The Art of Fact: An exploration of the relationship between theory and

practice in documentary filmmaking.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Liverpool John

Moores University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2017

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my Mam and Dad. They are super cool human beings and have always put their children's welfare and happiness before their own. Against all odds, they provided their children with a future that was far better than their past. I love them both so dearly.

I'd also like to thank my brothers Craig and Neil and my sister Bev for the love, friendship and protection that they have given to their kid brother. Also props go out to the rest of my family, I love you all.

A very special thank you goes to Geoffrey Cox, who has helped me mature as a filmmaker, has helped inform my practice in general and has opened my ears to a symphony of the world. You have been a brilliant learned colleague to work with and a very dear friend.

I would also like to give a big thank you to David Sorfa for his initial supervision, most of which took place down the pub. I'd also like to thank him for proving that your boss can be boss. I missed him when he left for Edinburgh and I continue to miss him now.

I would also like to give a big thank you to Lydia Papadimtriou for her guidance, support and patience during the supervisor-student relationship. I would not have got here without you.

I would also like to thank all those associated with Middlesbrough Football Club for making me understand the term 'hope springs eternal.'

A special thank you goes to Johnny Turton, without whom *Wayne Smith: a coach's story* could not have been made. JT, you were a top guy to work with; your positivity, humour and passion are qualities that do you proud.

A special thank you also goes to Chad Murray, one time student of mine, whose musical outfit, *Driven By Machines,* provided the music for *In Dreams* and my film of the same name, *Driven By Machines*. I am also grateful for his skilled contribution to some of the post-production design on both of the films mentioned above.

A special thank you to Alicia Stubbersfied for being a lovely person and getting *Deconstructing Voices* on the road and generally making LJMU a better place to work. The same can be said about Andrew MacMillan.

And now I would like to give extra special thanks to the three most important Liverpudlians in my life. Firstly Ella May Marley, my daughter, you gave me a very good reason to live and I will always love you, undeniably so. To Danielle Quigley, my partner, who has simply made me so very happy. I love you. And finally to Mungo, The Teesside Terrier - dogs are called man's best friend and that is for a good reason.

At this point I would like to mention a number of names, to whom I am eternally grateful for contributing, in some way, to making this academic journey easier and more palatable: Liz Webster, Owen McShane, Drew Hyland, Vevina Quigley, Martina Quigley, Victor Quigley, Keevan Quigley, Erin Quigley, Amy Gunning, Mikkel Vilhelmsen, Kalle Weis-Fogh, Jon and Sally Kelly, Marc

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Sturgess, Alex McCune, Ben O'Brien, Pip Sargent, Chris Simpson, Howie Kearey, Jaz Kaur, Mike, Emma, Lily and Freddy Derbyshire, Demelza Kooij, Ruth Doughty, Rachel McLean, Liz Greene, Claire Jones, John Paul Manley, Pryce Roberts, Matthew Kirton, Bradley Hessey, Rachel Brewster, Lena Valutye, Ian Walker, Wayne Smith, Ben Watkins, Sue, Jen and Mary in the café, Bill the best postman in the West, Kerry and all those who work on the front desk at Redmonds, Nicola King-Williams, Jan Coulson, Jill Smith, Tommy, John and all the other LJMU GAs and to anyone else I have not mentioned, who may think that you deserve a mention. If you feel you do deserve a mention then get out a biro and add your name, you probably do deserve it, its just my memory fades with the many moons that wax and wane.

Up The Boro. Love and peace Keith Marley Junior x

Research Questions

How can theoretical discourse inform the representational strategies adopted by documentary filmmakers?

How can a documentary filmmaker use Nichols' *modes of documentary* (1991) as a template for developing specific representational strategies in documentary practice?

What potential impact can Nichols' *modes* have on the way a documentary "speaks" to its audience?

How do *Modernist* modes of representation challenge the notions of actuality, objectivity, referentiality and reality in documentary practice?

How can the creative use of sound contribute to the articulation of meaning in documentary practice?

How can technologies associated with DJ/VJ culture create innovative narrative structures in documentary practice?

Glossary Of Terms

Actuality I use this term in relation to events that take place in front of a camera.

Cinema Verité This term particularly refers to the work of Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin who use it in relation to the types of films they made. It means *film truth* rather than *truthful film* (as it is sometimes incorrectly used when describing the Direct Cinema movement). Rouch and Morin coined the term as a critique of the truth claims made by those associated with Direct Cinema. For Rouch and Morin, the only truth that was exposed was the truth of an encounter between filmmaker and subject.

Formalist I use this term to describe a type of documentary filmmaking that is more interested in aesthetics and structural elements as a form of engaging audiences in particular ways, as opposed to a type of documentary filmmaking

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that is more interested in using content for expositional and rhetorical purposes.

Interactive I use this term in relation to a specific mode of documentary style that Bill Nichols identifies. Nichols updated this term to 'participatory', however I prefer the use of this term because it implies more of a relationship between filmmaker and subject. Of course contemporary us of interactive documentary has come to mean something entirely different. In today's parlance it refers to relationship between audience and text, in that, say for example, the way an audience has the ability to affect the structure of a documentary text through the use of interactive media technologies.

Kino Pravda This translates from the Russian into *film truth.* This term was coined by Dziga Vertov and refers to the ability of cinematic apparatus to reveal social truths via the development of a specific type of film language. This term was later adopted by Rouch and Morin, which translated into the French as *cinema verité* (discussed above).

Korg Kaptivator A video sampler and sequencer used in my live performance of documentary

MAX MSP/Jitter Computer software user interface used to sequence and transform images and sounds used in my live performance of documentary

Numark NUVJ A midi controller used to manipulate computer software used in my live performance of documentary

Reality I use this term to refer to phenomena occurring in the world 'out there' regardless of the presence of a camera.

Scholarly Filmmaking This term refers to a type of documentary practice that is thoroughly underpinned by theoretical discourse.

VJ I use this term to refer to a person who uses machines/computer software that are associated with club culture, in the context of live audio-visual performance.

Abstract:

This practice led thesis is an exploration of the ways in which theory can inform practice in documentary filmmaking. Section 1 of the thesis provides an embedded review of literature in order to offer the reader a critical evaluation of the theoretical debates that have informed my documentary practice. This section analyses issues associated with definitional debates on documentary film, while also addressing the formal features associated with what Bill Nichols (1991; 2001) called *modes of documentary*. The work of particular filmmakers will be discussed, namely Dziga Vertov, Jean Rouch and the city symphony makers of the early 20th century, in relation to how their ideas and film work have had a major impact on my own approach to filmmaking.

