have been submitted for a research degree of any other institution. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

I declare that the word count of this commentary is 24,189 words

Mark Chapman

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1. Introduction

This PhD research grows out of my work as a filmmaker and photographer focusing on selected projects completed over the last decade (2010-2020) and relates to experiments with the development and production of nonfiction stories. The contemporary context of formally adventurous ‘cinematic nonfiction’ -or ‘hybrid’¹ documentary’- is contributing to a significant re-conceptualisation of film practice orthodoxies. These are films that move away from the sober form of documentary inspired by Griersonian ‘social purposiveness’ (and later, the unvarnished observations of Direct Cinema in the 1960s) and are instead linked to art cinema -of which this study is primarily concerned- through the use of an expressive audio/visual language, narrative ambiguity and formal experimentation. The documentary image, now seemingly compromised by the acknowledged manipulations of digital technology and thus robbed of an uncritical indexicality, has turned its attentions to complex ethical and political questions of how an image was created and how it will be used, exposing the underlying fact that authorial manipulation is an inherent part of the documentary impulse.

This research draws upon my background in both filmmaking and still photography against the context of hybrid forms of the creative nonfiction film to explore how material drawn from reality –that is, subjects, images or stories founded in ‘documentary’- can be used to visualise and interpret unrepresented subjective spaces, which here I term the ‘Documentary Interior’. Specifically, I investigated how to use the expressive tools of cinema, such as sound, narrative construction, performance and editing, to render visible the inner thoughts, feelings and beliefs of real-life contributors. My intention is to use nonfiction material to engage with the world around us from the inside out and as such render private, personal spaces as ethical and political ones. Though this research incorporates a fluid creative practice including a feature film screenplay, short films, photography, curated film events and peer-reviewed academic articles, all of the works submitted are founded in documentary practice and it is to the area of documentary film production

¹ The term ‘hybrid’ is contested and has already been rejected by some scholars and filmmakers due to perceived vagueness (such as Greene 2020), but it has been adopted by many in the film industry as a useful term of classification.

methodologies that this work primarily contributes. For the sake of clarity, the term 'documentary' will be used interchangeably with the 'nonfiction film'. The works submitted are the results of these explorations.

When asked why he decided to stop making documentary films and move into fiction, the late Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski responded, 'Not everything can be described. That's the documentary's great problem. It catches itself as if in its own trap. The closer it wants to get to somebody, the more that person shuts him or herself off from it.' (Stok 1993: 86) Echoing Kieślowski, scholars such as Michael Chanan (2007: 16) have suggested that the documentary film has traditionally been rooted in public concerns rather than private ones and that audiences approach a documentary film quite differently from fiction: that fiction films appeal directly to the spectator's emotional life and their private subjectivity and that documentary speaks to the spectator as a citizen and a member of the social collective. However, the ubiquity of digital technology has resulted in a blurring of these archaic public/private binaries. This project seeks to engage with *documentary's great problem* through embracing interdisciplinary creative arts methodologies that has allowed nonfiction films to venture into inner space in order to present unique perspectives on the world.

In this contemporary documentary landscape ethics has now taken on a new centrality, particularly in relation to the cultivation of the filmmaker/contributor relationship. Scholarship focused on filmmaker/contributor relationships has usually discussed the perceived (lack of) ethics and the (im)balance of power. Documentary filmmakers and artists have routinely been accused of being powered by self-regard and considering themselves to operate outside of conventional moral constraints, leading them to disregard ethical responsibilities as they transform contributors into 'anonymous and pathetic' victims (Winston 1988²) or mere 'aesthetic objects' (Ruby

² Much has been written about the filmmaker/contributor relationship, perhaps most scornfully in Brian Winston's critical article on the British documentary movement of the 1930s, *The Tradition of the Victim in Griersonian Documentary* (1988), where Winston attacks Grierson's approach to his participants and suggests there was an appreciable and problematic shift 'from work-as-hero to worker-as-victim' (Winston 1988: 769). Winston asserts that the British Documentary Movement's focus on the

1979: 214-215). Evoking Roland Barthes' claim regarding the photographed image's relation to indexicality that 'the photographer bears witness to his own subjectivity' (Barthes 1985: 356), for Michael Renov, a nonfiction work is always the result of an *encounter* between 'between seer and seen', i.e. the subjectivity of the filmmaker and objectivity of the historical world (Renov 2007: 14). Renov's view is much influenced by ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who in articulating the ethical responsibility to the Other, 'described, "problems of knowledge and truth must... be put in relation to the event of meeting and dialogue."' (Renov 2004: 147) In its emphasis on challenging, open-ended enquiry rather than the certainty of factual delivery systems, the contemporary hybrid documentary is redefining the encounter between filmmaker and contributor, providing new understandings about the changing nature of this relationship and, I claim, can result in a more ethically engaged nonfiction cinema.

disadvantaged by those from considerably more privileged backgrounds was 'the most potent of their legacies.' (Winston 1988: 768) Winston claims that Grierson's *victims* are shown 'anonymous and pathetic' whilst the reputations of their directors are elevated to the status of *artist*. Winston's article was an early signal of scholarship's shifting focus towards debates surrounding the ethics of documentary production, particularly the ethical considerations in the relationship between filmmaker and contributor.

2. Research Aims

Traditionally, the formal capriciousness of nonfiction -or 'documentary'- film storytelling has been both its strength and its misfortune, its scope defying easy classification and this, according to Michael Chanan has resulted in its being under-represented both in orthodox versions of film history and, until relatively recently, in critical film theory (Chanan 2007: 24). However, over the past 15 years with technological advances such as inexpensive HD video cameras and models of online digital distribution aiding modes of production and audience access, the documentary now 'finds itself in the midst of a golden age of creative expression.' (Nichols 2016: 82). This is evidenced by the steady output of formally challenging and commercially successful films, the popularity of documentary-focused festivals (IDFA, CPH:DOX, Sheffield Doc/Fest, FIDMarseille, et al) and the conspicuous presence of nonfiction titles on streaming services such as Netflix, Mubi and Amazon Prime.³ My research is a response to the changing position of the documentary film within an industrial and academic context.

Through this practice-based research my aim was to identify, analyse and develop strategies for the use of subjective, internal states as documentary representations. I have identified variations of this formal tendency in significant recent cinematic nonfiction works such as Robinson Devor's *Zoo* (2007), Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), Clio Barnard's *The Arbor* (2010), Peter Middleton & James Spinney's *Notes on Blindness* (2016), and many more. In these films spaces previously thought to be out of bounds for the documentary camera have opened themselves up for exploration, including non-physical, mental spaces -thoughts, feelings, memories and dreams. My intention with this conceptual body of work is to foreground personal stories rather than using a more 'social issues-based' approach: this focus on using the documentary form to interpret interior, subjective space is an explicit rejection of a journalistic, evidentiary approach to stories drawn from the raw material of reality as it accepts that documentary narratives are always at the mercy of the filmmaker's own creative sensibility.

³ As well as the unprecedented number of real stories featured in a gallery context and the growing presence of VR projects at festivals and film markets.

The critical context of this research is informed by the work of theorist Michael Renov who has consistently sought to redefine the boundaries for the nonfiction film via an emphasis on expressive formal tendencies of contemporary documentary cinema and its proximity to the fiction and avant-garde modes.

The aim of the thesis and publications is to contribute to a re-formulation of the discourse around documentary material. Specifically, my research explores how ethical creative intervention via an expressive conceptualisation of the historical/factual world can be redeployed to create a documentary aesthetic that reveals interior space on screen.

Within the context of my own development as a filmmaker working within the film industry, this research also aimed to:

1. Identify new approaches to the documentary film that contribute to development and production methodologies.
2. Identify and explore how nonfiction stories access the interior life of their contributors through formal exploration and reflection.
3. Examine how this emphasis on unrepresented, interior spaces impact the ethical filmmaker/contributor collaboration.
4. Demonstrate how cross-disciplinary methods of production founded in creative arts practice can contribute to the development of a nonfiction film.

The multi-disciplinary projects discussed -which include filmmaking, photography and curatorial practice- form a new body of work that represents a sustained engagement with documentary practice through which to examine the stated research aims.

3. Contextual Review

In 2014, film journal *Sight & Sound* carried out twin surveys of 237 critics and 103 filmmakers in order to identify the ‘greatest documentary films of all time’⁴. The journal has completed a similar canon-assessing ‘greatest films’ poll every decade since 1962, but predictably, as Nick Bradshaw (2014: 22) notes, ‘across all seven iterations of the poll, the fictional impulse has reigned’ and nonfiction has been pushed to its margins. However, the very existence of a similar canon-defining poll dedicated to nonfiction is a clear indication of the current elevated importance of the documentary form in film culture, which, given its formal variation, arguably represents the most significant opportunity for formal experimentation and creative daring in contemporary cinema.

The most startling outcome of the critics’ top 50 poll, and much to Bradshaw and the journal’s self-confessed ‘delight’, was that eleven of the fifty films were produced in the fourteen years since 2000⁵ (this would surely now be an even higher number). The films included are as varied as Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel’s visceral *Leviathan* (2012), Errol Morris’ interrogation of Robert S. McNamara in *The Fog of War* (2003) and Ari Folman’s psychedelic animation *Waltz With Bashir*. After 120 years of cinema the nonfiction film canon is still remarkably open to change: the corpus of films still in flux.⁶ The eruption of innovative contemporary work points to a form that is still seeking to define its boundaries, and as a result, scholarship on the documentary is undergoing a similar renaissance. This renewed interest has produced an ever-expanding range of research on the subject and is likely to have a profound, lasting effect.

⁴ Number one in both the critics’ and filmmakers’ poll was Dziga Vertov’s *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929), a film that Brian Winston calls ‘(Vertov’s) masterpiece... a flash spinning top of a movie. It has taken more than 80 years, though, for this to be fully recognised.’ (Winston 2014: 38)

⁵ It is a very different picture in *Sight & Sound*’s 2012 critics’ poll where only two post-2000 films made it into the top 100. Incidentally, in the 2012 poll only five films in the top 100 could be defined as ‘nonfiction’. One wonders if this will change in 2022.

⁶ Though there are long established ‘classics’ that typify certain formal tendencies, including *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Dont Look Back* (1967), *Shoah* (1985) and *The Thin Blue Line* (1988).

The structure of this contextual overview begins with the key histories and theories in the evolution of the nonfiction film. Exploring the evolution of the frequently neglected 'expressive' domain, it will then go on to a more detailed discussion of the aesthetic methodologies of contemporary cinematic nonfiction that forms the basis of my research on the Documentary Interior.

3.1: Documentary Definitions

A Road Not Taken: Locating the Boundaries of the Nonfiction Film

In order to situate the submitted works within the contested terrain of the nonfiction film, we first need to explore the plurality of approaches and theoretical/historical paradigms that have continued to shape the evolution of scholarly discourse on the form. Given its historical crossover between the fiction and experimental modes, the nonfiction film appears to actively resist classification and, of course, given the inherent limitations of this review, any claims to be comprehensive are unwise; for example, my focus will primarily be on the boundary-challenging tendencies of the modern cinematic nonfiction rather than contributions from television or recent innovations in Virtual Reality (VR).

Origins: Pre-Narrative Nonfiction

In his seminal book *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*⁷, Erik Barnouw discusses the genesis of the form and explores the pioneers of early cinema (Barnouw 1993: 1-30). Entitled 'Prophet', Barnouw begins his journey with the indexical experiments of stills photographer Eadweard Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion* (1886), and in particular, his famous study of the galloping horse, which utilised faster shutter speeds in order to accurately capture motion. Barnouw reminds us of the inherently interdisciplinary beginnings of the form (a theme repeated throughout the text). According to Barnouw, these early experiments epitomised a crucial quality of the documentary, namely, 'Its ability to open our eyes to worlds available to us, but for one reason or another, not perceived.' (Barnouw 1993: 3) In other words, the camera has perceptual qualities that exceed the human eye.

⁷ Barnouw's book has an impressively international reach towards work beyond the UK and USA and builds conceptually on the work done by Paul Rotha in *Documentary Film* (1935). Barnouw rejects a strict chronology and instead structures his book around thirteen perceived trends of the form -exemplified by certain films and filmmakers- that evolve gradually to perform particular social functions, i.e. Prophet, Explorer, Reporter, Painter, Advocate, Bugler, Prosecutor, Poet, Chronicler, Promoter, Observer, Catalyst, and Guerilla.

Numerous historical accounts of the nonfiction film, including Barnouw, have also stressed the important progenitive role played by the 'actualities' of early cinema, which includes the pioneering work of Auguste and Louis Lumière, such as *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895) and *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895). Programmes of these short, single-set up projections, often featuring real life scenes (and increasingly exotic locations) were the leading form of commercial cinema until narrativised fiction began to exert its enduring influence. Due to their relatively austere form, actualities also foregrounded the *indexical qualities* of the images they recorded, that is, the filmed footage becomes a document of a particular act or location (or 'pro-filmic event') and this forms the basis of the 'belief in the informative and evidentiary power of photographic images.' (Plantinga 2013: 40) The power of the photographic image (both still and moving) as *evidence* is a foundational tenet of the documentary impulse and yet their veracity has been much debated because, as Plantinga continues, we must acknowledge that they are 'implicated in webs of subjectivity.' (ibid)⁸

The fiction film's dominance led to a seemingly 'lost' period for the nonfiction film between 1906 and the introduction of the dramatic documentary feature exemplified by Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*. Film Historian Tom Gunning has written about this formal stasis for the nonfiction film⁹ in his discussion of the 'view' aesthetic which extends his much discussed revisionist ideas on early cinema, 'cinema of attractions'. In the 1980s, Gunning's notion of *attractions*, provided a new critical framework that sought to highlight the complicated relationship between formally unsophisticated actualities and early audiences, as Gunning describes, 'By its reference to the curiosity-arousing devices of the fairground, the term denoted early cinema's fascination with novelty and its foregrounding of the act of

⁸ Given the spate of documentary-focused theoretical texts in the early 1990s, the brutal beating of Rodney King by a group of Los Angeles police officers in 1991 was much debated. The incident was filmed by a bystander George Holliday and became a key piece of evidence, which was then deconstructed by skillful defence lawyers resulting in the officers' controversial acquittal. This, as film theorist Bill Nichols wrote, 'Testifies to the malleability of footage that may document what happened on one level but not guarantee its meaning on another.' (Nichols 1993: 190)

⁹ That is, in contrast to the accelerated commercial maturation of fiction cinema.

display.’ (Gunning 1993: 42) Gunning specifically dated the period of attractions from 1895-1906¹⁰ (Gunning 1986: 13). Gunning suggests that the *view* film is a formal variation of the actuality which -although similar in descriptive value of the image- is not simply a ‘presentation of a place, an event or a process, but also as the mimesis of the act of observing.’ (Gunning 1997: 56) In a ‘view’ film such as *Making Christmas Crackers* (1910) the formal characteristics of the camera and editing foreground display and ‘permits manipulations of the image’ (ibid). A *view* is not strictly evidential in purpose in order to support a rhetorical argument and is not in the service of a truth claim. It is ostensibly a cinema of surfaces. However, Gunning suggests that *view* films had not previously been acknowledged as part of the documentary mode because they expose the subjective desires of their makers at the expense of a studied objectivity, ‘(View films) made the fashioners of the documentary tradition uncomfortable, because they reveal the ambiguous power relations of the look so nakedly. The voyeurism implicit in the tourist, the colonialist, the filmmaker and the spectator is laid bare in these films, without the naturalisation of dramatic structure or political argument.’ (Gunning 1997: 62) Gunning’s article is a persuasive discussion of what is considered to be the documentary’s wilderness years and another example of documentary’s retreat from the artistic impulse.

Throughout the 1920s, Russian filmmaker and theorist Dziga Vertov (real name Denis Kaufman) presented a rather more iconoclastic and self-conscious vision for the documentary form, as Michael Renov asserts, ‘Dziga Vertov, one of documentary’s totemic ancestors, voiced certain modernist ambitions which constitute, for the documentary tradition, a road not taken.’ (Renov 2007: 15) In order to construct what Annette Michelson called, ‘A cinema that offered the Communist Decoding of the World’ (Michelson 1984: lxi), Vertov rejected the ‘leprous’ theatricality of bourgeois fiction films of the day (‘Keep away from them! Keep your eyes off them! They’re mortally dangerous! Contagious!’ (Vertov 1922: 7)) and believed in the cinema as a tool for revolution. Vertov foregrounded how documentary form can be employed to break down the barriers between a film and

¹⁰ Gunning extended his hypothesis from the single-shot actualities to the theatrical tableaux of the *trick films* of the period, as typified by Georges Méliès’ fantasy *A Trip to the Moon* (1902).

an audience's everyday experience by creating, 'A loop from screen to audience, an orbit which connected the images to the audience's world.' (Chanan 2007: 70). The key to achieving this, as Renov (2007: 15) has suggested, was the balance between artistry and intellection, which were fundamental characteristics of the documentary form. Vertov believed the combination of camera lens and its operator became the *Kinoglaz* ('Kino-eye'), which exceeded the powers of human observation, 'Kino-eye as the possibility of making the invisible visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised overt, the acted nonacted; making falsehood into truth.' (Vertov 1924: 41) Vertov formulated his radical ideas for the Kino-eye movement in a series of polemical reports and manifestos, such as *WE: Variant of a Manifesto* (1922), alongside his work on the newsreel series *Kino Pravda* (a series of 23 films made between 1922-1925). He did not advocate an observational approach,¹¹ but rather one of experimentalism that utilised all of the expressive tools of cinema, 'Kino-eye means the conquest of time... Kino-eye is the possibility of seeing life processes in any temporal order or at any speed inaccessible to the human eye.' (Vertov 1929: 85)

Vertov's ideas perhaps reached their purest expression with *Man With a Movie Camera*: a restless, kaleidoscopic city symphony of the everyday and a propagandistic vision of technical advancement whose central character is the subjective perspective of the cameraman himself. Utilising techniques such as double exposures, mixing frame rates and split screen tableaux, the film is now considered a modernist documentary masterpiece, and Vertov, a celebrated pioneer of the nonfiction film form at the intersection between documentary and avant-garde practices. However, upon release, the film was dismissed by Soviet contemporary Sergei Eisenstein as merely 'formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera mischief' (Michelson 1984: xx) and subsequently Vertov found himself an increasingly marginalised figure within the bureaucracies of Stalinist-era Russia.

¹¹ That a mischievous experimenter such as Vertov called a film *Kino Eye: Life Caught Unawares* (1924) is further evidence of the difficult nature of labeling in the documentary.

Vertov was another victim of the documentary's seemingly habitual suspicion towards visually-led work¹².

The film's initial international reception did not fare much better: in Britain, for instance, 'John Grierson dismissed it as irrelevant to the serious task of proving documentary's value.' (Christie 2013: 168) Discussing the Russian innovators of the era, Grierson stated, 'Altogether, the Russian directors have been slow in coming to earth. Great artists they are, but alien for the most part to the material they are set.' (Grierson 1935: 65) This (rather condescending) opinion was shared by Grierson acolytes such as Paul Rotha -a producer and director of some note¹³- who wrote a trilogy of seminal books on the history of documentary including the first published survey of the form, *Documentary Film*, in 1935¹⁴. This dismissal of the work of Vertov, extended to Joris Ivens (*Rain*, 1929), Buñuel (*Land Without Bread*, 1933) Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's *Manhatta* (1921) and Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, and meant a long-term disavowal of the aesthetic, sensory and expressive impulses present in the documentary¹⁵.

¹² Particularly where the subjectivity of the filmmaker (rather than real-life participants) is foregrounded.

¹³ Rotha's films as a director include *World of Plenty* (1943) and, perhaps most notably, *Land of Promise* (1946).

¹⁴ Rotha helped to popularize the nonfiction film within scholarship with a trio of historical texts on the subject: *The Film Till Now* (1930), *Documentary Film* and, much later, *Documentary Diary* (1973). Rotha's description of Vertov is a prime example of shifting tastes since the publication of *Documentary Film* (and perhaps limiting the book's value to the contemporary scholar), 'He has, I am afraid, many of the faults which characterize the approach of Continental Realists and has not succeeded, in any of the films which I have seen, in getting beneath the surface of his material. He is, I admit, master of technique, but he is not, I submit, fulfilling the fundamental requirements of documentary by interpreting the problems set by his themes.' (Rotha/Road/Griffith 1952: 90)

¹⁵ Given the increasingly global networks of production, exhibition and distribution, further discussions will also surely reject the aforementioned Westernised focus of the documentary history and incorporate a more international scope, particularly in relation to the avant-garde mode. As the rediscovery of Vertov's initially shunned *Man with a Movie Camera* demonstrates, a more inclusive approach is likely to introduce new and vital texts into the documentary canon and lead to a more nuanced analysis of the evolution of the form.

John Grierson: Defining Documentary

‘Documentary is a clumsy description, but let it stand’ wrote John Grierson (Grierson 1932-34), producer, director, theorist and the key proponent of the British documentary film movement in the 1930s. Clumsy perhaps, but Grierson is credited as the first person to use the term ‘documentary’ within a cinematic context during an overwhelmingly positive review of Robert Flaherty’s *Moana* (1926), “Of course, *Moana* being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value.” (Grierson 1926: 86) In the same article, Grierson declares that the significance of Flaherty’s film is largely the result of a collision between the images taken from nature and its value as a document, but that this is secondary to Flaherty’s creative sensibility, ‘I think *Moana* achieves its greatness primarily through its poetic feeling for natural elements.... *Moana* is lovely beyond compare.’ (Grierson 1926: 87) For Grierson, the film’s *evidentiary* values were exceeded by its *aesthetic* qualities.

Grierson’s earliest attempt to refine his ideas on the documentary came in his ‘minor manifesto of beliefs’, *First Principles of Documentary* (Grierson 1932-34). Much like Vertov, Grierson sought to define nonfiction films in opposition to the studio-bound fiction films of the day, rejecting the artifice and fantasy of fiction whilst claiming the documentary to be a new creative form (even if the latter is somewhat of a secondary concern), ‘My separate claim for documentary is simply that in its use of the living article, there is *also* an opportunity to perform creative work.’ (Grierson 1932-34: 219) In discussing this ‘new and vital art form’, Grierson rails at the studio-bound theatricality of the fiction film of the day and dismisses the ‘lily-fingered interpretations of the metropolitan actor’ in favour of the spontaneity and powerful presence of the ‘native actor’ (i.e. real people). The documentary was a chance to create cinema that breathed the same air as its audience: Grierson wanted real people and authentic stories ‘taken from the raw’ of everyday life.¹⁶

¹⁶ Grierson’s differentiations were made in an era of conspicuously studio-bound fiction production, but today, where ‘realism’ is the key register for the fiction film, it could be argued that such distinctions are a little more nebulous.

Grierson also attempted to differentiate between higher and lower forms of films 'made from natural material' (i.e. actuality footage); a documentary is not merely descriptive, it must be, according to his oft-cited phrase, a 'creative treatment of actuality'. Flaherty is again given elevated status as the prototypical practitioner of this new dramatic art¹⁷. Newsreels and educational (or 'lecture') films were excluded and form part of the lower category because, 'They do not even dramatise an episode: they describe, and even expose, but in any aesthetic sense, only rarely reveal.' (Grierson 1932-34: 218) However, as Grierson's own ideas on the form and function of nonfiction storytelling began to take seed, his admiration for Flaherty's work (whom by now he considered a personal friend) became rather more muted. It is clear from Grierson's writing that Flaherty is an important early influence; he admires Flaherty's commitment and methods of production¹⁸, but soon began to feel ambivalent about what he perceived to lack of social component in Flaherty's work. This tension is evident in an article Grierson wrote for *Cinema Quarterly* wherein he states that 'so much Flaherty has taught us all', but that 'he is of a persuasion that does not easily come to grips with the more modern factors of civilisation.' (Grierson 1931-32: 31).

For Grierson, the social purpose of the realist documentary exploring the 'streets and cities and slums and markets and exchanges and factories' was key to his evolving documentary paradigm, as Stella Bruzzi asserted, '(Grierson) believes that the documentary is a useful, educational and impersonal genre, able to develop a discourse of sobriety, with connotations of authority, seriousness and

¹⁷ Flaherty seems essential to Grierson's conception of his *First Principles*:

1) The documentary must master its material on the spot, and come in intimacy to ordering it. Flaherty digs himself in for a year, or two maybe. He lives with his people till the story is told "out of himself."

2) It must follow him in his distinction between description and drama. I think we shall find that there are other forms of drama or, more accurately, other forms of film, than the one he chooses; but is important to make the primary distinction between a method which describes only the surface values of a subject, and the method which more explosively reveals the reality of it. You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your juxtaposition of detail, create an interpretation of it. (Grierson 1932-34: 219)

¹⁸ Flaherty was known for living amongst his contributors for a number of months before shooting even a foot of film, so that he could better understand his subject.

honesty.’ (Bruzzi, 2000: 79) In retrospect, Grierson saw his own film, *Drifters* (1929¹⁹), a bold exploration of the fishing industry influenced by Soviet montage techniques as a slightly uncomfortable mix of Flaherty’s ‘noble savage’ and this new documentary of social responsibility and the drama on the doorstep. As the creative impulse that gave birth to *Drifters* quickly turned -at least outwardly- to fiery polemicist, Grierson forcefully rejected aesthetics and, throughout his time overseeing production at Empire Marketing Board Film Unit (EMB) and later the General Post Office Film Unit (GPO), promoted ideas related to the social utility of documentary. As Erik Barnouw later wrote:

‘Grierson importuned his staff to avoid the “aestheticky”. He told them they were propagandists first, filmmakers second. ‘Art is a hammer, not a mirror,’ he said. It was part of Grierson’s genius that he could build an atmosphere of enthusiasm for necessary, vital propaganda without ever being quite clear about its aim.’ (Barnouw 1993: 90)

Indeed it is difficult to know where Grierson actually stood on the question of just how important aesthetics were in relation to his ideas of realist content and social purpose, particularly given the idiosyncratic sensibilities he recruited to be part of EMB including Alberto Cavalcanti, Paul Rotha, Harry Watt, Basil Wright²⁰, and even, briefly, Robert Flaherty. Later, in *The Documentary Idea*, written in 1942 whilst Grierson was working across the Atlantic as head of the recently established Canadian National Film Commission, he even suggested that his documentary project was essentially *anti-aesthetic*, ‘The documentary idea was not basically a film idea at all, and the film treatment only inspired an incidental aspect of it. The medium happened to be the most convenient and most exciting available to us. The idea itself, on the other hand was a new idea for public education.’ (Grierson 1942: 113) This position ultimately divided Grierson and Flaherty and this binary of classification has characterised much of the scholarship on documentary ever since, as Betsy A. McLane suggests, ‘Flaherty and Grierson represent two poles in the documentary

¹⁹ *Drifters* is an exploration of the North Sea herring industry. Made whilst Grierson was at the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit (EMB), this silent documentary is the only film on which Grierson is officially credited as ‘director’.

²⁰ Perhaps the most famous film from the British Documentary Movement remains the overtly poetic and formally ambitious *Night Mail* (1936), directed by Harry Watt and Basil Wright, and featuring a duologue by W.H. Auden and Grierson.

tradition between which any documentary filmmaker has to find a place.’ (McLane 2012: 87) However, as Trinh T. Minh-ha (Minh-ha 1984: 761) has succinctly stated, ‘Differences... never offer two absolute oppositions.’ Given the experimentalism of modern cinematic nonfiction, one must surely need to extend the sphere of influence by adding Vertov to this paradigm.

Scholars such as Brian Winston (Winston 2008: 37) and John Corner (Corner 2008: 27) have suggested that Grierson’s overt rejection of aesthetics was merely political manoeuvring, that is, justifying his and documentary production’s importance within the financial structures of a war-time government. Sincere or not, Grierson was a -perhaps necessarily- provocative advocate for a nascent art form still finding its identity and the influence of his brand of social purposiveness has been felt worldwide. He remains, however, a divisive figure in scholarship and has been challenged most notably, and combatively, by Winston (1995 & 2008²¹). Others including Corner (1996), Michael Chanan (2007) and Bill Nichols (2010) have found continued value in Grierson’s famous definition of documentary as the *creative treatment of actuality* as it makes explicit the necessary tension between *actuality* and its *creative treatment* that is part of every *real* story that is mediated through a filmmaker’s sensibility and conceptualised for the screen. As Nichols writes, ‘Neither term has full sway, that the documentary form balances creative vision with a respect for the historical world, identifies, in fact, one source of documentary appeal.’ (Nichols 2010: 6) Though the phrase *creative treatment of actuality* is not comprehensive (and not helped by Grierson’s seeming inconsistency), its longevity certainly attests to its ongoing definitional value.

²¹ In *Claiming the Real II*, Winston argued against Grierson’s famous definition of documentary as the *creative treatment of actuality* (though not as virulently as in the book’s predecessor), ‘I had in the first edition of this book averred that ‘the supposition that any “actuality” is left after “creative treatment” can now be seen as being at best naïve and at worst a mark of duplicity; but not, I must now admit, by everybody.’ (Winston 2008: 14) Winston acknowledges John Corner’s belief that this was ‘to be a too uncompromising assessment of the play off between ‘actuality’ and ‘creative treatment’. (Corner: 1996) Winston sees these challenges to his own criticism as ‘not without value’. However, others such as Anderson & Benson (1988) have suggested (via Michael Selig (1983:10) that Grierson did not define documentary in his oft-quoted phrase, ‘he merely announced its paradox.’ (Anderson & Benson 1988: 75)

3.2: Documentary Paradigms

Eat the Document: The Documentary Aesthetic

Of the texts published on the documentary during the flourishing of film studies in the early 1970s, Erik Barnouw's *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* has arguably been the most enduring since its publication in 1974²² and perhaps, as Jonathan Kahana suggests, the most influential history of the form since its publication. (Kahana 2016: 14) Kahana suggests that Barnouw's adherence to a historical model derived from John Grierson and Paul Rotha²³ is typical of the study of documentary up until the relatively recent explosion of critical texts in the early 1990s (ibid). In that decade Jack C. Ellis (1989), Brian Winston (1995 & 2000), John Corner (1996), Carl Plantinga (1997) and Stella Bruzzi (2000) all provided significant contributions to the study of the documentary film that widened the scope of critical approaches in scholarship. These works moved beyond a discussion of documentary's 'truth claim' and sought to apply 'methods borrowed from literary studies and the semiotic analysis of fiction film to prove that documentary film had a poetics, a narrative structure, and a set of genre conventions.' (Kahana 2016: 723-724) However, perhaps the most enduringly influential of this new scholarship has been the theoretical models introduced by Bill Nichols and Michael Renov, whose work is arguably now regarded as the new foundational texts of nonfiction film.

Bill Nichols: The Fictive and the Real

Eschewing the historical model in favour of establishing a more theoretical approach to documentary discourse, Bill Nichols has, across 40 years, offered a widely discussed body of work that includes seminal texts *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (1991), *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (1994), *Introduction to Documentary* (2001, 2nd

²² Richard Barsam's *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (1973) should also be acknowledged -though it has a more traditional chronological narrative than Barnouw's book.

²³ Further editions of Rotha's *Documentary Film* conscientiously added chapters by Sinclair Road covering Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australasia, and Richard Griffith exploring developments in North and Latin America.

Ed 2010) as well as a number of important articles²⁴. These works take us far beyond the principles of documentary introduced by the aforementioned spokesmen of the British documentary movement: Grierson and Rotha.

In *Representing Reality*, a book Michael Renov declared as 'The single most significant and influential book on documentary film.' (Renov 1999: 314). Nichols sought to differentiate his work from the historical surveys of nearly two decades before by asserting his book to be a 'conceptual overview of the form itself: what qualities of cinema underpin it, what institutional structures sustain it, what rhetorical operations inform it, what interpretive perspectives encompass it.' (Nichols 1991: ix) Nichols' interest in the formal aspects of the documentary, its *qualities of cinema*, has ensured the book's relevance to both film practitioners and film scholars, "A good documentary stimulates discussion about its subject, not itself." This serves as many a documentarist's motto, but it neglects to indicate how crucial rhetoric and form are to the realisation of this goal.' (Nichols: 1991: x) Nichols knows this unattributed maxim (which has distinct echoes of Griersonian social purposiveness) is unworkable in a cinematic context, as countless contemporary documentaries have so explicitly demonstrated. To paraphrase Jean-Luc Godard, form is meaning and so cannot be separated from content.

Representing Reality contains a wealth of definitions and concepts that have been an integral part of the documentary discourse in the 30 years since its release. These include Nichols' notion of the *discourse of sobriety* wherein he posits that through a long-established connection to educational and political systems, the documentary is regarded as the sobering, austere sister Ego and Superego to the fantastical Id of the fiction film. (Nichols 1991: 3-4) In Part One, *Axes of Orientation*, Nichols attempts to define the documentary film as a unique form of filmmaking: he explores the relationship between the historical world and the construction of filmic narratives, spectator positioning and introduces us to his four 'modes of representation' (Expository, Observational, Interactive and Reflexive – which in

²⁴ One might also include Nichols' early book *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media* (1981), but the later works focus more closely on actuality material and the documentary film.

Introduction to Documentary was modified and expanded into six modes to include Participatory, Poetic and Performative²⁵). It is with Nichols' theoretical remodelling of nonfiction that the question of ethics comes to the forefront of documentary discourse; it reminds us that there is an ethical dimension to every image we see and every sound event we hear, or as Nichols succinctly states, 'Historical place becomes ethical space.' (Nichols 1991: xv) Part Two, *A Fiction (Un)Like Any Other*, explores the differences between representing the imagined world of a fictional narrative and the historical world of the documentary film. Nichols introduces the terms 'likeness' and 'replica' in order to differentiate the two modes. According to Nichols, the fictional domain resembles the historical world, it presents a likeness, but its 'resemblance is fundamentally metaphorical.' (Nichols 1991: 109). The documentary allows its audience access to a shared historical world, a replica, not a fantasy world, but *the* world where 'issues of life and death are always at hand. History kills.' (ibid) Part Three, consisting of *Documentary Representation* and the *Historical World and Representing the Body: Questions of Meaning and Magnitude*, locates the corporeal body as the site for a discussion of the ethical challenges inherent in documentary rhetoric, style and representation. Nichols identifies two problematic forms that ostensibly trade in evidential truth: pornography and ethnography. Nichols suggests that these modes are indefensible because they present a naturalised representation of the Other that seeks to hide their true hierarchical, hegemonic and institutional concerns.

²⁵ As its title suggests, *Introduction to Documentary* is a rather more accessible proposition than its predecessors. Nichols begins, 'A concise, overarching definition (of the documentary) is possible, but not fundamentally crucial. It will conceal as much as it will reveal.' (Nichols 2010: 6) Instead Nichols chooses to define common characteristics that contribute to an ongoing dialogue and to do this he significantly revised his four *modes of representation* (Expository, Observational, Interactive and Reflexive) and presented the reader with a new six-mode paradigm, consisting of: Poetic, Expository, Observational, Participatory, Reflexive and Performative. Nichols continues to say that these modes cannot be strictly defined categories; that films seldom correspond to just one of these definitions and most documentaries are an amalgamation of several modes, which 'come into prominence at a given time and place, but they persist and become more pervasive than movements... Individual films often reveal one mode that seems most influential to their organization, but individual films can also "mix and match" modes as the occasion demands.' (Nichols 2010: 32) Certain tendencies might emerge from perceived limitations of form, technological innovations and changing social contexts, all of which contribute to certain organizational characteristics becoming more visible.

In a review of *Representing Reality for Screen*, John Corner suggests Nichols' aim was to resituate documentary within film studies, an undervalued form of storytelling that for a long time had 'lacked 'interest' in film and media studies largely because of what has been seen as its irredeemable and naïve obsession with realist representation.' (Corner 1993) Though theoretical discourses on mainstream fiction film scholarship had been sufficiently developed, due in no small part to the commerciality and visibility of the film texts under consideration, there was no such precedent for the documentary film: Nichols' ambitious, expansive writing gave documentary scholarship a new set of theoretical tools with which to articulate its distinctiveness and to re-connect with the wider film culture.

Informed by the guiding principle that documentaries were films that made arguments about the historical world and stimulate 'epistophilia' (Nichols' neologism meaning 'a desire to know') in their audiences (Nichols 2010: 40), Nichols' view was one still primarily attached to notions of the nonfiction film as a vehicle for socio-political concerns. However, in recent years Nichols' emphasis has somewhat shifted, which is evident in his two essays on 'Voice'. *The Voice of Documentary* (1983) explores some of the strategies that filmmakers have employed in order to demonstrate authorship of their filmed material, 'By "voice" I mean something narrower than style: that which conveys to us a sense of a text's social point of view.' (Nichols 1983: 640) Nichols suggested that too many filmmakers had disavowed their voice in a desire to present faithful observation (Direct Cinema) and the selective recall of talking head interviews (factual television), which 'flattens witnesses into a series of imaginary puppets conforming to a line.' (Nichols 1983: 648). Though a significant early contribution to Nichols' ongoing project, the article remains a little vague in its ideas of filmmaker authorship²⁶ in the documentary and might explain why Nichols was motivated to return to and elaborate on the notion of

²⁶ Michael Chanan suggests (2007: 130) this is perhaps unsurprising given the difficulty in articulating the concept of the 'author' in post-structuralist film scholarship. However, in Nichols' lengthy discussion regarding *Soldier Girls* (1981), directors Nick Broomfield and Joan Churchill, are never mentioned. This is rather curious given that the subject of the essay is the filmmaker 'voice' in documentary and directly relates to the authorship of the filmed material. It is unlikely such an omission would occur in a discussion of narrative fiction films.

the voice in a recent collection of essays concerning today's 'golden age of creative expression' for the creative documentary, *Speaking Truths With Film* (2016). Inspired by the plurality of creative approaches and forms to be found in contemporary hybrid documentary, Nichols declared that the nonfiction film has become, 'less like a narrowly conceived form of social moralizing and short-term advocacy and more like its fictional siblings: a form that explores the depth and complexity of human interaction.' (Nichols 2016: 80) In this new work the subjective 'history from below'²⁷ (the world of experience, the subjective/individual experience) mode of nonfiction filmmaking found a new prominence over the classical 'history from above' (the world of facts, the when, what and the why) and in doing so transcended notions of documentary *sobriety*.

Michael Renov: The Expressive Impulse

Michael Renov has consistently sought to present a rather less sobering approach to the documentary discourse by repeatedly emphasising the form's capacity for expressivity, 'my belief (is) that documentary, construed by Nichols as a "discourse of sobriety," is equally a discourse of jouissance - of pleasure, desire and of appeals to the Imaginary.' (Renov 2004: 23) Renov has foregrounded the documentary's close relationship to fictional works, particularly regarding semiotics, narrativity, and performance: unlike the early polemical writing on the form, documentary no longer had to define itself (simplistically) as oppositional to the fiction film to justify its uniqueness. As such, this is a sign of progress.