Section 2 is the practical portfolio of work itself and acts as an exploration of theory within a practical context. The audio-visual texts include, *A Film About Nice* (2010), a dawn-to-dusk city symphony, which focuses on capturing the

everyday life of a European city. It echoes the tradition of the City Symphony makers of the early 20th Century, however the significant difference here is that I explore some of the visual techniques adopted by the filmmakers and explore them within a sonic context. This film can be seen as an exploration of the impact rhythm has on signification within film.

Mechanized Deconstruction (2011) is a recording of a live performance at *Documentary Now 2011.* This was my first venture into producing documentary films within a live context, via the use of DJ/VJ technologies. *There* is a cine-poem, which acts as a collaborative approach to documentary, combining the work of the poet and the work of the filmmaker. It also acts an example of how some of the techniques I have developed during the live performance of documentary have had an impact on the documentary films that I have since produced. *The Mill* (2016) adopts a similar structure to The City Symphony, however this film can be seen as an *Industrial Symphony*, in that the focus here is on the rhythm, movement and the sonic dimension of the machine. In many ways this film can be seen as that which encapsulates the essence of the formalist approach I adopt when producing documentary films. *Driven By Machines* (2017) uses footage from *The Mill* and provides an example of how a filmmaker can de-familiarize actuality footage through post-production technique. This film acts as an ode to the abstract filmmakers such as Man Ray, Len Lye, Viking Eggelling and Hans Richter, all of who used actuality footage and abstracted this footage through manipulation

techniques available to them at the time. In summary, Section 2 acts as an audio-visual explication of theory within a practical context.

Section 3 is a critical reflection of the practical portfolio of work. Here I aim to explain how I have used certain filmmaking techniques as a way of exploring some of the theoretical concepts outlined in Section 1. This offers the reader an opportunity to gain insight into how theory can inform practice; as such the reader of my films is able to gain insight into authorial intention, therefore the reader is able to make a more informed analysis of my practical portfolio.

Introduction

Documentary filmmaking, in its relatively short existence, has had a major impact upon knowledge production across much of the world. It has established itself as a major genre within film culture and the study of documentary film has emerged as a bona fide academic discipline.

I aim to make a contribution to the body of knowledge on documentary film by writing this thesis from the perspective of both an academic and a filmmaker. This will serve as an effective way of exploring the relationship between practice and theory in documentary filmmaking. I seek to show that if a filmmaker can develop a *scholarly* approach to production processes and techniques, then that filmmaker can engage audiences in particular ways, which other, more conventional forms of documentary, rarely achieves. Once I have established the major tenets that contribute to a *scholarly* approach to filmmaking, I will then evidence this approach within a practical context. The

body of practical work that I produce will, in effect, become an explication of that very approach. I will then speculate as to the possible impacts that this approach can have on the viewer/listener. I say speculate, because all interpretations of any text by a given audience will be contingent on a number of factors that can impact on the decoding of that particular text. Media effects is a much debated topic and there is scant room to enter into those debates here, however any speculations that I may make about what the audience impact may be, will be informed, to some extent, by theoretical perspectives on such matters.

The thesis contains three sections: the literature review is embedded within Section 1 and will provide an overview and evaluation of some of the theoretical perspectives and debates that have had an impact on my approach to documentary filmmaking and gives insight into the way that theoretical discourse can provide a grounding in terms of developing specific approaches to making documentary films. Chapter 1 begins with a critical evaluation of some of the definitions afforded to documentary film by scholars in this field of study. The purpose here is not to compose a *definitive* definition for documentary; in fact I argue that there can be no definitive definition for this genre of film. Documentary is too complex of a phenomenon to be succinctly defined. What I do aim to provide however, is a critical evaluation of some of the definitions of documentary in order to get an idea as to what documentary *can* look and sound like and how particular formalist conventions *can* impact on audiences.

Chapter 2 uses Nichols' modes of documentary (1991; 2001b) as a useful starting point for analysing what *types* of documentary there are, especially in relation to the formalist aspects of each mode. Using Nichols' taxonomy provides the filmmaker with a succinct template from which he or she can copy, modify or reject when developing a particular approach to documentary filmmaking. It is worth pointing out here that Nichols' modes are not without contention; Bruzzi (2000), for example, takes issue with the way Nichols characterises each mode, claiming that his process of delineation between modes is confused and rather obscure. However for the purpose of this thesis, the way that Nichols creates his categories by identifying the distinguishing features of each mode, while at the same time speculating as to the potential impact the formalist techniques can have on audiences, has helped to inform my own approach to documentary representation; and for that reason alone his work has been invaluable for the purposes of this thesis.

Chapter 3 is as an evaluation of specific filmmakers, namely Dziga Vertov and Jean Rouch. The films and writings of Russian filmmaker and theorist Dziga Vertov have had a huge impact on the production processes and aesthetic regimes that I have developed in my own work. I have chosen Vertov to discuss at length because in many ways he becomes emblematic of *the* scholarly filmmaker. I also choose to discuss the filmmaker Jean Rouch, as it was Rouch's re-discovery of the work and philosophies of Vertov that brought the Russian back into vogue. Without Rouch, Vertov may well be confined to

history books that would be low on information about him and be in scant supply.

Chapter 4 focuses on the sub genre within documentary film known as The City Symphony. The City Symphony filmmakers were a loosely affiliated group who produced dynamic vignettes of early 20th Century urban life. Their stylistic approach had a definite emphasis on rhythmic patterns, which has influenced the structural elements of the films that I have produced for this thesis. Here I outline how, by using footage drawn from a metropolitan canvas, the artist can synthesize that footage into dynamic rhythmic patterns in order to create visual and sonic symphonies, creating rich patterns of signification, which more traditional forms of documentary rarely achieve.

In summary, Section 1 will provide the reader with an understanding of what is meant by *scholarly filmmaking,* with the work of the city symphony makers acting as a specific example of a scholarly approach to documentary filmmaking. The practical portfolio contained in Section 2 and the critical reflection of Section 3 aim to provide the reader with material that will give insight into how the filmmaker has explored theoretical discourse within a practical context. It will also provide an understanding of what the intentions of the filmmaker were in relation to the signifying practices that have emerged as a result of the exploration of the theory-practice relationship. As such, the critical reflection aims to provide an explanation as to why I have made particular decisions in relation to cinematography, sound design and narrative structure. This section is essentially a statement of intent. It provides an

explication of how my authorial intentions are realized within a practical context and will give insight into the technical processes involved. There is a direct correlation between Section 1 and Section 3, in so far as I attempt to highlight how the theoretical debates outlined in Section 1 have helped to inform my practical portfolio. At times, Section 3 contains minute detail with regard to explaining some of the production processes involved; however this should not be seen as merely incidental information: if one is to explain the link between theory and practice, then at times, highlighting specific details about process is absolutely crucial as a way of explaining the theory-practice relationship.