In *Toward a Poetics of Documentary* (1993b), Renov argued for the presence of four functions that he termed *modalities of desire*. The interplay between these four fundamental modes of production forms a documentary *poetics*, which has been a part of documentary since its inception. They are:

1. **To record, reveal, or preserve:** this is a fundamental impulse of the documentary –to reproduce the *historical real* via the recorded image- and can be traced back to

²⁷ Nichols links notions of 'history from below' to his Performative mode, which often amplifies underrepresented groups and voices.

the actuality films of the Lumière Brothers. But as Renov states, ‘The duplication of the world, even of what we know most intimately –ourselves- can never be unproblematic.’ (Renov 1993b: 26) Thus the truth claim of documentary will *always* be disputed.

2. **To persuade or promote:** This mode can be traced back to the Griersonian tradition of films that were socially purposive – but persuasiveness and promotion has had a component in numerous works already cited including aesthetically dynamic works, e.g. *Man with a Movie Camera*, et al. The aforementioned truth claim remains the ‘Baseline for all nonfiction, from propaganda to rock doc.’ (Renov 1993b: 30)

3. **To analyze or interrogate:** Renov considers this to be the ‘cerebral reflex of the record/reveal/persevere modality’ (ibid) in which the text encourages the spectator to actively question what is onscreen. This process of intellection creates more critically aware spectators as ‘Every viewer is forced to confront the malleability of meaning and the ideological impact of authorial or stylistic choices that typically go unnoticed.’ (Renov 1993b: 32) Examples of this mode are found in the work of Jean-Luc Godard, Vertov (again!) and the experimentalism of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet.

4. **To express:** as we have seen, the aesthetic function has been consistently undervalued in the history of nonfiction, which can be traced back to the pursuit of a scientific veracity of the photographic image (Muybridge, et al). As a result, innovative imagistic works were largely viewed as formal cul-de-sacs. Renov describes the expressive as the least explored of the functions and later stated, ‘Up until the past decade or two and despite the influence of the 1920s documentary innovators, the expressive or aesthetic function had been consistently undervalued within the non-fiction domain.’ (Renov 2013: 347) Renov warns against this ‘aesthetic straightjacketing’ and expands the boundaries of documentary to include avant-garde work of Stan Brakhage (*The Act of Seeing with One’s Own Eyes*, 1971) and Peter Kubelka (*Unsere Afrikareise*, 1966). Nonfiction, according to Renov, has long treated aesthetic innovation by the likes of Vertov as anomalous or amusing, but

fundamentally unimportant diversions, however, 'A view of documentary which assumes too great a sobriety for nonfiction discourse will fail to comprehend the sources of nonfiction's deep-seated appeal.' (Renov 1993a: 3) Renov believes this anti-aesthetic tendency has prevailed since the Griersonian documentaries of 1930s and 1940s, and was compounded by the emergence of factual television.

Renov rejects Brian Winston's (1995) dismissal of the expressive as a unnecessary element and declares, 'The formal construction of a work is far from an add-on or surface feature that the 'prettifying' label (Winston, *Claiming the Real*) would suggest (aesthetics as the icing on the cake). The formal regime is the very portal of sense-making; it determines the viewer's access to the expression of ideas, its power to move and transform an audience.' (Renov 2013: 348) Renov believes that through this paradigm he can show that the expressive is inseparable from the documentary's rhetorical function, 'The centrality of the expressive domain is a crucial point to make for documentary studies in light of a tradition of disparagement toward 'formalism' meant to be an unyielding focus on the beautiful rather than the true.' (Renov 2007: 16)

The conference *Truth or Dare: Art and Documentary* took place at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in February 2006 and was an acknowledgment that resistance to notions of expressivity in nonfiction filmmaking were on the decline. The event brought together documentary and contemporary art practitioners and scholars in an attempt to locate the boundaries of their respective practice: documentary makers who experimented with form, artists who used real stories as raw material. Renov suggests that this visible breaking down of disciplinary boundaries constituted a new phase for documentary practice as 'Artists are drawn to the world 'out there' as documentarists have since the Lumières but shaped and informed by the world 'in here,' by their personal experience, cultural and sexual identities, their political and aesthetic engagement.' (Renov 2007: 14) Renov highlights the formal outer limits of traditional nonfiction filmmaking and posits that documentary has *always* been inseparable from art-making.

At the conference, Renov, seemingly inspired by evidence of a spirited and long overdue convergence in the form of hybrid documentary, introduces 'Ethics' into his paradigm as a fifth mode of desire in order to 'support' the seldom-discussed expressive function (Renov 2007: 23). Renov describes this ethical function as the 'Attentiveness to the mutuality and commensurability of self and Other despite the differences of power, status and access to the means of representation, a 'you' and 'I' in delicate balance.' (Renov 2007: 23)²⁸ Seeking to provide a basis for his ethical mode, Renov is much influenced by ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, 'who asserts that "nonindifference to the other" is the very precondition for the construction of subjectivity.' (Renov 2004: 159) Levinas advocated for an ethics as first philosophy, wherein this responsibility for the Other precedes being, 'to be I signifies not being able to escape responsibility.' (Levinas 1996: 117) According to Levinas, the face-to-face encounter between self and Other is the arena where ethics are examined and its ultimate principle -*responsibility*- is identified, 'Levinas understood that there is something enigmatic, or quasi-indeterminate, in the human visage that forces us to recognise certain commitments to others.' (Hutchens 2004: 20) However, this enigmatic quality -the very essence of the Other- remains beyond the grasp of rational knowledge. As Renov asserts, Levinas' writings sought to resist the desire to reduce difference to sameness and suggests a coexistence in which otherness remains intact. (Renov 2004: 150) Levinas highlighted the violence in the pursuit of a totalising knowledge and believed that, 'giving value to the relation of infinite responsibility which goes from the I to the Other... I believe that this is our most valuable everyday experience, one that allows us to resist a purely hierarchical world.' (Levinas 1996: 22-23) Renov believes that this elevation of the ethical and commitment to the fraternal respect and attentiveness of the Other could have important consequences for documentary practice and theory as it looks beyond the claims of truth and knowledge towards an open, collaborative exchange of ideas that challenges 'models of mastery or absolute certainty, placing greater emphasis on open-endedness, empathy and receptivity.' (Renov 2004: 130) The impact of this elevation of the filmmaker/subject *encounter*, according to Renov, 'is a new balance

²⁸ Renov later expanded his conference presentation into the article *Art, Documentary as Art* (2013).

being struck between subject and object and the result is a reinvention of documentary practice.’ (Renov 2007: 14).

Renov, via his *poetics*, shows us that the expressive impulse in documentary aligns with the fiction film and avant-garde tendencies, and is finally merging to create the formally exciting, politically challenging new work evident in cinemas, festivals and galleries, ‘The recalibration of practitioner classification is already well under way.’ (Renov 2007: 18)²⁹ We will explore this further in the next chapter.

Through the work of scholars like Nichols, Renov et al the documentary form has been resituated alongside the fictional and avant-garde modes and given a new vocabulary with which to articulate its complex aesthetic and rhetorical ideas. This has resulted in the traditional principles being vigorously and perceptively tested. Corner (2008) said that the documentary has traditionally been associated more with the ‘knowledge business’ rather than the art-systems of society, and consequently ‘Documentary is widely seen to lack the symbolic richness of narrative cinema both in its visual design and its textual organisation.’ (Corner 2008: 21) The next step for scholarly discourse, suggests Corner, is to develop a more sophisticated understanding of aesthetic practices. This appears to already be underway with new and vital texts appearing with an unprecedented regularity (often by practice-based researchers³⁰) and including Oppenheimer & Ten Brink (2012), MacDonald (2013), Quinn (2015), Hongisto (2015), Cohn (2020).

²⁹ It should be noted that Renov is also co-editor (alongside Jane M. Gaines) *Visible Evidence*, an ever-expanding series of anthologies exploring the documentary tradition (inspired by the annual *Visible Evidence* conference) all published by University of Minnesota Press.

³⁰ Routledge’s imprint Focal Press, for example, have in recent years published numerous important practice-based texts focused on documentary.

3.3: Documentary Forms

Contemporary Cinematic Nonfiction

So far we have outlined some of the key historical and theoretical paradigms at the heart of the documentary tradition, and it is now important to explore some of the practical methodologies contemporary filmmakers have used within the context of the creative nonfiction film. Routinely referred to as ‘cinematic nonfiction’ or ‘hybrid documentary’, this shapeshifting contemporary amalgam of documentary, fiction and avant-garde modes aligns itself to art cinema by embracing formally innovative methods of production that transcend traditional boundaries, including fictive elements and an expressive visual/auditory style that appeals to the senses rather than straightforward intellection. The richness of the form is evident from the list of recent films commonly categorised as ‘hybrid documentary’, including *24 City* (2008), *El Sicario Room 164* (2010), *This is Not a Film* (2011), *Bombay Beach* (2011), *Komunia* (2016), *Bloody Nose Empty Pockets* (2020), et al. Though the documentary is a mode of representation traditionally associated more with actuality and rhetoric than imagination, this formally bold work is also now helping to re-evaluate what were previously thought of as relatively obscure cinematic anomalies, such as *Land Without Bread*, *Blood of the Beasts* (1949), *On the Bowery* (1956), *The Exiles* (1961), *The House Is Black*³¹ (1963) and *Animal Love* (1994).

Scholars such as Trinh T. Minh-ha have suggested that too often filmmakers have overlooked the chance to invest ‘documentary’ images with the depth of subjective emphasis in favour of a pursuit of (the appearance of) objectivity, that is, images and sounds in a supporting role and primarily used to corroborate a film’s seemingly neutral position/perspective that ‘tie cinematic language to scientific rigor.’ (Minh-ha 1984: 758). Evolving from an ethnographic impulse and a willing retreat from the expressive, this approach established an all too recognisably dreary film language with the characteristics of the ‘long take, hand-held camera, sync sound (authentic sound) overlaid with omniscient commentary (the *human science*

³¹ Forough Farrokhzad’s haunting short *The House is Black* (1962) is another example of a recently reclaimed ‘lost’ film. The film was voted joint 19th in the 2014 critics poll of best documentaries in Sight & Sound – an exceptional result for a short form film.

rationale), wide-angle lens...' (ibid: 759) This 'anti-aesthetic' attitude favoured the wide-angle tableaux and sacrificed the creative possibilities of the close-up, 'The creed is: the wider, the truer.' (ibid: 761) The approach is perhaps most notable in the seminal films of the Cinéma Vérité³² and Direct Cinema³³ era of the 1960s, the latter of which featured a stripped-down, observational style in which the repression of subjectivity was seen as 'a cardinal virtue' (Renov 2004: xx) and according to director Robert Drew (*Primary*, 1960) 'The film-maker's personality is in no way directly involved in directing the action³⁴.' (Renov 2004: xxi)

The early Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs (1884-1949) suggested that the expressive tools unique to the medium of film provides filmmakers with the opportunity to use 'subjective lyrical manifestations' to give a 'subtle personal emphasis' that speaks directly to the spectator and asserted that, 'The camera in fact shows us invisible things.' (Balázs 1952: 143-145) On the potential dangers inherent in such authorial manipulations in a documentary context, filmmaker Clio Barnard

³² Despite the bold formal provocations of films such as Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961).

³³ As Beattie (2004) suggests, the terms Cinéma Vérité and Direct Cinema are often used interchangeably. Cinéma Vérité, usually associated with ethnographic filmmakers working in France differs from Direct Cinema (which is associated with American filmmakers and the twinned demands of journalism and television) by its layer of reflexivity that reveals the relationship between the subject and filmmaker rather than rely on the strict observations of Direct Cinema. However, there was considerable overlap in their intention of achieving moments of truth and experience for the camera and both were popularized in the 1960s due to the introduction of new, portable 16mm cameras. Eschewing the provocative interventions of Cinéma Vérité (where filmmakers frequently highlighted their presence behind the camera), Direct Cinema is defined by its lack of artifice in its pursuit of an unadorned *truth*. Inspiring Bill Nichols' 'Observational' mode of his six-mode paradigm, characteristics include limited staging, no verbal commentary or music (other than diegetic) and few talking head interviews. Nichols traces its aesthetic origins back the Italian neo-realist cinema of the 1940s and uses the *Observational* mode to highlight ethical issues, e.g. the presence of the camera -which is usually concealed and ignored by the social actors- and its effect on the scene. Examples include *Primary* (1960), *Dont Look Back* and the work of Frederick Wiseman (*Titicut Follies* (1967), *Near Death* (1989), *National Gallery* (2014)). For years synonymous with notions of truth and authenticity in the cinema, this deep rooted view has been repeatedly challenged by scholars such as Stella Bruzzi (2013).

³⁴ A dubious claim that seemingly neglects to account for the impact of the presence of the camera or the edit on this 'action'.

quotes Errol Morris (Morris & Bates 1989), whose extraordinary body of work features elaborate and conspicuous manipulations of the cinematic form³⁵, 'He (Morris) says 'Truth can't be guaranteed by style or expression. Truth can't be guaranteed by anything'. And I agree with him, completely.' (Brassey, no date) But this is not invention without responsibility, as Barnard continues, 'Continually pointing out that 'this is reconstruction' doesn't gain you the right to reconstruct things with an open mandate.' (ibid, no date)

Michael Renov believes that Documentary Studies, with its adherence to Griersonian seriousness, still considers the 'avowal of subjectivity a slightly suspicious act' (Renov 2004: xviii) and, in particular, has tended to 'repress the emphasis on the subjectivity of the maker in favour of the world on the other side of the lens.' (Renov 2007:13). In this chapter, we will explore how contemporary filmmakers and artists -via an emphasis on the expressive- are contributing to a reconceptualisation of documentary practice orthodoxies in order to represent the subjective, private and internal.

The Expressive

In his valuable collection of interviews with filmmakers and scholars *Avant-Doc* (2015), Scott MacDonald provides an extended closing chapter on the influential work of the Sensory Ethnographic Lab (SEL) at Harvard University. An interdisciplinary collaboration between researcher/filmmakers from the departments of Anthropology and Visual and Environmental Studies³⁶, SEL has produced such

³⁵ Morris' formal strategies in films such as *The Thin Blue Line* include dramatised reconstructions, musical underscoring, scripted scenes, etc. In his interview with Bates, Morris says that in contrast with the observational impulse, in his films his intention is to be as 'Obtrusive as possible' and claims that the aims of 'cinéma-vérité set back documentary filmmaking twenty or thirty years.' (Morris & Bates 1989: 808)

³⁶ The impact of practice-based scholars on the boundary-challenging contemporary documentary cannot be underestimated. Notable examples include Joshua Oppenheimer (*The Act of Killing*), Brett Story (*The Prison in Twelve Landscapes*, 2016), RaMell Ross (*Hale County This Morning, This Evening*, 2018), Robert Greene (*Kate Plays Christine*, 2016), Peter Snowden (*The Uprising*, 2013) and Clio Barnard (*The Arbor*).

aesthetically innovative films as *Leviathan*, *Manakamana* (2013) and the once-seen-never-forgotten study of an infamous Japanese cannibal murderer *Caniba* (2017). In an interview with SEL's co-founder Lucien Castaing-Taylor, MacDonald evokes the work of John Dewey, the educational theorist and leading proponent of Pragmatism, whose notable work on aesthetics, *Art As Experience*, was first published in 1934. Dewey's conception of the 'Live Creature' connected art to the aesthetic and sensory experience 'in the raw' of every day life (Dewey 1934: 4). Acknowledging Dewey's influence, Castaing-Taylor asserts, 'Like Dewey, the SEL is concerned not with analyzing, but with actively producing aesthetic experience' (MacDonald 2015: 402) and 'a return to the primacy of the individual, the body, and above all inter-subjective and inter-corporeal experience.' (MacDonald 2015: 404) SEL's work is notable for its rejection of expository methods in favour of a daring, sensory, visceral approach to film form that push actuality images into the expressive and hallucinatory. *Leviathan*, for example, which, like Grierson's *Drifters*, is a visually startling exploration of a fishing boat at sea, used multiple Go-Pro sports cameras -frequently attached to the fishermen themselves- to capture a disorientating experiential journey. Dispensing with the traditional visual strategies of nonfiction, such as talking head interviews, the film is crafted from footage of several different trips completed by the filmmakers and then presented as a single unbroken journey. *Leviathan* is a 'document' only in the sense that it is the filmmaker's experience of their subject and captures the beauty, harshness and fear of being out at sea. As co-director Verena Paravel explained, 'The film is a gesture, a physical and emotional reaction to our experience... an aesthetic translation of what we have been subjected to.' (Cook 2012) This is a visceral truth in the form of the filmmakers' expressive interpretation of the documentary image, or as Robert Sklar (1975: 726) described it, 'artifice in the service of truth': neither wholly objective truth or subjective invention, but both at the same time.

The scopic and experiential pleasure of *Leviathan* (and numerous other works by SEL) can be situated within what Keith Beattie refers to as 'Documentary Display' (Beattie 2008). Endeavouring to revise what he considers to be a historically restrictive critical discussion of nonfiction aesthetics, Beattie describes *Display* as existing where 'The visual realm is maximized as the field of exhibitionistic,

expressionistic and excessive attractions.’ (Beattie 2008: 4). Following Elizabeth Cowie’s notions of documentary -from a psychoanalytic perspective- as a locus of contradictory desires (the desire for knowledge and the more ‘immoral’ desire for spectacle) in *The Spectacle of Actuality*³⁷ (Cowie 1999), Beattie’s *Display* is a move away from the creatively choking strictures of the documentary as narrowly defined by its educative or evidentiary purposiveness, as he proclaims, ‘Beyond ‘telling’ there is another way of seeing and knowing.’ (Beattie 2008: 5) Beattie asserts that the origins of documentary *display* can be found in the actuality films (and by extension the post-1906 *view* films) of Tom Gunning’s ‘cinema of attractions’ and their merging with the modernist city symphonies of the 1920s and 1930s. For Beattie, the expressive visual and auditory capabilities of the documentary form help to construct knowledge in new and valuable ways by focusing on the sensual and affective via an appeal to the spectator’s subjective imagination, ‘appearances inform imagination through which the world is apprehended within a form of visual knowing.’ (ibid: 16) This privileging of the image may manifest itself in a text, for example, through the use of long takes, kinetic editing and dynamic movement within the frame.

Beattie, like Renov before him, suggests that Bill Nichols’ emphasis on the rhetorical function and notion of documentary as a ‘discourse of sobriety’ has infused the form with an overly solemn and dull tone, ‘Documentary display entertains, startles and excites in ways which produce pleasure – the great repressed in analyses predicated on documentary as a sober discourse.’ (ibid: 5) Beattie’s synthesises the work of Gunning and Renov for a compelling reconsideration of the scopic impulse long marginalised in the documentary.