Methodology:

The initial stage of my research process was spent critically analysing the literature that was relevant to my subject area and rather than have a stand alone Literature Review, I have embedded the review of literature within Section 1 of my thesis. I have chosen this approach because I believe that it allows me to make the direct link between theory and my own practice in a more explicit way. My review of literature has provided me with an in depth critical awareness of some of the major debates associated with documentary representation. This awareness has allowed me to develop particular representational strategies that act as explorations of theoretical discourse within a practical context. Once the practical portfolio was completed and a thorough critical evaluation of the films was carried out, I was then in a position to critically reflect on the theory-practice interchange and make

substantiated claims as to how theoretical discourse had impacted upon the representational strategies I have developed within my practical portfolio.

With regard to the filmmaking itself, I was producer for all the films except *Mill Study* (2016), which was co-produced with Geoffrey Cox. For *A Film About Nice* (2010) I was responsible for gathering sound and image footage, supported by Cox, who acted as a first sound recordist and second cinematographer. I co-edited the film and acted as an advisor on the sound design, which was largely executed by Cox. For the live performance of *Mechanized Deconstruction* (2011), I planned and produced the project, with some support from Cox. We were both involved in the gathering of sound and image footage and I provided the sampled visual footage that would be used in the performance, whereas Cox provided the sampled audio footage. During the live performance I sequenced the visual track, while Cox sequenced the audio track. For the performance I used VJ machines such as *Korg Kaptivator, Edirol V4* and sequencing software called *NUVJ*. Cox used an audio-visual software package called *Max MSP-Jitter.* The version contained in the portfolio is a recording of the live performance.

For *Mill Study* (2016), Cox and I shared sound recording and cinematography roles and I took on the role of assistant editor and assistant sound designer to Cox.

For the final piece, *Driven By Machines* (2016) I worked closely with Chad Murray, who provided the music for the film and contributed to the post-production processing of the images that I had previously gathered during the

making of *Mill Study No.1*. I also contributed to some of the post-production

processing and I executed the edit for the film.

Section 1

Chapter 1: Definitions and Debates

> 'Much of the attraction of, and debates and controversies around
> the documentary genre, derives from being a hybrid form, straddling
> both conflicting paradigms within the social sciences on the one
> hand, and the aesthetic dimensions of art and entertainment, on the
> other.' Wayne in Austin and de Jong (2008:7)

In this chapter I aim to critically evaluate some of the literature associated with the way documentary has been conceptualised and defined. I initially focus on the contribution made to the original documentary project by John Grierson and Paul Rotha. Both of these scholars and filmmakers were leading figures in The British Documentary Film Movement, who became the driving force in the development of documentary film as a whole. In many ways the British approach to documentary practice differed to that which was being developed in continental Europe and Russia. The focus for British documentaries was associated more with issues of content and social message, as opposed to the documentary practice associated with the Soviets and continental Europe, which focused much more on issues of form and aesthetics. That is not to say that the European approach did not address social, cultural and political issues, however the focus on developing innovative aesthetic approaches to the documentary form was not at the heart of the British approach.

This tension between documentary film as instruction, versus that of documentary as aesthetic project has been central to the divergent trajectory of the development of the different types of documentary films that have emerged over the last century or so. It is with these tensions in mind that I have approached my own practice in particular ways. For example I have a desire to produce films that contribute to a greater understanding of, say, specific cultural practices, as well as social issues, and as such I am working very much in the British tradition of documentary as didactic text. However, central to my practice has been the desire to develop innovative representational strategies, which is an approach informed by the formalist documentary filmmakers of The Soviet Union and continental Europe. In order to inform my own practice, I try to adopt what may be called a *scholarly approach* to documentary filmmaking, in that theoretical discourse is used as a way to inform the way I develop representational strategies. In order to assess the way that theory has informed my own approach, it is important to introduce some of the scholarly debates associated with how documentary is actually defined in the first place. If one is to ask *what is a documentary*, then one naturally invokes debates associated with the ontological nature of documentary film. If one is to ask *what does a documentary look and sound like*, then one naturally invokes debates associated with the aesthetic nature of documentary film. If one is to ask *what does a documentary aim to do*, then one naturally invokes debates associated with authorial intent. The purpose of the following chapters is to ask those very questions as a way of interrogating and critically analysing my own documentary practice, so that the reader can

gain insight into the relationship between theory and practice in documentary filmmaking according to the perspective of the filmmaker.

Any search for a definition allows the practitioner to develop conceptual frameworks that can inform their own practice and subsequently contribute to the development of specific discursive strategies in one's own practice. Having said that, defining documentary is no easy task in itself. One could argue that documentary belongs to the meta-genre of nonfiction, however not all nonfictions are documentaries: travelogues, instructional films, promotional films and newsreels can all be seen as nonfiction, yet they are not all necessarily documentaries by definition. Some definitions may concern themselves with the *formal features* of documentary, while others may be more concerned with *content* and *subject* matter. Plantinga (1997) makes the claim that there is no definitive definition of documentary and that in many ways there can be no distinction between nonfiction film and fiction film, 'every film has political implications, and thus every film makes an "argument" about reality' (14). Even though he asks the question, 'why bother to define the nonfiction film?' (7), he does see the attempt to define it as a useful exercise, as it encourages the theoretician to search for the ontological essence of documentary film: 'questions about the nature and function of nonfiction and documentary infuse *all* of the theoretical debates about the genre' (7). Renov rejects Platinga's point that there is little distinction between fiction film and documentary by claiming that documentary has a 'direct ontological claim to the real' (1993: 71) and as such, he argues that

documentary implicitly makes some sort of *truth claim*. This suggests that documentary film differs from the fiction film, in that documentary has an indexical link to the historical world, whereas the fiction film has an analogous or symbolic relationship to the real world. Beattie supports this notion of the indexical nature of nonfiction film, by making the claim that documentary 'can be defined, generally, as a work or text which implicitly claims to truthfully represent events or issues or to assert that the subjects of the work are real people' (Beattie 2004: 10). However this definition is problematic in the sense that one could still apply that to a fiction film, which is based on a true story and involves people who actually exist or have existed. Aufderheide offers a more useful definition, by stating the footage is drawn from real life itself, and as such documentaries are, 'portraits of real life, using real life as their raw material, constructed by artists and technicians who make myriad decisions about what story to tell to whom, and for what purpose.' (Aufderheide 2007: 2)