Beattie rejects what he claims to be the prevailing social pedagogy of the Griersonian expository form and instead foregrounds the scopic pleasures of nonfiction work that has historically been attributed to an avant-garde context, ‘The image, released from its strict denotive literalism whereby it must serve as the

³⁷ Elizabeth Cowie wrote about documentary as spectacle in ‘The Spectacle of Actuality’ (1999), which was published as part of the long-running Visible Evidence series edited by Michael Renov, et al. This was later expanded to the book *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* (2011).

vehicle or subject of evidence, is variously deployable as evocation, sensory affect or 'poetic' allusion. (ibid: 5) In fact, Beattie is wilfully provocative in his rejection of Grierson's didacticism and declares him 'notoriously contradictory and inconsistent in his writings.' (ibid: 37) Beattie also dismisses what he sees as the long-standing divide between aesthetics and politics rooted in the Griersonian tradition, 'a division that is typically framed in terms of mutual expulsions within which the aesthetic denies politics and vice versa. The separation of aesthetics and politics is recast with documentary display's circulation of a politics of aesthetically-organised vision³⁸.' (ibid: 15)

In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), Jacques Rancière suggests that the aesthetic regime of the arts which was able to capture what he called 'a specific beauty' within previously marginalised and 'anonymous' subjects (i.e. the poor masses) led to an important breakdown in a system of representation, 'where the dignity of the subject matter dictated the dignity of genres of representation.' (Rancière 2004: 32) This system of representation based on privilege defined the forms of expression that were appropriate for the lowliness or loftiness of a subject matter according to the established social order, that is, tragedy for the affluent, comedy for the impoverished, et al. Though Rancière declares this shift literary in origin, it was later reappropriated by the modern 'mechanical' arts of photography and the moving image resulting in 'the appearance of the masses on the scene of history.' (ibid: 34) Questions of visibility have long been part of the documentary tradition and Beattie's notion of a documentary display, in its potential to establish an expressive rendering of everyday experience represents an opportunity to reveal and elevate previously neglected subjectivities. According to Rancière, this convergence of the aesthetic regime and the *newly visible* facilitates a transformative act:

³⁸ Beattie suggests that the essay film (such as those by Chris Marker, Patrick Keiller, Harun Farocki, Jean-Luc Godard, et al) is just one form of nonfiction that combines aesthetic pleasures with overtly political intent, e.g. characteristics including explicit authorial perspective, focus on historical experience, disunities of time and place and polemical tone (usually from a left-wing perspective). The most prominent contemporary example is perhaps Adam Curtis (*The Power of Nightmares* (2004), *HyperNormalisation* (2016)).

‘the ordinary becomes beautiful as a trace of the true. And the ordinary becomes a trace of the true if it is torn from its obviousness in order to become a hieroglyph, a mythological or phantasmagoric figure. This phantasmagoric dimension of the true, which belongs to the aesthetic regime of the arts, played an essential role in the formation of the critical paradigm of the human and social sciences.’ (ibid: 34)

As we will see in later chapters, my own research conceptualises the (erroneous) binary of aesthetics and politics, seeking to create a *specific beauty* within the spectator’s imagination. My intention is to unite an expressive cinematic language with contemporary social themes such as gender (*TRANS*, 2013) and homelessness (*Camrex* (2015), *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You* (2020), et al) to create new ideas about the world.

The Subjective Interior

In *Subjectivity*, José Moure reminds us that the cinema has long since been viewed as a vehicle to render visible things we cannot see, ‘Film, as a medium which is apparently meant to reproduce concrete reality both externally and objectively, has, from the start, been considered a privileged vehicle of subjectivity and interiority.’ (Moure 2011: 24) That this wide-ranging collection of essays almost entirely avoids a discussion of modes of nonfiction subjectivity -the habitual repression of which, Renov believes, is an ‘ideologically driven fact of documentary history’ (Renov 2004: xviii³⁹)- demonstrates how slow film scholarship has been to embrace the expansive possibilities of the documentary form. As we have seen, Renov has suggested that creative intervention, the construction of certain fictive elements through an expressive conceptualisation of the historical world, is an essential part of the documentary tradition, and, with formally bold contemporary hybrid films incorporating the private subjectivities rather as well as the public life of their central protagonists, ‘(The) sensory experiences and psychic processes of everyday life (are) increasingly the terrain of the new documentary.’ (Renov 2007: 20).

³⁹ Despite the fact that many of the greatest achievements of the form -*Man With A Movie Camera*, et al- were exercises in aesthetic self-expression. (Renov 2004: xviii)

A focus on private subjectivity is used as a key narrative strategy in Clio Barnard's *The Arbor*, a multi-layered and frequently harrowing exploration of the life and lasting impact of late playwright Andrea Dunbar (*Rita, Sue & Bob Too*). Employing expansive interdisciplinary arts techniques, most notably from verbatim theatre, e.g. professional actors lip-syncing to real life testimony -as the interviewees retain a degree of anonymity- Barnard starkly and poetically renders visible the thoughts and memories of her central protagonist, Dunbar's daughter Lorraine (played by Manjinder Virk). Barnard's focus on the interior is evident in an early sequence where Lorraine and her half-sister Lisa (Christine Bottomley) recount a traumatic memory from their childhood: a fire is started in the bedroom in which they have been imprisoned by their mother. Faced with the documentarian's eternal problem, i.e. having to visually represent a real moment where no recorded imagery exists, Barnard -who interviewed Dunbar's family, friends and colleagues and created an 'audio script', from which she then designed her film- looks beyond the archive and reinvents the drearily ubiquitous 'talking head' interview as a fresh and engaging visual strategy. She provides a startling, visceral experience for an audience utilising a complex combination of scripted/storyboarded scenes, blocking, production design and practical visual effects in order to creatively interpret and dramatise the sisters' memories.

Béla Balázs sought to explore the correlation between mental patterns and processes unique to the cinematic form. Discussing the fiction films of his day, he believed that the close-up was the primary tool for filmmakers to express their poetic sensibility and declared, 'Close-ups are film's true terrain. With the close-up the new territory of this new art opens up.' (Balázs 2010: 38) He believed that by isolating the human face from the rest of the scene, close-ups helped the spectator to perceive what was happening 'under the surface of appearances' and reveal a character's interior thoughts and feelings. As Ilona Hongisto observed, 'Balázsian inner aesthetics presupposes that the camera takes on the role of an active observer and is not satisfied with being the passive recorder of an unfolding mise-en-scène.' (Hongisto 2015: 75). Likewise, *The Arbor* does not purport to be an exercise in unmediated truth, instead, by focusing on the private, interior life of its characters, it foregrounds Barnard's role as creator/mediator and produces a different kind of

knowledge about the subject: one based in the experiential. Through these expansive formal techniques Barnard signals to the spectator that the film is not merely a delivery system for factual information, but rather a reflexive layering of representations: an acknowledgement of competing subjectivities. This reflexivity compromises an evidentiary reading and makes the spectator complicit in the artifice of the film, thus acknowledging that real stories will inevitably be changed in the retelling.



Fig. 1: An image from Clio Barnard's *The Arbor* (2010)

Hongisto suggests that documentary captivates viewers primarily because in the act of framing an image we are reminded that a film persistently draws attention to its own limitations, 'not in an effort to contain and explain, but in order to reveal the limits of what is seeable and sayable at a given moment in time.' (Hongisto 2015: 23) For Hongisto, a frame reminds us that the dimensions of the world are 'not limited to what is directly perceivable in images' and beyond that threshold is an expressive world rich in 'transformative potential.' (ibid: 12) As a consequence, the presence in the historical world -the world of facts, of daily life- of those represented on screen is highlighted and 'this endows documentary films with a particular agency in the real and issues them with a related ethical prerogative.' (ibid: 135-136) Discussing a section of *The Arbor* where a faltering Lorraine reveals she fell into sex work, Barnard articulates the importance of preserving the affective response of the original interview recordings, 'When we were editing the audio obviously there were these pauses. Presumably, when pausing a lot was going on in her imagination. It

was really important to leave those pauses exactly as they were. To leave those gaps exactly as they were. And then the actress that played her had to reproduce those gaps.’ (Brassey, no date) By focusing on these active moments of imagining, and thus with authorial intervention explicitly on display, ethics directly informs aesthetic and methodological choices. The film in its totality is a depiction of that extended enquiry and reinforces the need to engage with an analysis of the aesthetic sophistication of the text *as well as* its social component.

In *The Subject of Documentary* (2004), Michael Renov suggested that due to nonfiction’s historical links to science (the photographic image as evidence), observation and journalistic reportage, that filmmakers and scholars alike have viewed the subjective as ‘a kind of contamination, to be expected but minimized.’ (Renov 2004: 174) However, with the influx of post-Direct Cinema films of the 1980s and 1990s which were rooted in the diverse cultural identities and personal concerns of their makers (such films as Marlon Riggs’ *Tongues Untied* (1989), as well as the various first-person autobiographical works that Renov termed ‘Domestic Ethnography’ (Renov, 1999)) Renov claims that the documentary form that ‘had previously been valorized as informed but objective was now being replaced by a more personalist perspective in which the maker’s stake and commitment to the subject were being foregrounded.’ (Renov 2004: 176) A personal commitment to the filmed ‘experience’ is at the foundation of many of the works exploring the Documentary Interior - where the expressive creative sensibilities of the maker links with the private subjectivity of the contributor and where the ‘openness and mutual receptivity between filmmaker and subject may be said to extend the relationship between audience and the film.’ (Renov 2004: 130). This is providing important new insights into the filmmaker/contributor relationship.

Portuguese filmmaker Pedro Costa, whose series of films featuring characters from the long-dismantled Fontainhas neighbourhood of Lisbon and includes *In Vanda’s Room* (2000), *Colossal Youth* (2006) and *Vitalina Varela* (2019) forms a singular, visually austere body of work on the outer limits of nonfiction

representation⁴⁰. Costa specialises in a kind of filmed portraiture, featuring the recurring characters of Ventura, Vitalina and Vanda (usually playing versions of themselves) as they discuss their lives, thoughts, dreams, and fantasies. Collectively, these testimonies contribute to developing an imagined version of Fontainhas, a place long destroyed (as we see in *In Vanda's Room*) and replaced with brand new social housing (as we see in *Colossal Youth*).

Costa's mode of working emerged from a dissatisfaction with traditionally financed, large scale crews (relatively speaking) and strictures of standard filming schedules on films such as *Ossos* (1997). During *In Vanda's Room* - a 3-hour epic of intense intimacy focusing on the life of heroin user Vanda Duarte⁴¹ - Costa would frequently work entirely alone on location with his non-professional cast. Shooting on a small mini-DV camera and working without a conventional screenplay - just scene fragments and an open narrative structure and filming schedule, *In Vanda's Room* took around two years to shoot, 'The film's intimate quality transcends the mere observation of spontaneous moments... his directorial supervision also consisted in insistently re-enacting particular scenes and, occasionally, adding small props in the *mise en scène* to enhance the episodic narratives depicted in the film. On some occasions, the actors staged them to recreate particular occurrences, either witnessed by Costa or told to him.' (Jorge 2020: 64) Recent work such as *Horse Money* (2014) and *Vitalina Varela* are pushed further into the abstract and exist almost entirely within memory and imagination: long, deliberately-paced monologues mix memory and fantasy from the centre of a starkly-lit vortex.

⁴⁰ Though he disavows such labels, Costa was often grouped together with the 'contemplative cinema' movement popular in the early 2000s alongside the durational experiments of practitioners such as Wang Bing, James Benning, Jia Zhangke, Tsai Ming-Liang, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Bela Tarr and Lav Diaz - where the line between documentary and fiction and experimental is frequently dissolved.

⁴¹ Vanda Duarte also acted in Costa's *Ossos*.



Fig. 2: Pedro Costa's *Horse Money* (2014)

Costa frequently uses studio sets to recreate locations that only exist in the memories of his characters - recording and preserving its images and sounds, as he describes, 'it's a real memory of what it used to be, what it still is sometimes, because I spend lots of days and nights at Vitalina's, like I used to at Vanda's.' (Guest & Peranson 2019: 22) Collectively, Costa's films form a poetic archive of inner voices that transcends traditional filmmaking boundaries. Inspired by Charlie Chaplin, Costa describes his method of filming as *rehearsal for the camera*, '(Chaplin) used to film all his work, everything he did, and that included all the rehearsals with the actors, with himself. It was his method of clearing the way or discovering things just by studying the details and variations from one take to another.' (Kasman, 2020) Costa creates a space for his non-professional cast to experiment on a daily basis: a routine of creative work mingling with the everyday lives of his actors is essential to breath life into the films, 'For me, there's much more than just the shooting or the editing: there's Ventura's health, there's Vitalina's papers, all the waiting rooms and court houses and infirmaries and corridors that they have to walk through. I think cinema is also there for them not to walk alone. Sometimes I wonder if it was just a film, would I bother?' (ibid) Costa's long-term personal commitment to collaboration allows him to consistently redefine the

parameters of his stories as his characters live their lives, reflect and dream about their past experiences, as he stated, 'in every film there has always been some sort of fantasy serving some sort of reality... if I'm true to Vitalina, if I follow her guidance, memories, feelings, we will be safe⁴².' (ibid) Through an in-depth collaborative focus on the experiential, subjective and internal, Costa's films endeavour to reveal *histories from below* and amplify seldom-heard voices⁴³. Through this creative intervention Costa brings the spectator closer to inner, private spaces, extending the frame of documentary representation (private becoming political) and so creates new insights about the world.

The works discussed above⁴⁴ are all examples of striking documentary design that push at the boundaries of documentary representation: using methods of narrative imagination, all inhabit a liminal space between documentary film, fiction and avant-garde, that is, the creativity of their approach is shared with the ethical commitments of the documentary tradition. Yet this impulse towards an expressive rendering of the subjective interior as a way to experience real lives and stories remains somewhat unrecognised in both documentary scholarship and practice. My body of work aims to establish a distinct space for the use of expressive creative techniques in order to render visible internal representations within a nonfiction context.

⁴² Costa's use of the word 'safe' in this context unmistakably evokes Emmanuel Levinas' work.

⁴³ This is a similar deep immersion approach to the work of directors such as Alma Har'el (*Bombay Beach*), Anna Zamecka (*Komunia*), Chloe Zhao (*The Rider*) and Roberto Minervini - whose fascination with areas of the southern states of the US featured in his Texas Trilogy (*The Passage*, *Low Tide*, *Stop the Pounding Heart*) and *The Other Side* (aka Louisiana).

⁴⁴ It should be noted that from the many examples I could have chosen, the selections reflect my own interests, e.g. the work of filmmakers Clio Barnard and Pedro Costa feature stories founded in working class landscapes and experiences (relevant to the ongoing thematic preoccupations of my own work).

4. Methodologies

The projects that make up this PhD research demanded multiple methodologies in support of my work as filmmaker and photographer. The fluidity of my creative practice means that there is significant overlap between projects. In order to capture the variety of approaches specific to each project, I will discuss these individually in the following section. The research can essentially be split into two parts: the experimental work informed by hybrid documentary up to and including *TRANS and Refocus* (2014), and my more thematically unified work from the *Hostel Polaroids* (2014) to *Truant* (2020b), all of these explore marginalised working class environments of North East England. The importance of providing fresh perspectives on these communities became a key motivation during these later works. The submission includes a feature film screenplay and development documentation, three short form films, four photography projects, and an ongoing contextual review via a curated season of documentary films and a peer-reviewed article.

The projects that comprise this research required me to take on numerous roles including: Director, Producer, Writer, Editor, Director of Photography (DoP), Sound Recordist/Designer, Photographer, Curator, Programmer, Researcher, et al. This work also encompasses often overlooked areas, including project development, pitching, funding applications, post-production/mastering films, exhibition/festival strategies, creation of release materials (inc. language translations) and distribution. All of which require substantial organisation and are enormously time-consuming and each has its own methodologies that, where possible, I have tried to document. My intention with the short films *Funny Onion* (2010), *TRANS* and *Camrex* was to make works suitable for exhibition at film festivals; this was an important guiding principle in order to conceptualise the material, for instance, selecting stories suitable for such durational strictures. This helped me gain the industry knowledge and experience in order to begin to develop my feature film project *Truant*.

This process was assisted by the skills of multiple collaborators -in front of and behind the camera- who assisted immeasurably throughout, particularly during the

production of my creative projects. There are too many to name here, but without their expertise (and patience) this research would not have been realised. *Hostel Polaroids*, *Camrex* and *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You 2015-2020* all prominently feature Derek Rutter and attempted to form a sustained body of work across disciplinary boundaries that focused on the same central character.

Alongside this self-generated research I was working on multiple other projects as a freelance filmmaker and photographer. I worked for various companies developing narrative feature films, shorts and moving image installation projects. This professional work (where I was frequently in close collaboration with other filmmakers and artists) has given me great insight into how films take shape from inception through to production and exhibition. This includes all three primary modes of cinema: fiction, documentary and avant-garde/artist's films. This collaborative work undoubtedly brought fresh perspectives to my own practice.

In the following section I will provide a discussion of methodologies specific to the individual projects, describe their development and reflect on what was learnt.

5. Publications

Original Contribution

The original contribution is represented by the publications submitted, each of which focus on a specific aspect of my practice. The works presented evidence a creative and conceptual practice exploring the boundaries of nonfiction material. There are common methods which developed based on creative/aesthetic intuition, experience and research as I matured as a practitioner and developed projects within a film industry context of the past decade.

Each project is made with the intention of moving forward my practice and the methods specific to the production of each project are outlined in the following section. Two key themes link the submitted works: how to foreground the creative impulse within the creation and development of nonfiction projects and how an expressive form of documentary is intimately intertwined with the ethics of documentary practice. The conception of 'The Documentary Interior' -which developed out of a fluid creative and critical practice- is presented as an embodiment of these themes and forms the original contribution to knowledge.

5.1. *Funny Onion*

(2010/short creative documentary):

Director/Producer/Camera/Editor/Writer/Sound

Link: <https://vimeo.com/265979656>

Password: Onion

The film is not currently freely available online due to economic restrictions, but is available to rent.

OVERVIEW

Funny Onion is a two-channel reflexive documentary ‘self-portrait without the self.’ Through a series of fictive *embellishments*, the film explores the disparate connections that make up our everyday experience. By highlighting and exploring my own absence, my place within this fragile social construction slowly emerges.

RESEARCH AIMS

This research sought to explore the constituents of narrative design and use fictive elements within a documentary context to investigate the interplay between construction and the factual. Specific research questions were posed by the work:

What is the effect of foregrounding a filmmaker’s sensibility on the objectivity of documentary?

What is the effect of a highlighted omission in documentary?

How can this omission create a more engaged spectator?

METHODS

Firstly, I selected a number of contributors (all of them personal friends) and recorded interviews. The contributors were asked to be as honest as they could about their subject (me). I then devised characters and situations and wrote a simple visual narrative structured around dramatic embellishments of either real-life events or exaggerated personality traits of my contributors. In order to ‘author’ the film I took

on all of the crew roles at every stage of production: Director, Producer, Writer, DoP, Sound, et al.

After shooting was completed, I returned to interview some of the contributors in order for them to comment on specific scenes. This was necessary to both provide further shape to the narrative and add an important reflexive component, e.g. at 2.07, one character comments, “It’s not as messy as you make out in the film. That’s all set up.”

This was my first dual channel work (a formal strategy usually more associated with the white space of an art gallery than the nonfiction film): this essentially allowed me to cut within scenes.

Small standard definition cameras (the academy aspect ratio of 4:3) were used to achieve a raw, stripped-down filmmaking aesthetic. It was then edited, mixed and colour graded in Adobe Premier Pro.

Funny Onion was submitted for my application to Berlinale Talent Campus at Berlin Film Festival, which was my first experience of an industry development programme.