The task of defining documentary is complicated even further when questions of form and structure are raised; documentary film has too varied a history to simply resort to using technical and aesthetic codes and conventions as a way of defining the genre. One has to look beyond the mere form of documentary in order to fully engage with the debates associated with its nature and function. The distinction between fiction film and documentary cannot simply reside in formal difference; rather the distinction is made through a filmmaker's sense of *intentionality,* as Ward points out 'the key distinction is

never one of form or style, but rather of purpose and context' (Ward 2005: 7). Stallabrass supports this viewpoint, claiming that the status of documentary 'is largely asserted by the maker' (Stallabrass 2013:14). This implies that the *intentionality* of the filmmaker is key to understanding what a documentary actually is. However this can complicate the issue even further, as different filmmakers will have different agendas when making films and each documentary will adopt various codes and conventions in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the filmmaker or commissioner. Generally the viewing public do not have access to information about what the author's intentions were in the first place, therefore any assumptions made about what the author may have been trying to achieve, will naturally be speculative. However it is with this in mind that I aim to provide such information in section two of my thesis, by articulating an overview of the aims of objectives of my practical portfolio of films and live performances. I will then critically reflect on practical work, highlighting how I set out to achieve those aims and objectives within a filmmaking context, as well as providing an explanation as to how theoretical discourse has informed my specific approach to documentary filmmaking. Essentially Section 3 operates as a statement of intent.

Barsom acknowledges the importance of authorial intentionality, by arguing that the documentarian is always driven by a didactic impulse: 'the film maker who works in this form wants to use cinema for purposes more important than entertainment…he wants to persuade, to influence, to change his

audience' (Barsom 1973:1). Even though it is not always possible to know what a filmmaker's intentions are, Barsom's point is a fair one, in that documentary film can be seen as a *progressive project*, with education and knowledge exchange being two of its fundamental aims. A key figure in the development of documentary as *progressive project* was John Grierson. He is widely credited as the founding father of the documentary movement and went on to produce (and occasionally direct) a number of documentary films, first at the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit and then at the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit, before leaving the UK to work in Canada. He saw documentary as being part of a civic cinema, which should have social education as its core value, whereby documentary film could be used as a way to create a sense of deep felt citizenship among the British masses. John Reith, the founding father of the BBC, saw the role of broadcasting as serving a similar purpose and it is no coincidence that documentary film went on to become an important part of the BBC's schedule, helping to realise its ethos of *information, education* and *entertainment* in the name of public service.

Grierson was a prolific writer on documentary and his *First Principles of Documentary* (in Hardy [ed.] 1979) is a useful way of assessing the intentions of such an important figure in the development of documentary production. In this essay Grierson argued that documentary film was far more valuable than the newsreels that were so popular in cinemas of the early 20th Century claiming that they were just a, 'speedy snipsnap of some utterly important ceremony…The skills they represent is purely journalistic skill. They describe

novelties novelly.' (35). Grierson elevated the position of documentary film further when he compared it to the perceived failings of fiction film, claiming that, 'documentary can achieve an intimacy of knowledge and effect impossible to the shimsham mechanics of the studio, and the lily fingered interpretations of the metropolitan actor.' (37) By drawing on footage from real life, Grierson claimed that the documentary provides cinema with a greater degree of social, cultural and political significance. Images drawn from real life, 'give cinema a greater fund of material. They give it a power over a million and one images. They give it power of interpretation over more complex and astonishing happenings in the real world than the studio mind can conjure up or the studio mechanician recreate.' (37) From these ideas he coined the much-quoted phrase that documentary is simply the *creative treatment of actuality*. The implication here is that the documentarian uses "real life" as raw material, however he or she then shapes this material into what can only be termed as an *interpretation* of actuality, rather than an unmediated record of it. However, Winston, who is rather critical of Grierson throughout his book *Claiming The Real: the documentary film revisited*, asks the question as to 'what is the nature of the 'actuality' or reality after 'creative treatment'' (Winston 1995: 14), suggesting that any creative treatment renders the text as ideological, having no claim on the real at all: 'In all this only one thing is certain – the edifice of 'creative', 'treatment' and 'actuality which Grierson built is going to collapse, bulldozed by a force more thorough than any dreamed of by any postmodernist. Claiming the real in the old sense is rapidly becoming untenable.' (Winston 1995: 259)

While Grierson's impact upon documentary film cannot be denied, it could be argued that the principles on which he based much of his work were actually rather restrictive in terms of the formal development of documentary. He felt that documentary should be distanced from art cinema, in fact he argued against documentary becoming an aesthetic pursuit at all, claiming that it should first and foremost serve a social and political purpose:

> 'Creation indicates not the making of things but the making of virtues...beauty will come in good time to inhabit the statement which is honest and lucid and deeply felt and which fulfils the best ends of citizenship...the self-conscious pursuit of beauty, the pursuit of art for art's sake...was always a reflection of selfish wealth, selfish leisure and aesthetic decadence.' (in Hardy [ed.] 1979, 40-41)

Paul Rotha, a British documentary filmmaker and close associate of Grierson, echoed this sentiment, by claiming that 'where cinema has pretended to be an art in itself, with no other ends than its aesthetic virtues, it has slobbered and expired in a sepulchre of symbolism, or, still worse, mysticism' (Rotha 1970: 66). He criticised the more formalist approaches of the French and Soviet avant-garde documentarians (he fails to name any filmmakers directly), arguing that they were more interested in producing films for selfish reasons, with their 'cultural ideals set up by bourgeois aestheticism' (Rotha 1970: 66). For Rotha and many other British documentarians working under the leadership of Grierson, documentary, much like art in general, should serve a social purpose in order to make a significant contribution to cultural

development and citizenship. Both Grierson and Rotha were heavily critical of cinema simply being seen as entertainment. Rotha claimed that documentary films served a 'special purpose', that went beyond, 'mere artistic endeavour or the desire to make a profit', stating that, 'without this aim of special service, I cannot see that cinema has any real significance beyond that of providing a temporary emotional refuge for the community.' (Rotha 1970:69)

Even though Rotha and Grierson admitted to being influenced by some of the more formalist filmmakers of continental Europe, including Cavalcanti, Léger, Ruttman, Vertov, Turin and Eistenstein, they both remained highly critical of their aesthetic approach to documentary film, with Grierson claiming that these filmmakers aimed to, 'capture the eye and impress the mind in the same way as a tattoo or a military parade might do' (Hardy [ed.] 1979: 41.). He argued that their work offered little in the way of social responsibility and that these filmmakers were far too focused on creating a specific documentary style or aesthetic, rather than addressing social issues. He even went as far as saying that the work of Walter Ruttman and other *City Symphonists* was, 'the most dangerous of film models to follow' (Hardy [ed.] 1979: 41). The likes of Grierson and Rotha felt that social message was far more important than issues of form or aesthetics. Rotha was perhaps more radical than Grierson in that he openly stated that documentary film should naturally be *propagandist* and should serve the State in order to create an acceptance of certain political beliefs. Documentary film could, in his opinion, become the most important mechanism for influencing public opinion, describing it as, 'one of the most

powerful channels of expression for persuasion and public illumination.' (Rotha 1970: 58) For Rotha, documentary should function as, 'a method of communication and propaganda to project not just personal opinions but arguments for a world of common interests.' (Rotha 1970: 70) It is those "common interests" that can be seen as highly problematic however, in that the shared goals Rotha referred to were implicitly imperialist by definition.