OUTCOMES

This hybrid nonfiction self-portrait project stemmed from a conceptual enquiry rather than issue or theme: the primary aim was to make a nonfiction portrait without the central character ever appearing on screen. Extending conceptual models of narration from Russian Formalism⁴⁵ (which in scholarship are more commonly associated with fiction films), David Bordwell describes the distinction between the chronological story that is represented (*fabula*) and its presentation as a pro-filmic event (*syuzhet*), ‘Selections of fabula events [through the syuzhet] shape the constructive activities of the spectator.’ (Bordwell 1985: 50) This enables the

⁴⁵ Especially Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folk-tale* (1927), a favourite of the Structural theorists.

spectator's ongoing causal/spatial/temporal construction of a film's diegesis. A third element, *style*, frequently overlaps with the dramaturgical interests of the *syuzhet* but differs in that it is concerned only with, 'The film's systematic use of cinematic devices.' (ibid) *Style* would be the dominant narrative modality of avant-garde film -and so more easily discernible- where method and technique are pushed to the fore (in the context of the Documentary Interior this links to 'sensitivity'). David MacDougall (2006) reminds us that viewing a film is not merely a passive experience and, much like every day life, a film's perceptual information is incomplete and so 'we must fill in the gaps with suppositions.' (MacDougall 2006: 25) Through my corporeal absence I sought to deepen the spectator's cognitive-perceptual experience of *Funny Onion* by obstructing the fabula by way of *syuzhet* organisation which positions them to be more inferential. In doing so, my intention was to create a more active spectator.

Funny Onion needed to work both as an authentic self-portrait, but by omitting the very thing it purported to explore (thus introducing a narrative ellipsis), it sought to satirise the 'truth claim' of documentary and suggestions of authoritativeness/ comprehensivity. The film seeks to further subvert notions of documentary objectivity by repeatedly highlighting creative interventions and in doing so reminds us that 'all cinematic phenomena tend to confer the structures of subjectivity on the objective image.' (Morin 2005: 90) Nearly everything is 'observed' in a master shot and though the wide visual frame and voice-over narration are traditional characteristics of the factual documentary form, this ostensible objectivity is playfully interrogated by the inclusion of fictive *embellishments*. These performative embellishments were not reconstructions, but rather fictions that attempted to visualise a closer truth about a personality or situation. In doing so, my intention is to foreground filmmaker subjectivity without sacrificing the film's relationship to the veridical, as Michael Chanan elegantly elaborates, 'It is one thing to recognise this dose or dimension of subjectivity in the image. It doesn't follow that it is therefore not a true image. For that would be to assume an equation in which the subjective is opposed to the objective, and the objective is identified with truth. The two are not opposed in this way, they are both present at the same time.' (Chanan 2007: 50) The decision to emphasise

certain traits of the characters then allows a foregrounding of sensibility which reveals my *own way of seeing*.

In the film the self is 'Othered' and this draws the spectator's attention to the unknowability of capturing a documentary subject, i.e. that what is represented is just one version of the truth. This situates the work on the border between nonfiction and the avant-garde. The film suggests that the greatest 'truth claim' in documentary is that it always captures people in the act of performance. That documentaries are about real people in a similar way that Facebook is about real people, that is, highly constructed representations. As I cast my friends in all roles, my manipulations were grounded in the reality of my long-term relationships (which was the basis of the film).

A great deal was learned about combining fictive and documentary elements: for example, as this was my first documentary film, it was also the first time I did not work with a traditionally formatted and structured fiction screenplay. Given the staggered nature of the shoot I was able to write and re-write scenes as production developed. The freedom this approach allowed laid the foundations for future work.

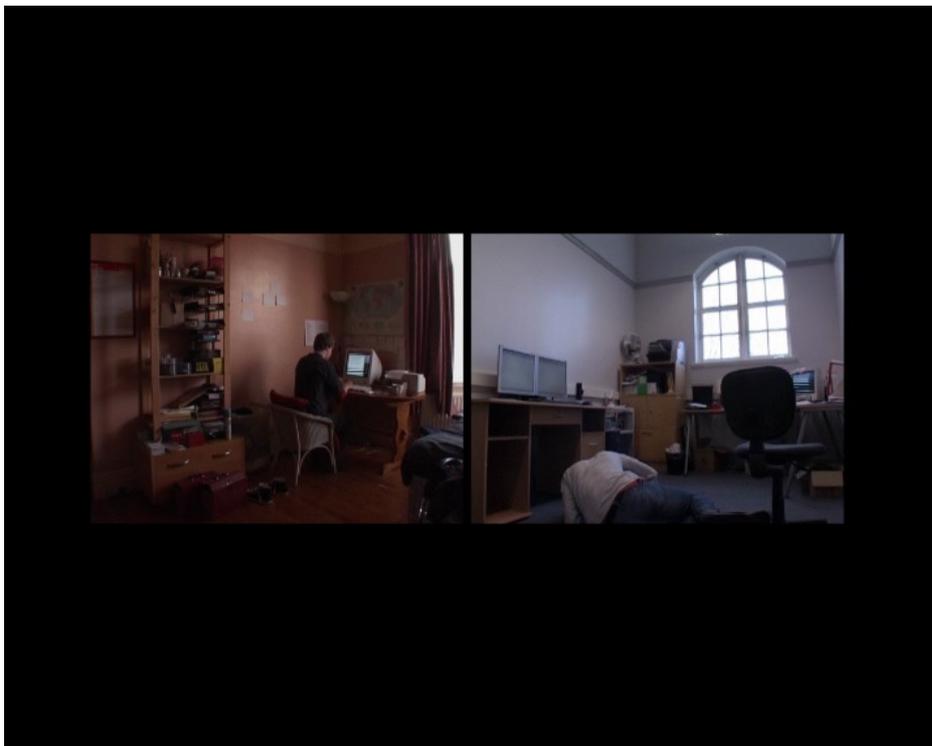


Fig. 3: *Funny Onion* (2010)

5.2. *The Invisible and the Real*

(2013/season of artists documentary films)

Curator/Programmer/Filmmaker

OVERVIEW

The Invisible and the Real was a 6-week season of artists' documentary films, which took place at the Star and Shadow Cinema in Newcastle upon Tyne. The season brought together documentary filmmakers and artists whose work explores the formal boundaries of nonfiction representation, including Nikolaus Geyrhalter, Clio Barnard, John Smith, Richard Billingham and Nicolas Provost. The season began with a sold-out screening of a selection of Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests (1964-66)*, with a live score by Hapsburg Braganza. This was followed by screenings of *Fish Tank (1998)*, *Sunday (2009)*, *TRANS*, *Bodysong (2003)*, Nicolas Provost shorts selection including *Plot Point (2007)*, *Our Daily Bread (2005)*, *The Girl Chewing Gum (1976)* and *The Arbor*. The title of the season was inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (unfinished) study of intersubjectivities *The Visible and the Invisible (1968)*.

The Invisible and the Real ran from 15th February to 24th March 2013.

RESEARCH AIMS

The Invisible and the Real was an attempt to locate the boundaries of cinematic nonfiction and define the common ground between documentary and experimental/avant-garde modes of filmmaking. The season sought to:

Define the boundaries of contemporary documentary and artists' film

Explore the commonalities between artist and nonfiction filmmaker

Recontextualise documentary and avant-garde modes of production within a cinematic space

METHODS

For this season of films I performed the dual roles of curator and co-programmer (alongside Star & Shadow's Stephanie Oswald). This series of six events included feature length and short films that are linked by their use of documentary techniques

(real stories, interviews, actuality and archive footage, etc) in order to create uniquely personal, political and philosophical visions of the world. I worked with various distribution companies to source the best print materials possible (e.g. for film works, ideally 35mm). I also oversaw and organised the advertising campaign for the events.

My overarching aim was to acknowledge and explore the contemporary connections between nonfiction and the avant-garde and resituate them both within a cinema context. For example, on loan from the Museum of Modern Art in New York and seldom screened in a cinema auditorium, Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* are a fascinating collection of moving image portraits featuring 1960s pop culture icons such as Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, Jonas Mekas and Edie Sedgwick. To create these elegiac and beautiful films Warhol would set up a static 16mm camera and expose an entire 100ft roll of filmstock in one unbroken take (lasting approximately 3-4 minutes). The sustained gaze of the camera holding its subject in close-up as their presentational persona falls away to reveal a vulnerability not previously visible (I later adopted this as a shooting strategy in projects such as *Camrex*). The large cinema screen amplified the subject's minute gestures and so communicated real dramatic weight. The specially commissioned live musical score by Hapsburg Braganza further accentuated this tension in the films: creating an intimate, evocative and personal mood far removed from the 60s pop art kitsch that is routinely associated with Warhol.

The programme was diverse in its subject matter and mixed established and up-and-coming filmmakers/artists.

OUTCOMES

The 'invisible' of the title referred to the mysterious, unseen layer of meaning that is the artist's own creative vision, as Joris Ivens declared, 'It is the personality of the artist alone that distinguishes him from both reality and simple recording.' (Ivens 1931: 197) Informed by my work on *Funny Onion*, the central tenet of the season

was to foreground creative sensibility and explore its impact on real-life stories whilst resituating the documentary within the wider visual arts.

The project brought new understandings about the interdisciplinary connections between documentary film and art practice. A mix of feature-length nonfiction films and artist's films (the latter more commonly viewed in a gallery context), the season provided new perspectives by offering a rare chance to engage with these screen-based works within a cinema context. Away from the rarefied atmosphere of the gallery space, the artist's films revealed new textures, techniques and ways of looking, and the documentary films revealed their frequently overlooked creative and conceptual sophistication. This is evident, for example, in the startlingly different uses of actuality footage alone: Nicolas Provost's skewering of genre cinema in *Plot Point* to the rough and ready hi-8 of Richard Billingham's *Fish Tank* to the precise tableaux of Nikolaus Geyrhalter's *Our Daily Bread*.

Another important element in the approach to curating the season was that short films (another rich, but overlooked form) were presented as prominently as feature-length works. This resulted in some fascinating juxtapositions, such as John Smith's *The Girl Chewing Gum*⁴⁶ alongside Clio Barnard's *The Arbor*. Both films use the documentary 'voice' in way that draws attention to artifice of documentary construction and the season revealed this lineage of nonfiction reflexivity.

Even though the project introduced work to new audiences and amplified important voices, reflecting on the selection of films, it is undoubtedly true that if I was to curate another season it would have a more global outlook rather than primarily European and American work. However, the films summarise my personal and creative influences at the time of curating the project.

The six-week season of film events extended the research dimensions and helped to define the contextual basis for this body of work. It proved invaluable in cementing my ideas on the interior in the documentary film.

⁴⁶ The unbroken point of view shot in John Smith's *The Girl Chewing Gum*, which, with its director absurdly seeking to 'author' each moment of an ostensible actuality scene, acts as a kind of inverse exploration of Gunning's more naive attractions.

The Invisible and the Real featured in the national press, such as The Guardian where it was chosen as one of the week's top film events in the UK (Rose, 2013).

Star & Shadow Cinema website: (<https://www.starandshadow.org.uk/on/season/132>)



Fig. 4: *The Invisible and the Real* poster #1 by Rosa Kennedy



Fig. 5: *The Invisible and the Real* poster #2 by Kali Scott



Fig. 6: *The Invisible and the Real* poster #3 by Alyson Agar

5.3. TRANS

(2013/documentary film)

8 minutes

Director/Producer/Camera/Editor/Writer

Link: <https://vimeo.com/256301434>

Password: TRANSfilm

TRANS IMDb: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2276041/?ref_=nm_knf_t2

The film is not currently freely available online due to economic restrictions, but is available to rent.

OVERVIEW

TRANS is an intimate moving image portrait focusing on Kali. Exploring themes of transformation and identity, the film uses experimental photographic techniques within a documentary context to construct various scenes based on her thoughts, feelings and imaginings as she reflects on the pain of her metamorphosis.

RESEARCH AIMS

TRANS addressed the following questions:

How can creative digital imagery be used to restore a sense of mystery to the indexical certainty of the documentary image?

How can the documentary 'voice-over' subvert notions of the factual authority by concentrating on the experiential and emotional?

How can incorporating expansive art practice methodologies impact documentary film storytelling?

What are the boundaries between photographic and filmmaking practice?

METHODS

It was my aim to create a formally and thematically complex hybrid of photographic and cinematic technique. I devised scenes and shot them on a Nikon DSLR with slow shutter speeds. This captured motion was then reconstructed as a video sequence by dissolving the images together, allowing me to author a sequence

where actions can be accentuated by being lengthened, shortened or even entirely deleted. This also allowed me to retain the theme of transformation as the film never settles on a defined image, giving it the haziness of a retold dream.

I conducted audio interviews with Paul/Kali every few months over the period of about a year. The interviews were recorded for audio only in order to create a less intimidating atmosphere. Throughout this interview period I would shoot sequences for the film, which had been devised in response to the previous set of interviews. Through this method, the content of the audio interviews flowed into the constructed images and a visual grammar began to emerge. Given this amount of time, Paul's development of Kali paralleled my own filmic construction of this female persona, 'Kali'. The time gaps allowed for a deeper engagement, which was fundamental in Kali reflecting on her experiences.

The constructed scenes were storyboarded and then filmed on location and with elements of production design. Kali played a version of herself in these constructed scenes alongside professional actors and extras.

The sound was (necessarily) recorded separately from image. Aside from recording environmental atmospheres, most of the sound was created during post-production. It was then animated in Adobe Premier Pro - an unexpectedly laborious process that took many months.

OUTCOMES

TRANS was a mix of cinematic portrait and still photography portraiture: this approach helped to articulate a connection between the disciplines, which I continued to develop. The film was inspired by the sequential photography of Eadweard Muybridge ⁴⁷(*Animal Locomotion, 1886*), whose innovative work utilised faster shutter speeds in order to accurately capture motion and were subsequently

⁴⁷ Other influences included Chris Marker's photo montage *La Jetee* (1962) and the work of British painter Francis Bacon, whose images were also inspired by Muybridge.

considered foundational works of documentary cinema. However, in an era where digital technology has been accused of forever compromising the evidential qualities of the photographic image (Downing⁴⁸, 2013) I sought to invert these techniques and apply them to the thematic preoccupations of the work, i.e. constituents of identity and transformation. In *TRANS* the body is represented as an ever-mutable form. Subverting Muybridge's pursuit of an almost scientific veracity, it was my intention to use still photography to create near-expressionist sequences that explore notions of physical transformation and also endeavour to restore the uncanny mystery to human movement that Muybridge was so eager to render comprehensible.

Though I initially conceived the film to include talking head interviews, as production developed these were not filmed. Quite aside from the dull ubiquitousness of the talking head prevailing across documentary media, their seemingly accepted value as 'testimonial' or 'commentary' -both of which advance the appearance of a unadorned objectivity to the spectator- are problematic within this context (as well as usually being an unappealing visual strategy⁴⁹). However, this lazy presumed objectivity was decried as early as 1983 by Bill Nichols in his essay *The Voice of Documentary*: for Nichols, too many filmmakers had disavowed their own voice in a desire to present faithful observation (e.g. Direct Cinema) and the selective recall of talking head interviews. Building on the narrative design strategies from *Funny Onion*, *TRANS* further complicates a spectator's reading of the film by subverting the expectation of a voice-over narration as something that is not merely explanatory commentary (like it is in so many factual films), but that the image can not only diverge, but contradict what is being seen. This creative intervention creates an extra-textual response that leads the spectator to question what they are seeing and hearing. In doing so it provided new understandings

⁴⁸ In 'CGI and the End of Photography as Evidence' (2013), Downing argues that the complete dissolution of the photographic image having evidentiary status can be attributed to the digital image.

⁴⁹ Hongisto claims that the documentary previously celebrated the ostensible authenticity produced by the unity of the recorded voice and the photographed body, 'as its core achievement.' (Hongisto 2015: 86) Talking heads are, to my mind, another example of the documentary's retreat from the expressive possibilities of cinema.

regarding the disparity between voice and image, which became an important creative strategy as my work progressed.

In Liane Brandon's Cinéma Vérité classic *Betty Tells Her Story* (1972), the eponymous character tells an anecdote of how she once purchased the perfect emerald green dress for a very special occasion. Betty describes, amusingly and engagingly, how she found the right dress, spent far more than she could afford for it, modelled it for friends, felt absolutely transformed and then... lost it before she had chance to wear it. Later, she is asked to retell the story and focus on the emotions she felt. This time the story is strikingly different. While the facts remain the same, Betty reveals her anxiety over buying the dress, her discomfort at being praised for beauty she feels she doesn't have, and her subsequent bewilderment at the way things turned out. Betty becomes withdrawn, sad and vulnerable, and her body, voice and words express the painfulness of the memory. The contrast between the two versions of the story is deeply moving. Inspired by this conceptual basis for a film, I decided to approach the interviews with Kali with a similar emphasis on her emotional states of being as she recounts her internal thoughts, feelings and memories. With *TRANS*, I knew that the almost abstract nature of the images had the potential to be alienating for an audience. However, by focusing on the internal emotions Kali felt, the formal abstractions would be counterbalanced by Kali's immense warmth, honesty and intelligence. This concentration on her private emotions also allowed me to avoid 'issue-based' clichés. After the film's completion, I asked Kali to articulate her experiences of these interviews and of the making of the film and this is included in the supplementary material.

TRANS involved a synthesis across disciplines: this project highlighted the creative possibilities that photography had for my filmmaking practice. After completion of the film, I sought to explore ways in which I could combine cinematic and photographic techniques, particularly around research and development.

TRANS premiered at London Short Film Festival, followed by its international premiere at Uppsala International Short Film Festival.

The film screened across documentary, experimental and LGBTQ contexts.

Screenings include:

Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival, Czech Republic

London Short Film Festival, UK

Uppsala International Short Film Festival, Sweden

Melbourne Queer Film Festival, Australia

Glasgow Short Film Festival, UK

Flatpack Film Festival, UK

Boston LGBT Film Festival, USA

MIX NYC - New York Queer Experimental Film Festival, USA

fEXiff Experimental International Film Festival, Australia

Queer Lisboa, Portugal

Xposed Berlin International Queer Short Film Festival, Germany

Darklight Film Festival, Ireland

Filmkunstfest Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany

OK Video Festival, Indonesia

Klex Film Festival, Malaysia

Henley Fringe Film Festival, UK

Queer City Cinema Film Festival, Canada

Um Outro, Eu Mesmo Film Festival, Brazil

The Invisible and the Real, Star and Shadow Cinema

The Slow Wave (Georgian Gallery, University of Edinburgh)

Queer Screens conference (Northumbria University)



Fig. 7: *TRANS* (2013)



Fig. 8: *TRANS* post-screening artist's talk at Glasgow Short Film Festival in March 2013.

5.4. *Refocus* 'Unseen Borders'

Photographer/Artist

(2014/Arts Council England/Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA))

Public art commission

<http://www.mark-chapman.co.uk/other/>

OVERVIEW

Refocus is a public art commission exploring photographic evocations of the unseen within the Teesside edgelands. My intention was to document how these atmospheric, liminal landscapes - inferential gaps in the town's overarching narrative- contribute to the construction and preservation of identity amongst its population. An anonymous combination of rural and urban textures; these uncharted and uncelebrated areas evoke a dream-like, abstract quality that suggests a poetic rendering of a space where anything and nothing might have happened.



Fig. 9: *Refocus* (2014) installed in Green Dragon Yard, Stockton

RESEARCH AIMS

This project sought to establish a fluid practice between filmmaking and photography -where one project leads into another- and explore the commonalities between them.

The work had the following aims:

Develop strategies for film development via interdisciplinary creative methods

Identify how the public photographic image can be utilised to suggest unrepresented, private space

Explore how visual strategies of omission make a spectator more active

METHODS

This project developed from a series of walks I documented around the Teesside edgelands. The Tees Valley lies to the south of the North East region and includes Middlesbrough, Darlington, Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland as well as the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees.