In many ways the propagandist nature of British documentary came to act as a template for much of the development of documentary practice in the Western world, with scholars, such as Bill Nichols, claiming that the aesthetic dimension of documentary films have suffered as a result of the "seriousness" associated with the types of documentary that were being produced by The British Documentary Film Movement. In his opinion documentary practice became associated with what he called, 'discourses of sobriety' (Nichols 1991: 3) and as a result of this pervasive sense of seriousness, aesthetic experimentation in documentary practice has been restricted. An upshot of this has seen a plethora of documentary films that have prescriptive formulas of exposition and explication, which came to dominate the discursive aspects of documentary film. Keith Beattie claims that this formally restrictive approach can 'exclude alternate documentary approaches and forms' (2008:1). Beattie claims that certain members of the Documentary Film Movement, who were driven by a more expressive formalist approach to documentary filmmaking such as Humphrey Jennings and Alberto Cavalcanti, had an unstable position within the group, in that they 'challenged Grierson's

emphasis on documentary as a project concerned with social pedagogy.' (Beattie 2008: 10) As mentioned earlier, Grierson was circumspect about adopting an aesthetic approach to documentary filmmaking and Cavalcanti and Jennings were rather marginalised in the group as a result.

The tension between documentary film seen as a political project, as opposed to an aesthetic one, has been a divisive yet defining feature in the development of documentary film as a whole. Stella Bruzzi highlights this by claiming that documentaries that have an overt sense of style reveal a definite sense of authorship and, for her, 'the question of authorship has traditionally posed a thorny problem for documentary, as the recognised intervention of an *auteur* disrupts the non-fiction film's supposed allegiance to transparency and truthfulness' (Bruzzi 2006: 197). However, Bruzzi takes issue with this idea of transparency and truthfulness, by claiming that documentary is as heavily authored as fiction film. For her, like Nichols, the established Griersonian canon of documentary filmmaking has restricted its representational capabilities. Instead of talking of the dialectic relationship between art and science, she identifies the tension between documentary as *objective* text and documentary as *subjective* text, stating that 'the signposting of the documentary author-director…crystallises documentary's fundamental conflict between subjectivity and objectivity…the establishment of a documentary canon has historically marginalised films emphasising the author's presence [and] it has been too readily assumed that the repression of the author has been necessary to the implementation of objectivity.' (Bruzzi 2006: 198)

Beattie makes a similar claim by suggesting that if documentary is seen as a didactic rather than aesthetic project, then a natural division is created between documentaries that appeal to the intellect, over those that appeal to the senses. With particular reference to the work that was coming out of The Documentary Film Movement in the 1930s and 1940s under the stewardship of Grierson (a period that was seen as the most prolific in terms of films made), it was the intellectual impulse that prevailed over an affective one and as a result the representational strategies became associated with an aesthetic based on logic rather than evocation. This echoes Nichols' argument about the seriousness of documentary acting as an aesthetically restrictive device, with Beattie arguing that the divide between aesthetics and politics is one that 'is typically framed in terms of mutual exclusions within which the aesthetic denies politics, and vice versa.' (Beattie 2008: 15)

For my own work, it is in the tensions between form and content, between art and political science and between subjectivity and objectivity, that has inspired me to create documentaries films where I have no desire to treat politics and aesthetics as phenomena that are mutually exclusive of each other. For myself, the presence of an author cannot be denied, because the very act of recording and editing actuality footage, is in itself an authorial process: the filmmaker has to decide how and what to film in the first place and then what shots will be placed next to other shots and with what sounds and so on and so on. In film, reality can only ever be *mediated* through sound and image. Objectivity can never be achieved in documentary film, because the very act of filmmaking is

essentially a subjective one. The documentary filmmaker acts as interpreter of that reality and as such reality can never be captured, only represented.

While the literature used thus far has helped to open up debates associated with defining documentary, I have not necessarily aimed to provide a definitive explanation as to what a documentary is, nor indeed have I looked to explain what a documentary should do or what a documentary should look and sound like, however by exploring issues associated with dilemmas such as those outlined above, I have opened up debates that address questions of form, content and authorial intent. In to fully understand the ontological nature of documentary film, one must first acknowledge the five fundamental aspects of any discursive practice: the context in which a work is both produced and received, the nature of the content of the documentary film in question, the representational strategies such a film adopts, authorial intent and the impact upon the audience. In Section 3 I aim to address these five factors in either a direct or indirect way. It is worth noting here that final aspect, *impact upon the audience*, will be purely speculative. I have not devised any "experiments" to test any hypotheses, rather I have adopted a more informal approach to assessing the way my films are received, by using them as teaching material in the lecture theatre as stimulus for discussion among my students, as well as assessing the critical comments about my work by documentary scholars, gathered from when I have presented my work at academic conferences or at film premieres and live performances.

In order to address the formal concerns of documentary film, Bill Nichols'
highly influential work on documentary modes (1991), has enabled me to
understand issues associated with documentary production in terms of
context, form, content, intentionality and reception. As a cautionary note,
much of Nichols' discussion of documentary modes was formulated in 1991,
with an updated version in 2001, and as a result he does not discuss the
impact of digital technology on his ideas about what types of documentaries
there are. In Section 3 I will directly address the question of how
contemporary digital technologies have the potential to expand the
documentary form. At this point it is fair to say that the development of
interactive non-linear digital media has problematised existing definitions of
documentary, in that these technologies raise questions around authorship
and traditional narrative structures:

> When A is inevitably followed by B in a carefully
> constructed film, classical notions of continuity and
> narrative structure can apply and the flow of one
> element to the other can be crafted as the authors wish.
> When the user starts at G, proceeds to R and finishes
> viewing without ever accessing A, it is impossible to
> observe traditional notions either of continuity or
> narrative development (MacGregor and Simpson in Izod
> et al. 2000: 185-186).

Chapter 2: Nichols' Modes of Documentary

Even though digital technology has shifted the landscape of non-fiction filmmaking, Nichols' assessment of the representational strategies of documentary practice (1991; 2001b) continues to be seen as a seminal text for theoreticians interested in the critical analysis of documentary film. In this chapter I aim to provide an overview of the major features associated with each mode, in order to highlight the potential impact upon meaning associated with the different modes of documentary. In Section 3 of my thesis I will explain how Nichols' taxonomy of documentary has been used as a way of informing my own practice in order to highlight the relationship between theory and practice in documentary filmmaking. It is worth pointing out here that some modes have had a far greater impact on my work than others; in fact, I completely eschew the expository mode, whereas the poetic and reflexive modes have informed my approach greatly.

Nichols first wrote about documentary modes of representation in *Representing Reality* (1991), identifying four modes: expository; observational; interactive and reflexive. He later revised these modes, replacing interactive with participatory, as well as adding to his list with the poetic and performative modes (2001b). His taxonomy tends to follow chronological lineage, with the poetic mode emerging first, followed by expository, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative. However any attempt to place the emergence of modes into chronological order is not without issue; some of the features associated with later modes can be seen

in early documentaries, such as reflexive features in the work of Dziga Vertov, appearing as early as the 1920s. Nichols' makes no claim that these modes are simply the idiosyncratic utterances of individual filmmakers, rather that they are also products of particular economic, social and political contexts. For example, in Britain, much of the output of the expository mode came prior to, as well as during, the Second World War. As such this mode is closely associated with a propagandist sensibility, whereas the poetic mode emerged as a product of the experiments by French avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s, which was a time of great formal experiment in all of the arts. Filmmakers associated with this period were far more interested in how form and structure can impact on perception, whereas filmmakers producing work in the expository mode, with its overarching persuasive impulse, were far more concerned with content and information, rather than exploring form and style.

The Poetic Mode:

> 'The poetic mode has many facets, but they all emphasize the ways in which the filmmaker's voice gives fragments of the historical world a formal, aesthetic integrity peculiar to the film itself.' (Nichols 2001b:105)

Nichols' associates this mode closely with the Modernist avant-garde of the early 20th Century. He calls it an *associational form,* which, 'sacrifices the

conventions of continuity editing and the sense of a very specific location in time and place that follows from it to explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions' (2001b: 102). Poetic documentaries are more concerned with creating a lyrical impression, rather than imparting knowledge or information about specific events, people or places. Nichols' argues that these documentaries produce 'alternative forms of knowledge', rather than simply providing a 'straightforward transfer of knowledge…or the presentation of reasoned propositions about problems in need of a solution' (2001b: 103). The rhetorical element that is associated with the expository mode, discussed in detail below, remains undeveloped in the poetic mode; films in this mode show no particular discourse or perspective on the world, rather the emphasis is on the creation of a particular mood or atmosphere. For Nichols, mood is primarily created in documentary film through the use of editing and pacing, where rhythm becomes the overarching signifier in a poetic documentary. He uses Jean Mitry's *Pacific 231* (dir. Jean Mitry 1944) as an example, whereby the, 'editing stresses rhythm and form far more than it details the actual workings of a locomotive' (2001b: 103). In this mode, representational strategies can be seen as *expressive* as opposed to *informative*, there is no desire to *persuade* the audience, rather it could be seen that the audience is being *enticed* into viewing the world anew. In a sense the everyday is rendered peculiar or strange. No one seeing the train in Mitry's *Pacific 231* is learning about the way a combustion engine works, or indeed what the top speed of a locomotive is; that is not the purpose of knowledge transfer in this mode.

Rather the audience is being invited to *feel* the dynamics of the train and to be excited by the speed of movement; knowledge becomes something that is visceral, rather than cognitive. Specific styles of editing, such as montage, are used by Mitry to connote the sense of dynamism, speed and power of the train. Other films associated with this mode include the work of the city symphony makers, such as Walter Ruttman's *Berlin Symphony of a Great City* (dir. Ruttman 1927), Joris Iven's *Regen* (dir. Ivens 1929), as well as the more abstract films such as *Ballet Mechanique* (dir. Leger 1924) and *Taris* (dir. Jean Vigo, 1931). For an in depth discussion of the city symphony makers, see Chapter 4.

Renov argues that this form of expressive representation is repressed in most documentary filmmaking, claiming that the, 'expressive is the aesthetic function that has consistently been undervalued within the nonfiction domain' (Renov 1993: 32). For him, like Nichols, this expressive repression has had a negative impact on the development of innovative representational strategies in documentary filmmaking. Renov claims that the didactic impulse, which underpins much documentary practice, creates an 'aesthetic straitjacketing' (Renov 1993: 35) of filmmakers, thus restricting innovative approaches to representation. As such, formal characteristics associated with other modes, namely the expository and observational, have come to dominate much documentary practice today.

The Expository Mode

'This mode assembles fragments of the historical world
into a more rhetorical or argumentative frame than an
aesthetic or poetic one. The expository mode addresses
the viewer directly, with titles or voices that propose a
perspective, advance an argument, or recount history.'

(Nichols 2001b:105)

Whilst the expository mode emerged in the 1930s, especially in films produced in Britain, its legacy is clearly apparent in much of contemporary documentary practice. Nichols argued that this is the mode that viewers would be most familiar and could easily identify with, due to the way in which information is clearly conveyed, often through the use of what Nichols calls, 'an informing logic carried by the spoken word' (Nichols 2001b:107). A central feature of the expository mode is the use of voiceover commentary; Nichols states that there are two types of voiceover that dominate films produced in this mode: *the voice of god* commentary, where a narrator is heard, but is not seen, and the *voice of authority* commentary, where the narrator is both heard and seen on screen. These two formal features are often used in much of the output of documentary today, especially those that are made for television. Whereas in the poetic mode, it could be argued that there is an emphasis placed on *feeling*, in the expository mode there is an emphasis placed on *knowing.* The primary role for this mode of documentary is to

educate and inform the viewer and it was for this reason that Grierson championed documentaries that were expositional rather than aesthetic.