The images were captured on a Polaroid SX-70 camera using colour instant filmstock. The Polaroid format adds a sense of the classical and the immediate. The filmstock by the then-recently formed Impossible Project was frequently chemically unstable, which created unpredictable patterns in the final image.

The images were carefully scanned using an adaptor to avoid Newton rings - imperfections caused by the reflections between two surfaces, i.e. the glass of the scanner and top sheet of the Polaroid photograph. The images were then lightly edited using Photoshop.

As this was my first public art project, I decided that the image should have a significant sense of scale. A recce was carried out to identify the appropriate place for the installation in Stockton Town Centre. It was decided that the enclosed space of Green Dragon Yard was best suited for the project. This informed the size of the work and after permissions were ascertained the selected area was measured and prepared. The final image was chosen (see below) and the completed work would consist of a Polaroid photograph enlarged to 12ft. The 3-4 inch frame of the Polaroid, with its connotations of the private and intimate, was made expansive and public.

Working alongside Rachel Willis from Stockton Borough Council, the image was sent to a large format printing firm appointed by the council and I oversaw the

install. It was on display in Stockton-On-Tees from Saturday 22nd November 2014 for approximately 2 months.

Funded by Arts Council England, Stockton Borough Council and Mima.

OUTCOMES

Refocus added a new dimension to my work and was the first step towards establishing a fluid, cross-disciplinary creative practice. The project developed from previous experiments with photographic methods whilst working on *TRANS* and my ideas about the form's utility as a creative development tool for filmmaking practice beyond the traditional documentation of production elements such as recces, casting, etc.

Despite being an enormously important part of the filmmaking process and of the industry, relatively little film scholarship has focused on the subject of project development (outside of practical 'how to' manuals). My intention was to explore the possibility of establishing new development methodologies for my own practice, particularly around the depiction of inner states. The creative starting point of this project was threefold: the landscape work of James Benning⁵⁰, the news of the Impossible Project's attempts to resuscitate the Polaroid format and the discovery of Andrei Tarkovsky's book of Polaroids, *Instant Light* (Chiaramonte & Tarkovsky, 2006), which were taken in between 1979-1984 as he developed his penultimate film *Nostalgia* (1983). Research was also carried out into other artists working in documentary who had created equally powerful work across filmmaking and photography, e.g. Wim Wenders, William Klein, Raymond Depardon, Gordon Parks, Agnès Varda and RaMell Ross⁵¹.

⁵⁰ The need to 'look and listen' to a landscape in order to represent it fully is central to Benning's work, as he says 'Once you've been watching something for a while, you become aware of it differently.' (Zuvela 2004)

⁵¹ Ross sums up his interdisciplinary practice by describing himself as a 'liberated documentarian.' (Ross, no date)

Refocus redeployed and further tested narrative strategies based on omission and subtraction used in both *Funny Onion* & *TRANS*. My initial ideas were to explore the unfamiliar border spaces surrounding Stockton by going on a series of walks in order to *reveal* the landscape. However, as these walks were completed and my ideas developed I realised that I was more interested in what was *concealed*. The final image is inspired by the two primary modes of popular photography, the landscape and the portrait. In this image these modes are combined, but remain mysteriously hidden: the model's back to camera, the square shape of the Polaroid eliminating the traditional landscape frame. Referencing an image from Tarkovsky's autobiographical masterpiece *Mirror* (1975), the subject has her back to the camera meaning the audience is left to speculate on what she is seeing and her emotional state in relation to it. Instead, the spectator's attention is drawn to the small, personal detail of the hair - the size of the 12ft Polaroid frame amplifying these minute details. By limiting the camera's gaze this omission creates an inferential gap that encourages the spectator to engage their own critical imaginations and infer why this visual information is absent.

I was interested in exploring presentational methods and spaces outside of the traditional photographic/gallery context. This project was a chance to be challenged on my own notions of what can be achieved through expanded exhibition strategies and explore how this can contribute to the meaning of the work. Though the exhibition site was to be in a busy town centre, it was my aim to find an enclosed space within this area, so that the spectator was able to unself-consciously engage with the work without distraction - recreating an almost cinematic space. This concentration on the unifying of spatial elements is something I sought to develop with later projects.

The images below show the development of the project and the final chosen image.



Fig. 10: An unused image for *Refocus*



Fig. 11: Unused image for *Refocus #2*



Fig. 12: Final image for the commission



Fig. 13: Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975).

5.5. *Hostel Polaroids*

(2014) Set of stills

Photographer/Artist

OVERVIEW

A series of intimate portraits that explores the residents of Camrex Hostel. Camrex House is a homeless hostel on the site of a long-closed paint factory in Sunderland – a city that has a rich industrial history and was formerly a major shipbuilding hub in North East, England. The project features several residents and images of the environment.

RESEARCH AIMS

Develop strategies for establishing filmmaker/subject relationships

Explore how photography can be used to reflect the inner emotional life of documentary characters via an emphasis on the personal rather than social

Identify ways in which photography be used as a development and funding tool for a film

METHODS

Prior to the production of *Hostel Polaroids*, I had spent months casting a BFI-funded drama feature⁵² and the project involved extensive work with non-professional actors. As part of this process I interviewed an ex-drug-dealer in a pool hall in Teesside and he mentioned that after leaving prison he lived at Camrex House: a city-centre hostel with a notorious reputation. After production on the feature was completed, I visited the hostel eager to explore the characters and stories as a photography project.

My method of working began by using an old Polaroid SX-70 to explore the subject, reveal the location and build relationships with residents. I was initially viewed with some suspicion, but I kept going back to spend time in the environment;

⁵² *Bypass* (2014) premiered at Venice Film Festival in 2014.

weeks and months of taking photographs, talking with residents and staff, and watching daytime TV in the communal area and the residents' own rooms. Once I photographed a resident, then I would have the approval of their friends. It did not take long for everyone to be used to my presence.

The Polaroids were then scanned onto a Mac computer and then with some minor contrast added in Photoshop. Once digitised, little attempt was made to clean up the chemical patterns on the images.

OUTCOMES

Following the public art commission *Refocus*, this was a continuing experiment in how the form of a photograph can reflect the inner state of a documentary subject. The often-unstable Impossible Project/Polaroid format filmstock, which created the inconsistent chemical patterns visible in the images, was used to explore the expressive possibilities of photography and mirror the characters' internal struggles. Though occasionally frustrating in its unpredictability (and lack of light sensitivity), the film stock felt appropriate to explore characters who lived their lives from moment to moment.

Time was identified as a key creative strategy⁵³. 'Idle' time -talking, listening, watching television, listening to music- was an important component in developing trusting relationships with the residents. Understandably, they needed to feel sure of my intentions in order to open up, and by investing my time this was repeatedly demonstrated. The involvement of the hostel residents frequently remained fleeting, but the process allowed me to meet and photograph numerous residents and to build an overview of the hostel. I decided not to photograph anything outside of the environment of the hostel - this helped maintain a unity of space across the project and was an integral part of my approach to later projects. The SX-70 stills camera itself also became a useful way to breakdown barriers between the residents and myself, the novelty of its design being a consistent point of interest and so the use of

⁵³ This has also been an important method in the ethnographer's approach since Flaherty.

the camera became an important creative research strategy. The Polaroid image would fully expose in around 30-45 minutes (quite different from the near-instantaneous processing of the original Polaroid stock) and this allowed enough time for me to complete a research interview with a resident and then reveal the developed photograph.

Hostel Polaroids was the beginning of my work within northern working class communities in an attempt to create new perceptions and further unifying the presented body of research. Whilst shooting this project, I decided that there were certain atmospheres, characters and stories that would be compelling when rendered as a film narrative. It had also become clear that there were significant technical limitations with the Polaroid stock and that it was limiting my access to the stories I wanted to tell, e.g. the speed of the film made it difficult to shoot in the residents' rooms. This initial collaboration with the camera allowed me to identify cast for a more protracted film collaboration and this project formed the basis for my 15-minute documentary film *Camrex*. During production of the film, I would continue to return to the hostel in order to shoot stills. This allowed me to maintain relationships with residents of the hostel even when it was not financially possible to film.

Hostel Polaroids was also used as a development tool for my film *Camrex*: not only did the images help in defining a visual approach, but they were used to create a mood reel for the film (see below) and other documents, which were used to apply for development/production grants for the documentary.

Camrex mood reel: <https://vimeo.com/260462450>

Password: CAMREXmood

Hostel Polaroids were featured in photography journal *Then There Was Us*: <https://www.thentherewasus.co.uk/camrex-house-a-city-centre-hostel-with-a-notorious-reputation/>

A PDF of selected images can be found in the Dropbox folder accompanying this project.



Fig. 14: An image from Hostel Polaroids (2014)

5.6. *Camrex*

(2015-2017/hybrid documentary film & peer-reviewed journal article):
Director/Producer/Camera/Editor/Writer

Camrex (full film): <https://vimeo.com/243852846>

IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4463782>

OVERVIEW

Camrex House is a notorious homeless hostel that for 40 years has upheld a fearsome reputation. Its skewed, in-house morality perpetuated by men with complex histories. Based on interviews with hostel residents, CAMREX constructs a series of unflinchingly visceral sequences that reveal a hidden world of untold stories.

RESEARCH AIMS

This research sought to explore:

How does a documentary represent the interior life of its contributors via an expressive audio/visual rendering?

How does a focus on the interior impact the relationship between filmmaker and contributor?

Explore how to establish filmmaking methods that have the intimacy of stills photography portraiture

METHODS

Once familiar with the residents and environment via *Hostel Polaroids* (which now functions as both a sister project and early research for this film), I then introduced a video camera; obviously, with the switch in medium comes a new set of logistical and creative challenges, but by that point the residents were used to my presence and I had developed a good working knowledge of the hostel. Throughout production the crew size was restricted to a sound recordist and myself. This was essential in order to develop an intimate creative space with the contributors. Limiting equipment (not even using a tripod) and restricting the crew to only two people was a significant factor in cultivating an intimate, safe, and non-judgemental creative space in which to

work, particularly when talking through scenes with the cast. This is something I will seek to replicate in future work.

Camrex involved merging methods developed in preceding projects: first I recorded a series interviews with the contributors and then constructed scenes in response. These scenes also incorporated off-camera discussions with the residents and my own observations and ideas. Through this method, the film's grammar evolved alongside the revealing of the characters' relationship to each other and the hostel.

It was a challenging project due to lack of money, the difficulties of the environment, size of cast - many of whom had substance issues. Unfortunately, on the first day of filming, my lead character had to withdraw from the film, so I had to re-conceive the story around the supporting cast. As I was doing this, I met Derek Rutter who would later become integral to the film and this began an ongoing collaboration which continued with *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You*.

Camrex was a single camera shoot with a crew of two (including myself) and filmed on a BlackMagic cine camera. It was then edited in Adobe Premier Pro. Sound was created alongside Hapsburg Braganza's Phil Begg and completed at The East Wing studio in Newcastle. Colour grade completed at Fantomeline and mastering and DCP creation by Ed Maggs at Mediatek Post-Production.

OUTCOMES

Camrex gave me the opportunity to identify formal characteristics and test a number of different methodologies in my aim to explore the interior lives of my characters. I always felt that the film existed in the space between the sedate everyday routine of the hostel and the fierce, barely suppressed emotions felt by the residents. I wanted the film to be immersive: traditional establishing shots and cutaways were largely dispensed with in favour of close-body camerawork and an emphasis on faces. The audience is not provided with any information outside of the experiences of the

characters. The guiding conceptual idea of the Documentary Interior informed the production methods and it was clear it would not have been possible to achieve the kinds of images needed through observational filming techniques alone. This meant attempting to move beyond mere observable behaviour and actually meaningfully interpret their words through an expressive cinematic rendering, e.g. hyper-real sound motifs and montage of the building walk (04:09) and anxiety dream scene (04:41). This process allowed me to condense and synthesise scenes and sequences, with observation and fictive manipulations side by side, impossible to differentiate: both *likeness* and *replica*.

Filming for *Camrex* lasted for around eight days spread across a few months. This allowed time for the two main contributors, cast via the original photographic project, to invest deeply in the filmmaking process. That kind of investment is always important, but particularly so here due to the performative nature of the scenes we were shooting. They were essentially actors in their own stories and we did as many takes as was necessary. My experiences working with non-professional actors from a range of backgrounds who had never before performed scenes in front of a camera gave me invaluable confidence in crafting performances with residents. Filming over an extended period allowed for an approach that was fully collaborative with my cast, meaning I was more informed factually and ethically in my creative choices- what I can show and what I should show. A shorter schedule would mean mistakes were much easier to make and an uninformed documentary image, access without ethics, is a questionable image.

My previous projects also inspired methods of production, e.g. Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* - fresh in my mind after screening a selection of them for *The Invisible and the Real*, were key in achieving moments of performance, particularly silent close-ups. These were essential because I knew there would be an extensive use of voice-over in the film. I would frequently hold the camera on a subject and either talk them quietly through what I wanted or use silence to draw them out of themselves. Drawing from my photographic practice, this turned the shoot into a kind of moving image portraiture that eschewed traditional establishing shots of a location.



Fig. 15: The anxiety dream sequence from *Camrex* (2015)

The edit was challenging due to the merging of multiple stories and perspectives that made up the hostel. Though shooting took place over a period of months, the film does not rely on events simply unfolding or even a strict chronological structure as this would take a set of narrative tools/decisions away from the film. Instead, the writing and redrafting process continued throughout shooting.

Whilst editing, the voice-over interviews were a fundamental structuring element. Informed by Michel Chion's ideas on 'internal sound', that is, 'Sound which, although situated in the present action, corresponds to the physical and mental interior of a character. These include physiological sounds of breathing, moans or heartbeats, all of which could be named objective-internal sounds. Also in this category of internal sounds are mental voices, memories, and so on, which I call subjective-internal sounds.' (Chion 1994: 76) In contrast to the discordant sound mix of the hostel, I wanted to make the interviews with the residents feel like they were the whispers of their internal monologues - thus using subjective-internal sounds to reinforce on a formal level the theme of social isolation. These interviews were then stripped down to their essentials in the editing where every sentence needed to make an impact (rather than simply be an accumulation of factual details). This

introduces moments of silence: inferential gaps where the audience needs to activate their own moral compass.

My intention was to make a fifteen-minute film suitable for exhibition at film festivals; this was an important guiding principle in order to conceptualise the material, for instance, selecting the contributors whose story suited such durational strictures. Though the short form film is defined by its brevity, the variation in maximum acceptable running times for programming at notable international film festivals suggests that there are varying opinions regarding what can be considered optimal. A running time of around fifteen minutes was considered desirable because it was within the recommended guidelines for events targeted in our festival release strategy (Edinburgh IFF, Clermont-Ferrand ISFF, et al) and also allowed for an appreciable demonstration of both character and narrative.

Camrex premiered at Edinburgh International Film Festival. Described by Sight & Sound as 'An enquiry into the interior mind, viewed from a range of six inches' (Hayes, 2016), the film has been screened internationally across narrative, documentary and experimental contexts. For example, the Lab Competition of Clermont Ferrand International Short Film Festival (the largest shorts-only film festival in the world) was, until recently, seen as a space for experimental and artists' film outside of traditionally defined genres, but is now hosting many more works founded in nonfiction, including *Camrex*, which had its international premiere as part of the festival. The work was contextualised through artist's talks at numerous film festivals including Edinburgh International Film Festival (UK), Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival (France), Open City Docs (UK), Kinodot Film Festival (Russia), IKFF Hamburg (Germany), Encounters Short Film Festival (UK), Cheap Cuts Documentary Film Festival (UK) and Glasgow Short Film Festival (UK).

After the film's release I published an article (Chapman, 2017) in peer-reviewed practice-based film journal, *Screenworks*. This article outlined my initial ideas on the Documentary Interior in relation to *Camrex*. The peer reviewers stated, '*Camrex* deserves to be widely seen, as an expressive but unflinching piece of filmmaking that genuinely pushes at the boundaries of documentary' & '(The

research statement) makes a clear case for the expressive documentary as a valid vehicle for the further exploration of the interior landscape as a new frontier of documentary film.' *Camrex* is also currently being used as a case study of good practice on the AHRC-funded Filmmaking Research Network (Assessment of Filmmaking As Research, 2018).

This project was the basis for the presentation *Making Things Move: Concepts and Connections* (Chapman, 2016b), which explored re-configuring a work founded in still photography into a moving image work. The presentation was delivered at the AHRC Common Ground event at University of York on 21st June 2016.

Screenings include:

Edinburgh International Film Festival (UK) - International Competition

Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival (France) - nominated Lab Competition

Leeds International Film Festival (UK) - winner 'Special Mention' Best British Short Encounters Short Film and Animation Festival (UK) - nominated International Competition

Hamburg International Short Film Festival (Germany) - nominated NoBudget Competition

São Paulo International Short Film Festival (Brazil)

'This is England' Rouen British Short Film Festival (France) - winner Best Film

Magma International Short Film Festival (Italy) - winner 'Special Mention' International Competition

London Short Film Festival (UK) - nominated Best Documentary

Glasgow Short Film Festival (UK) - nominated Bill Douglas Award for International Short Film

Open City Documentary Festival (UK)

Aesthetica Short Film Festival (UK)

Minimalen Short Film Festival (Norway) - nominated International Competition

Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia (Japan) - nominated Non-fiction Competition

Berlin British Shorts Film Festival (Germany) - nominated Jury Award
DocuTIFF Tirana International Documentary Film Festival (Albania) - nominated
Short Film Competition
Cheap Cuts Documentary Film Festival (UK) - winner Best British Short
Montecatini International Short Film Festival (Italy) - winner 'Special Mention' Best
Documentary
Sunderland Shorts Film Festival (UK) - winner Best Documentary
Tabor Film Festival (Croatia) - nominated International Competition
DocsMX International Documentary Film Festival of Mexico City (Mexico) -
nominated 'Fragments' Competition
Iran International Documentary Film Festival (Iran) - nominated Best International
Short
Filmfest Eberswalde (Germany) - nominated Best Short Documentary
DC Shorts Film Festival (USA)
Filmets Badalona Film Festival (Spain) - nominated International Competition
Pravo Ljudski Film Festival (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
Aix-en-Provence International Short Film Festival (France) - nominated International
Competition
FRONTDOC – International Border Film Festival (Italy) - nominated Best Short
Documentary
Kinodot Film Festival (Russia) - nominated Observer competition
Atlantidoc (Uruguay) - International Documentary Film Festival of Uruguay
Ânû-rû Âboro International Film Festival (New Caledonia) – nominated International
Competition
Psarokokalo - Athens International Short Film Festival (Greece) - nominated
International Competition
DOCfeed - Eindhoven Documentary Festival (Netherlands)
FICSAM International Mental Health Film Festival (Portugal)
Central Doc - Tlaxcala International Documentary Film Festival (Mexico)
Festival Chalon tout Court - nominated International Competition (France)
Carmarthen Bay Film Festival (UK)
Homeless Film Festival (UK)
Supernormal Festival (UK)

InShort Film Festival (UK/Poland)

National Film Awards – nominated Best Short Film (UK)

RTS (North East & Borders) – nominated Best Factual / Non-broadcast (UK)

AHRC Research in Film Awards – nominated Innovation Award (UK)

Tabakalera Centre for Contemporary Culture, San Sebastian (Spain)

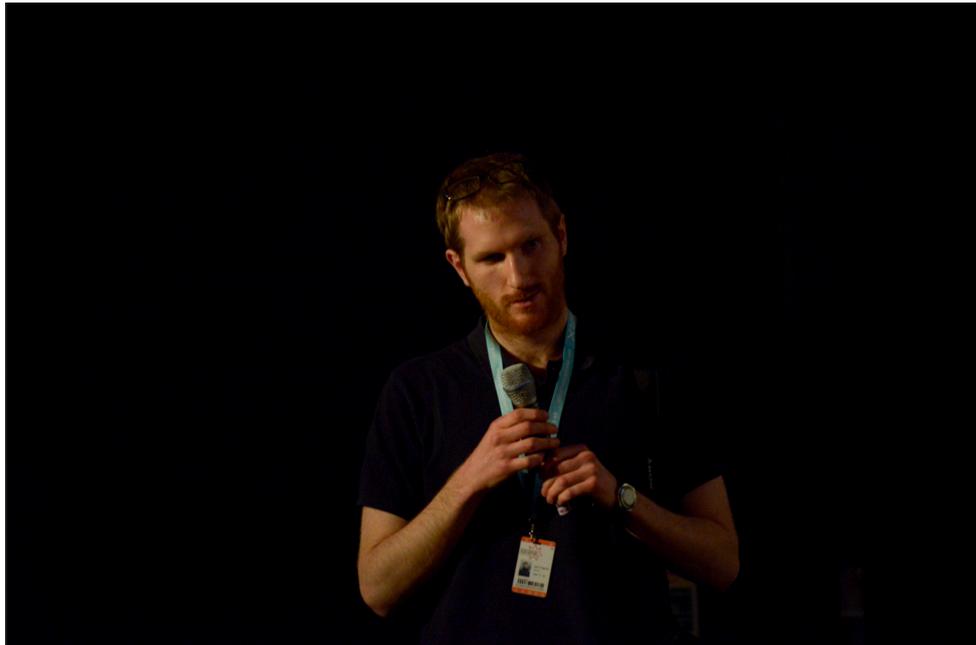


Fig. 16: Introducing *Camrex* at Edinburgh International Film Festival

5.7. *A Fear of Small Numbers*

(2016/set of stills)

Photographer/Artist

OVERVIEW

A Fear of Small Numbers (Chapman, 2016a) is an intimate series of black and white photographs featuring inhabitants of Byker in Newcastle upon Tyne and exploring notions relating to youth within increasingly fragmented communities. The perception of community is ever-shifting; this often leads to a disconnect between the environment and its inhabitants causing disruption to places of social interaction, places of work and places of leisure; between private, internal lives and their external conditions. Through examining shared experience and revealing commonalities, this project breaks down abstractions of fear of the Other and show how social housing and environment can facilitate forms of kinship and social solidarity, thus equally empowering the individual, both politically and personally.