Nichols claims that these types of documentaries were coded with a sense of authority, often emphasized by the authoritative tone of the narrator. Images would be used to support the commentary and used to illustrate points that were made by the speaker. Editing aimed to create a sense of continuity and cohesion, rather than a sense of rhythm or mood, which is more associated with the poetic mode. He goes on to claim films made in this mode are associated with the concept of objectivity and that the arguments created are 'above the fray' and act as an all seeing eye, that is able to comment truthfully and accurately on the world, anchored through the, 'professional commentator's official tone, like the authoritative manner of news anchors and reporters, [which] strives to build a sense of credibility from qualities such as distance, neutrality, disinterestedness, or omniscience.' (Nichols 2001b: 107) Expository documentaries are essentially propagandist, in that they are an 'ideal mode for conveying information or mobilizing support within a framework that pre-exists in film.' (107) It is of no surprise then that documentaries in this mode flourished just before, during and after the Second World War. Many documentaries adopting the formal features of this mode were aimed at mobilizing support for the war, including films such as *If War Should Come* (director not credited, 1939), *Britain At Bay* (dir. Harry Watt, 1940) and *Words and Actions* (dir. Max Anderson, 1943).

Documentary films in this mode require little "work" in terms of the way an audiences decodes meaning. The voiceover itself anchors meaning and does not necessarily encourage audiences to develop sophisticated interpretive frameworks. Whereas one might say that poetic documentaries *show*, expository documentaries most certainly *tell* (this is a concept I will return to in greater detail in Chapter 4). With this in mind, I would argue that expository documentaries do not encourage the viewer to become *active* in terms of the way they interpret the text. The "work" is done for them through the use of an authoritative commentary and a clear narrative structure. This is in contrast to the poetic mode, where specific discourses are not always apparent. Textual meaning in the poetic mode is implicitly polysemic in nature due to the absence of signifiers such as a voiceover, which help to create narrow interpretive frameworks. As such, films in the poetic can be seen as creating a more active viewer than in expository modes; here the "work" has to be done by the audience to form their own meanings and interpretations. In the expository mode discourse becomes apparent and the narrative arc often consists of a "problem" introduced at the beginning of a film and by the end, a solution is offered. An early example of this narrative structure can be seen in Edgar Anstey's *Housing Problems* (1935).

Observational Mode:

'The observational mode poses a series of ethical considerations that

involve the act of observing others going about their affairs. Is such

an act in and of itself voyeuristic…The impression that the filmmaker

is not intruding on the behavior of others also raises questions of

unacknowledged or indirect intrusion. Do people conduct themselves

in ways that will color our perception of them, for better or for

worse, in order to satisfy a filmmaker who does not say what he

wants?' (Nichols 2001b: 111)

Nichols claims that the observational mode emerged as a critique of the representational strategies associated with the expository mode, due to a general, 'dissatisfaction with the moralizing quality of expository documentary' (Nichols 1991:32). In this mode the filmmaker is seen as non-interventionist, in that they are merely there to record the pro-filmic event. Action is allowed to unfold in front of the camera, with the filmmaker aiming to have no influence on the behaviour of what is occurring. It is, of course, difficult to ascertain what effect the presence of the camera has on documentary subjects, however the role of the filmmaker here is one of uninvolved bystander.

This mode is particularly associated with a loose affinity of American documentary filmmakers, namely Frederick Wiseman, D.A. Pennebaker, Robert Drew, Richard Leacock and the Maysles Brothers. The films they produced became known as Direct Cinema, with the name itself implying that the films have a "direct" relationship with the real world. An overly stylistic approach is to be reined in as much as possible; for example non-diegetic music or sound effects are not used, nor is a voiceover or the inclusion of inter-titles. The overall aim here is to capture "life as it is". Editing in this

mode is not driven by the desire to create a sense of rhythm, as in the poetic mode or create a rhetorical structure as in the expository mode, rather, 'each cut or edit serves mainly to sustain the spatial and temporal continuity of observation rather than the logical continuity of an argument or case' (Nichols 1991:40). For Nichols documentaries made in this mode convey a sense of immediacy and intimacy, providing a direct indexical link to the historical world.

This mode flourished in the 1960s and a more direct relationship to the real world was now achievable due to the development of lightweight cameras with synchronized sound. The smaller portable cameras allowed a more intimate style of cinematography and the handheld approach is a formal technique that has been used in much fictional work as it has come to connote a sense of realism. A famous tracking shot of Kennedy in Robert Drew's *Primary* (1960) would simply not have been possible without the development of lightweight cameras and with the addition of synch-sound a new form of documentary realism emerged. Those associated with Direct Cinema often made the claims that their work could be seen as a more truthful form of filmmaking, and in a sense became associated with the concept of objectivity. It was for these reasons that anthropologists and ethnographers adopted this style of filmmaking, as it was seen as offering a more empirical approach to representing culture. However, one could make the claim that process of editing is naturally selective, which suggests an element of intervention by the filmmaker; as such the film is rendered as

subjective as the editing process itself still "shapes" specific discourses. Nichols was critical of the mode in terms of its ethical status, raising questions about the nature of consent given (or not as the case may be) by participants and he questions the whole notion of representing others without providing any context to the situation: 'does the filmmaker seek out others to represent because they possess qualities that may fascinate viewers for the wrong reasons?' (Nichols 2001b: 111) Nichols dismisses this mode as overly voyeuristic.

Interactive/Participatory Mode

> 'When we view participatory documentaries we expect to witness the historical world as represented by someone who actively engages with, rather than unobtrusively observes, poetically reconfigures, or argumemtatively assembles that world. The filmmaker steps out from behind the cloak of voice-over commentary, steps away from poetic meditation, steps down from a fly-on-the-wall perch, and becomes a social actor (almost) like any other.' (Nichols: 2001b: 116)

In *Representing Reality* (1991) Nichols used the term interactive mode, however in his later book *Introduction to Documentary* (2001b) he replaced that term with participatory mode. For the sake of consistency, I will use his original term, interactive, throughout this thesis. In many ways this mode can be seen as emerging as a critique of the observational mode, in that filmmakers using this mode argued that objectivity in documentary was a fallacy and any claims to achieving it were wholly misguided. Films in this mode placed emphasis upon the subjective nature of representation.

Whereas the Observational mode claimed a sense of impartiality in the way their films were made, films in the interactive mode are seen as having a degree of partiality and have what Nichols calls a, 'situated presence and local knowledge that derives from the actual encounter of filmmaker and other.' (1991: 44). So rather than the filmmaker observing reality unfolding in front of the camera, in this mode the filmmaker manufactures reality *for* the camera. A defining factor of a film in this mode is that it a *representation* of the world by someone who has *actively engaged* with the subjects, rather than merely *observed* them. Erik Barnouw succinctly sums up the difference between an observational approach, as opposed, to an interactive one:

> 'The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility, the…cinema verité artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of the uninvolved bystander, the cinema verité artist espoused that of provocateur. Direct cinema found its truth in events available to the camera. Cinema verité was committed to a paradox: that artificial circumstances could bring hidden truth to the surface.' (Barouw 1983: 255)

Films in this mode made no claim to be truthful as such; rather the film can only be seen as the truth of an encounter (between filmmaker and subject), rather than presenting *the* truth. An influential filmmaker associated with this mode is Jean Rouch. He called his approach to documentary filmmaking as

Cinema Verité.   The films and theoretical writings of Dziga Vertov heavily influenced Rouch; in the 1920s Vertov referred to his form of documentary filmmaking as *Kino Pravda*. Both terms literally translate as film truth and in similar ways both filmmakers believed that their films could *provoke* truth rather than merely record it. Even though the films of Vertov and Rouch differ formally, they both claim to offer the viewer a unique take on the world, as a result of their innovative approach to documentary representation (For a more detailed discussion of Vertov and Rouch see Chapter 3).