RESEARCH AIMS

Developing research practices from *Hostel Polaroids*, this project sought to:

Explore the impact of durational limitations on the documentary 'encounter'

Explore how a focus on 'histories from below' can contribute to a collective portrait of a community

Recontextualise and test casting strategies from film practice via a photographic project

METHODS

The Byker Wall in Newcastle upon Tyne is an expansive 1800-home estate of 9,500 people and is one of the most notable examples of post-war housing estates in the UK. Initially centring on notions of homelessness, the focus of the project shifted to an exploration of the diversity of the Byker Wall estate. Collaborating with Byker Community Trust, this six-week residency involved merging methods developed in

preceding projects and took the form of a series of short-term encounters: interviews followed by a photoshoot.

In contrast to the *Hostel Polaroids* where I developed relationships with residents over an extended period of time, the intensity of the schedule for this project required me to develop strategies for quickly establishing relationships. This meant conceptualising the process as a form of 'street casting'. Street casting is a technique used during pre-production on a film where casting directors must scout every day environments for potential talent. This process requires immediately establishing a rapport and communicating ideas about the project in order to maintain interest from the potential contributor. Usually I would only have a short time to do this, so the initial contact was key to facilitate the process. Preparation was required in order to identify a specific location (so that I did not waste time) and I would then explore that area for a few hours. Locations included street corners, pubs, community centres, social clubs, sports grounds, supermarkets, etc. When approaching a potential contributor I made sure I got their name, reference photo, phone number and email details. I would then visit the contributors, usually in their homes or places of work. These were short, intense encounters. It was important that it was a positive experience for the contributors: I would be simple and clear in my directions and not overload them with information - so that they were relaxed and unself-conscious. Contributors were offered prints after the process was completed.

As per my experience of the hostel work, this project gathered its own momentum: once I photographed a subject, I would then have the approval of their connections. In an attempt to explore the diversity of the community, subjects included staff and residents at a veteran's sheltered accommodation (including an ex-military sniper), Freemasons, church-goers, far-right 'activists', refugees, community youth groups, LGBTQ+ groups and, perhaps most unexpectedly, ghost hunters.

The completed project took the form of a series of black and white photographs, both portraits and landscapes. The work was shot on the Sony RX1

digital stills camera and prints were made at Northumbria University. I then oversaw the installation in both Byker Community Centre and Newcastle Civic Centre.

The use of black and white -once synonymous with notions of realism and authenticity in documentary photography- has from the vantage point of 2021, I believe, become reversed and instead is linked with poetical visions of the past. Subverting the stark, traditional portrayal of council estates this was an attempt to take the images 'out of reality'.

OUTCOMES

Influenced by the work of British oral historian and nonfiction writer Tony Parker -whose work centred on amplifying unheard voices and stories in the UK and beyond in such seminal books as *The Unknown Citizen* (1963), *The People of Providence* (1983) and *Life After Life* (1990)- this project sought to continue my engagement with inner, subjective 'histories from below' by exploring everyday working class communities of North East, England. In doing so, my intention was avoid images that were either whimsical or crude -both problematic and diminishing characteristics and all too common in the representation of this kind of environment.

My approach had much in common with *Hostel Polaroids*, except over a more expansive geographical area. It was an attempt to further test methodologies, but *A Fear of Small Numbers* had a time restriction quite different from other projects that comprise this PhD. However, the experience gained during this previous work helped immeasurably in engaging with a vast space in such a short period of time. The exhibition had a start date and I had a little over a month to begin finding and documenting subjects - this became something of a frustration because the lack of time to develop relationships with the contributors began to feel like a significant limitation. If my intention is to *transform* real stories rather than merely represent them, then in the creative practice I had established, time was emerging as the most important commodity.

The use of street casting techniques again demonstrated the fluid interaction across the disciplines, particularly in the pre-production/development process.

However, the lack of time to find and develop relationships meant that a greater emphasis was placed on the edit to unify and create connections between this series of disparate encounters. Combining portrait and landscapes allowed me to experiment with and build connections between the images, e.g. the emphasis on private domestic dwellings to create a feeling of intimacy. Pairing a portrait with a landscape resulted in the images becoming deeply entwined and created an imagined geography within the community.

Like *Hostel Polaroids*, it was my expectation that this photographic project would lead to the development of a film rendering of the stories identified during this process, but this this has not yet happened. However, much of this research would help to form the basis for the domestic environments in *Truant*.

As Byker Community Centre had been the primary site of this residency, it was decided that the possibilities of social engagement this presented were appropriate to the work and they were installed in December 2016. The images also formed part of the *People, Pavements and Property* conference at Newcastle Civic Centre (Northumbria University Press Release, 2016).

A selection of images were later featured in Lungs creative arts magazine (Lungs, 2017).

A PDF of selected images can be found in the Dropbox folder accompanying this project.



Fig. 17: *A Fear of Small Numbers* (2016)

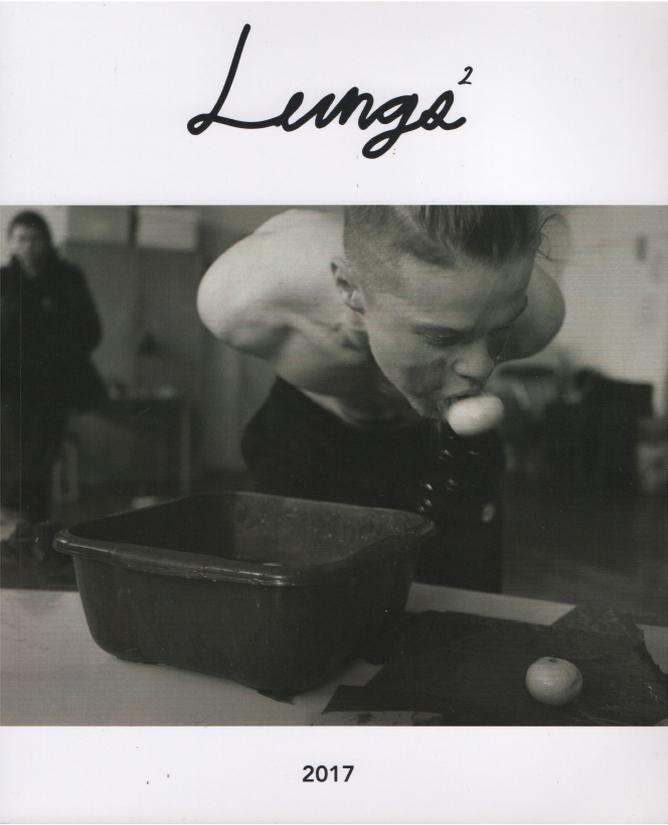


Fig. 18: *Lungs* creative arts magazine (2017)

5.8. *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You* (2015-2020)

(2015-2020/long-term documentary photographic project):

Photographer/Artist

OVERVIEW

The UK regions are in the midst of a “perfect storm” of more people using multiple drugs concurrently, strong prescription drugs flooding the streets, and long-term addicts –whose habits often date back to the late-1980s and 90s- in fragile health. My long-term project *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You* is a response to this drug crisis. So far spanning five years (with work only ceasing due to the series of national Covid-19 lockdowns), my intention was a to create an expansive long-term character portrait that extended over a number of years, but limiting the space within which we worked to a single room.

RESEARCH AIMS

How does an environment communicate ideas about a character’s interior life?

How can a nonfiction filmmaker/artist develop strategies for ‘after care’ when a project is completed?

How can the notion of the documentary ‘encounter’ be extended and developed across projects?

METHODS

The project was shot on a Sony RX1, a full frame digital stills camera with a fixed 35mm lens. The selection of camera was important because of its small size (which did not intimidate) and, importantly, the fixed focal length required me to actually get physically closer to a subject if I needed a closer frame (rather than relying on a zoom function). I believe an audience can feel the intimacy of this decision. Usually, only practical or natural lighting was used. These methodological approaches had a profound impact on the images and was something I had begun to develop in the filming of *Camrex*.

It was important to transform the subject's room into an intimate creative space. After being kindly granted permission by the hostel in Teesside⁵⁴, I visited Derek 1-2 times a month – to drop off food, talk, listen to music. Sometimes I photograph him and sometimes not. The time spent in each others' presence was essential to the work and the continuation of the project was dictated by Derek's availability. The images are an inseparable mix of the self-aware and spontaneous, candid and constructed. I worked with Derek like an actor or model and he is paid for his time accordingly. This allowed a tighter control over the images than a purely observational approach.

OUTCOMES

This project allowed me to further explore notions of documentary interiority and gain new insights into long-term 'aftercare' of nonfiction characters. As the project progressed and we moved from room to room within the hostel, the initial notion of a 'single space' became less defined by the physical and instead transformed into a semi-fictionalised interior; one comprising a number of sites that combine to create a single, imagined room featuring disorientating perversions of space and spatial impossibilities. The outside world is only hinted at through the repeated use of window frames and posters, whilst a sense of the temporal is captured through small changes in Derek's appearance, e.g. clothing, facial hair. Within this carefully constructed world, objects take on the metaphorical significance of interior thoughts and memories. The spatial limitations provide a feeling of intimacy - and a subjective perspective- which is an essential modality for the Documentary Interior.

The project began in late 2015 when I re-connected with Derek -via his probation officer- just after the completion of our film collaboration *Camrex*. The hostel where he had been staying had closed and when he was re-housed we had lost touch, so he was eager to maintain communication. A number of the cast members from *Camrex* had died since production ended and this project developed out of considering notions of post-shoot 'aftercare' and communication with documentary contributors. My intention was to find a way to document and maintain

⁵⁴ I have been asked to keep the specific location confidential.

long-term contact with a documentary subject after the collaborative encounter of a film production ended and avoid what John Ellis (Ellis 2007: 43) described as a 'quick seduction followed by abandonment', i.e. when a filmmaker and subject part ways after the completion of a production. This is something I had tangibly felt upon completion of *A Fear of Small Numbers*.

Filmmakers are reliant on the relationships that are developed during a production and this comes with a special *responsibility* - an engagement and commitment that extends beyond the need to make the work, and in which they are obligated to enact the terms of Levinas' ethical philosophy, 'meeting, encounter, dialogue.' (Renov 2004: 152) In this context, time becomes not only a creative necessity, but an ethical one. Through experimentation and intuitive engagement, *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You* presented an opportunity to develop a recurring character across projects (this is the third project in which Derek has appeared), which aligns the research with the work of filmmaker/artists such as Stefan Jarl (*They Call Us Misfits*, 1968), Khalik Allah (*IWOW: I Walk on Water*, 2020) and Pedro Costa. However, whilst *Camrex* was an exploration of a disparate community living under one roof, this photographic project was centred on Derek himself. His unifying corporeal presence creates a constellation of individual projects across disciplines that have now become an open-ended archive of experience. In the closeness of this collaboration, my story has also become entwined with his. Further exploration into the use of recurring characters within a documentary context suggests one way my future research might evolve.

Though a project founded in still images, my intention was to further explore how and why notions of time had become such an integral component of my work. *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You* would be a long term investment. However, this would present significant logistical/organisational issues. In his film, *Over the Years* (2015), director Nikolaus Geyrhalter explores the closure of a small Austrian textiles factory and its aftermath for the long-serving staff. Beginning in 2004, the film covers a period of ten years as the ex-factory workers struggle to come to terms with their new lives. Rather than attempting to cover all of the major events in his characters' lives (custody battles, characters dying, etc),

Geyrhalter approaches the film as a series of '*visitations*'. This variation in the conception of the documentary *encounter* informed my approach to this project: the acceptance that potentially important events would be missed given the length of time covered was an important creative and logistical decision that I made early on in the process.

This project became important foundational research and development tool for my feature film project *Truant*, which is partly set in a similar environment. For example, images from the project were used to communicate ideas related to the expressive visual rendering of *Truant* during my pitch at the international development programme Feature Expanded in Manchester and Florence (further information on this is included in the next section).

The project now comprises thousands of photographs. A selection of images from the project were presented as part of 'Dialogus' at Vane Art Gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne (Dialogus, 2017).

A PDF of selected images can be found in the Dropbox folder accompanying this project.



Fig. 19: *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You* (2020)



Fig. 20: *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You* image #2



Fig. 21: *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You* #3

5.9. *Truant*

(2018-20/feature film screenplay and development materials)

Writer/Director

OVERVIEW

Truant is a feature film drama that reveals the unsettling fragility in the connections that make up our everyday experience. *Truant* situates its story of addiction within an exploration of contemporary masculinity and mental health, and in doing so subverts traditional narratives of youthful experimentation and recovery.

RESEARCH AIMS

How can documentary observation be re-conceptualised as a development tool for film practice?

Use documentary research methodologies to inform the creation of a drama feature screenplay

Explore the overlap between documentary and fiction work in terms of narrative design and ethics

METHODS

This project began as a short documentary follow-up to *Camrex*, but as filming approached, the project's central character pulled out due to personal reasons. Shortly after this, I decided to develop a semi-fictionalised version and retain the film's focus on issues of addiction within a domestic environment. By focusing on the feature film form it allowed for a longer term investment and increase opportunities in terms of industry development. Applying previously employed narrative design strategies on a larger scale, *Truant* is a collision of fiction and documentary techniques and an attempt to merge methods from preceding projects presented for this PhD.

The film is a response to an extended research period. As much as possible, I attempted to immerse myself into the landscape and stories of my story world. I then transplanted this real knowledge and experience onto the framework of a story to complete the first draft of the script.

My development on *Truant* includes:

1. Six months shadowing staff at Change Grow Live drug and alcohol recovery service in Gateshead (<https://www.changegrowlive.org/recovery-partnership-gateshead>). It is essential that I understand the landscape that my characters inhabit and for this reason I have spent a significant amount of time researching these environments. This included observing Evolve's 'Foundations of Recovery' sessions (for new service users) and shadowing staff in the needle exchange.

2. Liaising with PROPS North East in North Shields, a charity assisting carers of people with addiction issues (<https://props.org.uk>). As part of this process I shadowed family intervention case workers as they visited carers in need out in the community. I also observed their Community Reinforcement Approach and Family Training (CRAFT) sessions at George Street Social recovery cafe in Newcastle upon Tyne.

3. Liaising with Newcastle City Council, I carried out interviews with recovering addicts which form an extensive archive of audio research - as well as needle exchange workers, addiction support workers, nurses, and others important to the world of the story.

4. Photographic research, primarily in the form of two long-term projects: *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You* and an ongoing series of night time landscape images related to the film called *Silence* (2020c).

5. Numerous audio field recordings in relevant locations (industrial estates, high rises, hostels, etc) in order to communicate the atmosphere of these environments.

Alongside this research process, *Truant* was one of 12 European projects to be selected for the UK-Italy programme Feature Expanded: a training programme for filmmakers/visual artists/researchers developing their first feature film project: www.featureexpanded.com. The programme included two residential workshops,

which took place between June-Nov 2018 in Manchester (Home) and Florence (Lo Schermo dell'arte Film Festival). My personal mentor on the programme is Oscar-nominated & Cannes-prize winning producer Yorgos Tsourgiannis (*Dogtooth, 2009*). This residential development lab included, masterclasses, workshops (with acting coaches, script editors, distributors, producers, directors), group feedback sessions, pitching, etc. *Truant* was presented publicly and to international experts at Lo Schermo dell'arte Film Festival in Florence in November 2018 (see image below). One of the biggest challenges was to allow people into my development process at an early stage, but this was necessary given my inexperience with the feature film form. Invited onto the programme with only a brief outline, I spent months developing this into a treatment of varying lengths and pitching the project.

The project now comprises development documents up to and including the first draft screenplay (including treatments, synopsis, logline, pitch, research, etc).



Fig. 22: Pitching *Truant* at Feature Expanded in Florence

OUTCOMES

The next step for my research practice was to expand narrative techniques developed in my short film work and explore a long form project. *Truant* is a culmination of all my research up to this point and each stage of development has been carefully documented. Given the size of the leap from shorts to features, this was by some distance the most challenging project to date. For *Truant*, the creative nonfiction strategies I have been developing throughout previous projects were further tested and implemented, including the interaction between documentary stories and the construction of fictive elements and narrative design, as well as utilising observation, interviews and photography as tools for project development.

My work has become more focused across recent projects such as *Camrex*, *Hostel Polaroids* and *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You*. These are all set in the same working class landscapes and although less overtly experimental than the earlier works, they are more guided by a commitment to developing narrative and character. New insights were gained through my short form works and with *Truant* my intention was to find the correct balance for an audience so that they not only comprehend the film on a conceptual level (as per *Funny Onion*) but also feel it on a visceral, emotional level (as per *Camrex*).

Although some scholars have suggested that traditional documentary films do not employ plot or character development as an organisational strategy to tell their stories and, unlike fiction, have been preoccupied with public matters rather than private ones (McLane 2012: 2), the hybridity of contemporary film forms is challenging such long-held doctrines. For *Truant*, much was learned about how to transform real experience to inform the composite lead character at the heart of the film. Reconstituting years of research into a feature film narrative, my intention was to provide a filmic structure to the chaos of reality. However, despite imaginative leaps, this in-depth research process means that the screenplay is not an untethered fiction, but rather anchored to the historical world. Whereas in a traditional fiction film, an imagined character will present a fictitious subjectivity, *Truant* aims to preserve traces of what Bill Nichols termed a character's 'social subjectivity' (Nichols

2010: 205) via an extensive interdisciplinary research process. Working this way, I have conceptualised the fictive intervention and construction present in the script as creative *embellishments* informed creatively and ethically by the historical world.

Whilst fiction has long ‘exploited documentary’s “lure of authenticity” through certain stylistic traits, e.g. shaky camerawork, the use of ‘witnesses’, grainy images (Renov 2004: 22), *Truant* moves beyond these surface characteristics and is a film based in personal experience where the relationships I have developed are the foundation of the project. It is a collaboration towards presenting an inner state of a protagonist that balances the dramatic demands of fiction with the ethical concerns of making work based in reality. These connections extend beyond the gaze of the camera and highlight the importance of an ethically informed process. I am able to draw upon relationships established during previous projects for this. After years of research in these environments it was now possible transform that experience.

Informed by my landscape work on *Refocus*, and developed alongside *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You*, the creation of an ongoing photography project called *Silence* was an attempt to explore the atmospheric textures of landscapes and urban areas related to *Truant*. With this project I attempted to identify visual strategies via the photographic image, which I will then take into the making of the feature film. The extended research process was instrumental in allowing me to articulate my ideas when pitching and discussing the project at Feature Expanded and beyond: for example, images from the *Silence* series were used during my pitch in Florence. Selections from *Silence* can be viewed in the Dropbox folder of supplementary material.

The contributor interviews have resulted in a rich archive of subjects and experiences. However, this emphasis on the development process -an enormously significant part of the film & television industry- is somewhat neglected in academia. My body of research suggests, via a deeper understanding of development methodologies, ways in which film practice can link to industry and thus provide important new insights for documentary scholarship, e.g. particularly around the establishing of relationships with contributors.

Looking ahead, I intend to develop the project into a second draft screenplay. My body of work so far has also facilitated the development of a series of production methods that will allow the work to maintain the authenticity of the screenplay, e.g. street casting, on location shooting, small crew, et al. This will be crucial to the next stage of project development. However, the project is now ready to take to the international marketplace.

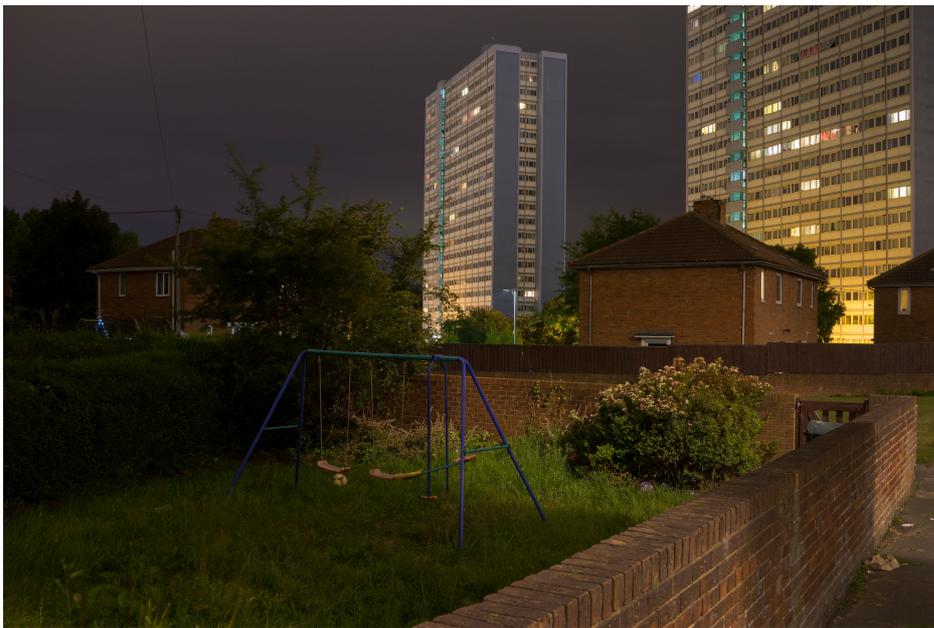


Fig. 23: An image from *Silence*.

6. Conclusions

This research on 'The Documentary Interior' has primarily drawn on the field of Documentary Film Practice to provide an account of my ongoing body of work, which in its focus on the development of new creative methodologies, renders this project a significant contribution to scholarship. As evidenced in previous chapters, this new knowledge thus fulfils the regulations of University of Northumbria as part of the overall submission for the award of PhD by Published Work.

In this closing section, it will be useful to revisit the research aims before going on to consider what was learnt in response to these and summarise the contributions this research makes to the field. These aims were:

- 1. Identify new approaches to the documentary film that contribute to development and production methodologies.*
- 2. Identify and explore how nonfiction stories access the interior life of their contributors through formal exploration and reflection.*
- 3. Examine how this emphasis on unrepresented, interior spaces impact the ethical filmmaker/contributor collaboration.*
- 4. Demonstrate how cross-disciplinary methods of production founded in creative arts practice can contribute to the development of a nonfiction film.*

In response to research aim 1, this PhD engaged a broad range of historical and theoretical paradigms through which we have seen how the formal reinvention of contemporary cinematic nonfiction has sought to transcend the perceived 'sobriety' of documentary with its focus on the expressive and subjective, the internal and experiential, on the inner thoughts, feelings, memories and dreams. Nonfiction cannot rely on observation and testimony alone: if we do not communicate the internal then we cannot reach truth. This modality shows that within the documentary there is a real place for the imagination. It is not an attempt to deny or rebuke the

social value of documentary, but an attempt to reclaim the importance of the expressive characteristics that are unique aesthetic values of the form.

The publications included in this project take the form of an expressive conceptualisation of documentary practice techniques. They are not meant to be a comprehensive exploration of how the Documentary Interior can be used, but rather how I have sought to use it in my own work. None of these techniques are new per se, but collectively they constitute the identification of an emerging aesthetic impulse in the contemporary documentary film.

The primary methods identified included:

1. Focus on the experiential
2. Expressive rendering of image and sound
3. The importance of time
4. A personal commitment to the subject
5. Foreground history from below over history from above
6. Provoke moments into being - construction and observation side by side
7. Reflexivity - dual subjectivities of the maker and subject
8. Promote intimate non-judgemental set - limit crew and filmmaking artifice
9. Use of methods from interdisciplinary arts practice
10. Allow images and sounds to contradict one another, dispense with commentary

This focus on expressivity is an attempt to communicate more direct emotional truths to an audience whilst finding a fruitful tension in acknowledging that manipulation is always part of the process. The notion of the Documentary Interior itself is a conceptualisation of the real world that relies on a delicate balance between collaboration and the imagination. It is a unifying factor. It is the creative layer that helps to locate the style of a work, that is, it functions as an aid to foreground the imagination -the very acceptance of which, as we have seen in the contextual chapters, has been largely overlooked or even stifled in documentary scholarship.

Through a focus on interior and unrepresented space the publications that comprise this PhD evidence the development of my critical practice and demonstrates the potential for art practice methodologies to have a real component in work based on documentary stories. In response to research aims 2 and 4, through my survey of expanded documentary practice (*The Invisible and the Real*) and experiments seeking to find formal strategies for *TRANS* I was able to identify new interdisciplinary methods of production, with a particular focus on photographic practice. When working with the stills camera my intention is to both create a project that exists on its own terms, but also research and develop visual design for the films, which, in form, approach a kind of moving image portraiture. I believe an audience can feel the intimacy of this decision and this is reflected in the relationship between filmmaker and subject. These methods were refined through projects such as *Refocus*, *A Fear of Small Numbers* and *If Anyone Could Have Saved Me It Would Have Been You*. It is a process of constant re-evaluation. This formal exploration, the development of a set of strategies for approaching real stories through an ongoing process of exploration and reflection, is evidenced in the peer-reviewed article on *Camrex* and the methodologies of project research for *Truant*. That the three films -*Funny Onion*, *TRANS* and *Camrex*- screened across documentary and experimental contexts reinforces that the work is pushing at the boundaries of nonfiction form (*Truant* was also developed through Feature Expanded, a development programme for artists developing their first feature). This contributes to new knowledge around documentary production methodologies.

Research aim 3 concerned the important ethical component of nonfiction. When constructing a film out of reality, there's an ethical dimension to every decision you make and those tensions persist throughout each stage of production. An audience will similarly find themselves facing ethical issues about what they see and hear, so it is important for the filmmaker to build the correct foundations, or interpretive framework, for the story. When Grierson advocated for Flaherty's method of living alongside his characters for long periods until the story is told "out of himself" as per *Nanook* or *Moana*, he was not advocating for the disavowal of reality of which Flaherty has frequently been accused. (Sinkler 2017 138-139) Ethics must guide the filmmaker's aesthetic choices. In this context, the temporal element becomes not

only a creative strategy, but when making intuitive fictive interventions, it is also an ethical necessity. In seeking the mythic and the exotic Other in its totality, and so sacrificing fidelity to the historical world, Flaherty compromised and reduced his vision⁵⁵. Flaherty's was a creativity that was not balanced by ethical considerations in the creation of an image.

As we have noted, documentary filmmakers must narrativise their material much like a maker of fiction does. They need to create structure where none exists, to creatively conceptualise, construct and dramatise material drawn from the historical world. These are manipulations intended to draw an audience closer to the truth of a situation, but also highlight the twin subjectivities of filmmaker and contributor at the heart of their filmmaking 'encounter', which in a contemporary context, as Nichols explains, often relies on personal investment where the 'filmmaker becomes more than a professional maker of films' and establishes a collaborative relationship with their subject (Nichols 2016: 83). To do this, filmmakers must constantly evaluate the qualities of the relationships they build, as 'Self and Other are irreducibly entwined.' (Renov⁵⁶ 2013: 351) Thus what began as an aesthetic strategy then formed the basis of the ethical approach to the contributors presented in my body of work.

It is evident from my findings that, more than ever before, filmmakers are seizing the opportunity to provide a deeper commitment to their characters. According to filmmaker and scholar Robert Greene, whose occasional dispatches for *Sight & Sound* are some of the most clear-eyed writing on contemporary documentary,⁵⁷ we are living through an age of 'hyper self-awareness'; new

⁵⁵ Though as Anderson & Benson (1988) note when describing the ethical quagmire of Frederick Wiseman's *Titicutt Follies*, 'Good films are sometimes made from bad rules.' (Anderson & Benson 1988: 86)

⁵⁶ It is here that we are reminded of Michael Renov's importance is not merely as an advocate for expressiveness and the creative impulse, but in foregrounding the ethical component of documentary discourse.

⁵⁷ Further explorations of the major developments in the study of nonfiction would surely have to find a place for the various online resources that provide a connection between film scholarship and the practice of documentary filmmakers within an industry context. For example, International Documentary Association (Documentary.org) and *POV Magazine* (Povmagazine.com) both provide a growing

smartphone and app technology makes video creation and distribution available to anyone, which presents an opportunity to reinvent the filmmaker/contributor relationship into something more foundationally collaborative:

‘When the camera gets turned on, the expectation is no longer that we capture the world as it plays; these days filmmakers and subjects alike actively understand that we are transforming life into art... There is, emphatically, no boundary between fiction and documentary, but truth matters more than ever. This, of course, is the great paradox of documentary: authenticity must be manufactured and reality must guide our fabrications.’ (Greene, 2020)

Greene believes that filmmakers must perform the dual role of ‘*witness*⁵⁸ and *manufacturer*’ and that the emphasis on creative methods have facilitated a shift, a collaborative space where contributors can be engaged in the telling of their own stories, ‘The best filmmakers ask us to show up, to convene, to make visible the things beyond images.’ (ibid) By exploring the contemporary models of practice in order to reveal the plurality of methods that have informed the approach to my body of work it is my claim that it is possible to reveal different kinds of truths about the historical world. In this, time is a primary asset that allows a filmmaker to develop an approach that is fully collaborative. Through this process, documentary observation is reconceptualised as something that happens *before* the camera begins turning.

The story of documentary’s development has been a physical history, it is the story of getting closer to the subject. Documentaries are about the space between the camera and the contributor: intimacy, the personal, what the filmmaker has access to and what remains out of view. Contemporary hybrid documentary reminds us that the life of the form is repeatedly renewed by its flexibility: the focus on the

and readily accessible archive of articles related to the documentary –often foregrounding innovative aesthetics and ethical challenges of contemporary work– that are relevant to practitioner and scholar. Also, International film festivals such as International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), CPH:Dox and Sheffield Doc/Fest all engage in various activities relevant to the scholar, including panel discussions, filmmaker Q&As, etc.

⁵⁸ Nichols (2016) defines the notion of ‘witness’ in opposition to ‘voyeur’, ‘one that listens to the words, and testimony, of the other in an act that brings a sense of closure and fulfillment.’ (Nichols 2016: 84)

subjective and experiential, on the internal thoughts, feelings, dreams and perceptions long since thought out of bounds for the documentary camera, are now a key part of its appeal. By outlining these representational methodologies which in different ways adhere to the documentary idea, this new work suggests that the interior landscape is the next frontier for the documentary film and for new critical studies of the form.

7. Filmography

24 City, 2008, China/Hong Kong/Japan, dir. Jia Zhangke
The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes, 1971, USA, dir. Stan Brakhage
Animal Love, 1996, Austria, dir. Ulrich Seidl
The Arbor, 2010, UK, dir. Clio Barnard
Arrival of a Train at the Station, 1896, France, dirs. Auguste Lumière, Louis Lumière
A Trip to the Moon, 1902, France, dir. Georges Méliès
Berlin: Symphony of a Great City, 1927, Germany, dir. Walter Ruttmann
Betty Tells Her Story, 1972, USA, dir. Liane Brandon
Blood of the Beasts, 1949, France, dir. Georges Franju
Bloody Nose, Empty Pockets, 2020, USA, dirs. Bill Ross IV, Turner Ross
Body song, 2003, UK, dir. Simon Pummell
Bombay Beach, 2011, USA, dir. Alma Har'el
Bypass, 2014, UK/Sweden, dir. Duane Hopkins
Camrex, 2015, UK, dir. Mark Chapman
Caniba, 2017, France, dirs. Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel
Chronicle of a Summer, 1961, France, dirs. Edgar Morin, Jean Rouch
Colossal Youth, 2006, Portugal/France/Switzerland, dir. Pedro Costa
Dogtooth, 2009, Greece, dir. Yorgos Lanthimos
Dont Look Back, 1967, USA, dir. D.A. Pennebaker
Dreams of a Life, 2011, UK/Ireland, dir. Carol Morley
Drifters, 1929, UK, dir. John Grierson
El Sicario Room 164, 2010, France/USA, dir. Gianfranco Rosi
The Exiles, 1961, USA, dir. Kent Mackenzie
Fish Tank, 1998, UK, dir. Richard Billingham
The Fog of War, 2003, USA, dir. Errol Morris
Funny Onion, 2010, UK, dir. Mark Chapman
The Girl Chewing Gum, 1976, UK, dir. John Smith
The House is Black, 1963, Iran, dir. Forough Farrokhzad
Hale County This Morning, This Evening, 2018, USA, dir. RaMell Ross
Horse Money, 2014, Portugal, dir. Pedro Costa
HyperNormalisation, 2016, UK, dir. Adam Curtis

In the Dark, 2004, Finland/Russia/UK, dir. Sergei Dvortsevov
In Vanda's Room, 2000, Portugal/Germany/Switzerland, dir. Pedro Costa
IWOW: I Walk on Water, 2020, USA, dir. Khalik Allah
Kate Plays Christine, 2016, Greece/USA, dir. Robert Greene
Kino Eye: Life Caught Unawares, 1924, Soviet Union, dir. Dziga Vertov
Kino-Pravda series, 1922-1925, Soviet Union, dirs. Dziga Vertov, Elizaveta Svilova, Mikhail Kaufman
Komunia, 2016, Poland, dir. Anna Zamecka
La Jetée, 1962, France, dir. Chris Marker
Land of Promise, 1946, UK, dir. Paul Rotha
Land Without Bread, 1933, Spain, dir. Luis Buñuel
Leviathan, 2012, France/UK/USA, dirs. Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel
Low Tide, 2012, Italy/Belgium/USA, dir. Roberto Minervini
Making Christmas Crackers, 1910, UK, dir. Unknown
Manakamana, 2013, Nepal/USA, dirs. Stephanie Spray, Pacho Velez
Manhatta, 1921, USA, dirs. Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler
Man With A Movie Camera, 1929, Soviet Union, dir. Dziga Vertov
Mirror, (1975) Soviet Union, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky
Moana, 1926, USA, dirs. Frances H. Flaherty, Robert J. Flaherty
Nanook of the North, 1922, USA/France, dir. Robert J. Flaherty
National Gallery, 2014, France/USA/UK, dir. Frederick Wiseman
Near Death, 1989, USA, dir. Frederick Wiseman
Night Mail, 1936, UK, dirs. Harry Watt, Basil Wright
Nostalgia, 1983, Italy/Soviet Union, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky
Notes on Blindness, 2016, UK, dirs. Pete Middleton, James Spinney
On the Bowery, 1956, USA, dir. Lionel Rogosin
Ossos, 1997, Portugal/France/Denmark, dir. Pedro Costa
The Other Side (aka Louisiana), 2015, Italy/France, dir. Roberto Minervini
Over the Years, 2015, Austria, dir. Nikolaus Geyrhalter
Our Daily Bread, 2005, Germany/Austria, dir. Nikolaus Geyrhalter
The Passage, 2011, USA/Belgium, dir. Roberto Minervini
Plot Point, 2007, Belgium, dir. Nicolas Provost
The Power of Nightmares, 2004, UK, dir. Adam Curtis

Primary, 1960, USA, dir. Robert Drew
The Prison in Twelve Landscapes, 2016, Canada/USA, dir. Brett Story
Rain, 1929, Netherlands, dir. Mannus Franken, Joris Ivens
The Rider, 2017, USA, dir. Chloé Zhao
Screen Tests, 1964-66, USA, dir. Andy Warhol
Shoah, 1985, France/UK, dir. Claude Lanzmann
Soldier Girls, 1981, USA/UK, dirs. Nick Broomfield (as Nicholas Broomfield), Joan Churchill
Stop the Pounding Heart, 2013, USA/Italy/Belgium, dir. Roberto Minervini
Sunday, 2009, UK, dir. Duane Hopkins
Unsere Afrikareise, 1966, Austria, Peter Kubelka
The Uprising, 2013, UK/Belgium/Yemen/Tunisia/Syria/Libya/Egypt/Bahrain, dir. Peter Snowdon
The Thin Blue Line, 1988, USA, dir. Errol Morris
They Call Us Misfits, 1968, Sweden, dir. Stefan Jarl
This Is Not A Film, 2011, Iran, dir. Jafar Panahi
Titicut Follies, 1967, USA, dir. Frederick Wiseman
Tongues Untied, 1989, USA, dir. Marlon Riggs
TRANS, 2013, UK, dir. Mark Chapman
Vitalina Varela, 2019, Portugal, dir. Pedro Costa
Waltz With Bashir, 2008, Israel/France/Germany/USA/Finland/Switzerland/Belgium/Australia, dir. Ari Folman
Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory, 1895, France, dirs. Auguste Lumière, Louis Lumière
World of Plenty, 1943, UK, dir. Paul Rotha
Zoo, 2007, USA, dir. Robinson Devor

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