A defining feature of this mode is the interview. The development of lightweight cameras with synch-sound allowed a sense of immediacy and spontaneity in the interview situation, as post-production audio synching was no longer needed. Rouch felt that this mode encouraged a more democratic approach to the filmmaking process, as "textual authority" was created in part by the subjects themselves: the film's argument or discursive position is a result of the reactions of the 'social actors' to the presence of the filmmakers. In effect this produces a dialogic relationship between filmmaker and subject; participants are allowed to speak for themselves, whereas in the expository mode, the filmmaker speaks for the subject. Nichols does not necessarily share Rouch's view about this form of documentary filmmaking being more democratic. Nichols claims that the interview situation implicitly creates a hierarchical relationship with regard to the power relations between interviewer and interview: 'interviews are a form of hierarchical discourse deriving from the unequal distribution of power, as in the confessional and the

interrogation…What rights or prerogatives does the interviewee retain?' (Nichols 1991: 47) Despite Nichols concerns he argues that films in this mode shift the, 'emphasis from an author-centered voice of authority', as we see in the expository mode, 'to a witness-centered voice of testimony' (Nichols 2001b: 48).

Interaction between filmmaker and subject does not always have to be in the highly structured formal interview situation. Interaction can be more casual, as is the case with films by Louis Theroux. Although his films can be seen as using interview as a central narrative device, his style of interviewing is far from formal. Theroux often engages in conversation with the participants of the documentary in their own space of work or domicile. Nichols claims this casual form of interaction helps to redefine the relationship between filmmaker and subject: 'the filmmaker and social actors engage one another as peers, taking up positions on the common ground of social encounter, presenting themselves as social actors who must negotiate the terms and conditions of their own interaction.' (Nichols 1991: 49) It is in this negotiation between filmmaker and participant that Rouch believes makes a significant contribution to the democratization of documentary practice:

> 'When you are using this system of filmmaking you are really using a
> kind of drug. It is very difficult for the people to resist it. When the
> first time they see themselves on the screen, they discover a new
> personality in themselves. And after a while they get accustomed to
> it. When I was shooting *Chronique d'un été* it was very difficult to

stop the film because people want to be filmed all the time. The

camera was their life.' (Rouch in ten Brink 2007: 107)

Even though participants have a voice, which is, in part, self-determining, authority still lies with the filmmaker in the sense that he or she has control of editing the rushes, which the subjects may have limited, or no editorial control. As such the power over representation is firmly in the hands of the filmmaker.

In summing up, Nichols argues that this mode makes the audience aware of the constructed nature of representation. We may see or hear the interviewer, thus drawing attention to the process of textual construction: 'Expository and observational films unlike interactive or reflexive ones, tend to mask the work of production' (Nichols 1991: 56). There is no effort on the part of the filmmaker to remain anonymous and invisible as there is in both the observational and is often the case in the expository mode. Here the audience are able to clearly see that the filmmaker is constructing a reality that in many ways is contrived; actions of the subjects are restricted by the filmmaker who is able to dictate interviews and control interactions between subject and filmmaker, as can be seen in the films made by the likes of Nick Broomfield and Michael Moore. According to Nichols, films belonging to this mode 'shift these texts closer to *discours* than *histoire*.' (Nichols 1991:56)

Reflexive Mode

'Instead of *seeing through* documentaries to the world beyond them,

reflexive documentaries ask us to see *documentary* for what it is: a

construct or representation.' (Nichols 2001b: 125)

According to Nichols, the filmmaker operating in the reflexive mode is more concerned with *how* the historical world is represented, rather than *what* is being represented. He argues that the relationship of the filmmaker and audience is redefined in that, 'the process of negotiation between filmmaker and viewer become the focus of attention for the reflexive mode.' (Nichols 2001b: 125) In contrast to the Interactive mode, where the viewer follows the interaction between filmmaker and subject, the, 'reflexive mode of representation gives emphasis to the encounter between filmmaker and viewer rather than filmmaker and subject.' (Nichols 1991: 60) A defining feature of this mode is the presence of filmmaker on screen. For example in Dziga Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929) we see the cameraman setting up his tripod in the street and the editor cutting film footage; both these images can be seen as reflexive elements of the text, which draw attention to the constructed nature of representation. Nichols argues that this form of filmmaking has a direct impact on the audience, in that the viewer becomes aware of how the production of knowledge about the historical world is subject to a process of mediation, whereby 'people, or social actors, appear before us as signifiers, as functions of the text itself' (Nichols 1991: 56) and through the revelation of process on screen, 'we see a constructed image rather than a slice of reality.' (Nichols 1991: 57)

Reflexivity in documentary is a more complex process than simply revealing the filmmaker in the frame. Reflexivity can also be seen as having a stylistic dimension. For example, films in this mode can create unexpected stylistics,

such as the use of unusual camera angles seen in the cinematography used in *Man With A Movie Camera*. In this film, the filmmaker often chooses a camera angle that frames a subject in an unusual way; perhaps a shot of a chimney taken from an extremely low angle or an extreme close up of an eye superimposed on a lens, thus drawing attention to the way that shots are composed in a particular way, again operating as reflexive elements that draws attention to textual status as representation. Russell succinctly sums up the critical potential of a reflexive approach to documentary filmmaking, in this instance she refers to the documentary sub-genre of visual ethnography:

> The effect of bringing experimental and ethnographic film together is one of mutual illumination. On the experimental side, ethnography provides a critical framework for shifting the focus from formal concerns to a recognition of an avant-garde filmmakers' cultural investment and positioning. On the ethnographic side, the textual innovations that have been developed by experimental filmmakers indicate the ways that 'the critique of authenticity' has been played out…From the interpretation of the avant-garde and ethnographic cinemas emerges a subversive form of ethnography in which cultural critique is combined with experiments in textual form (Russell 1999: xi-xii)

Editing can also function in a reflexive manner. In reflexive documentaries, a montage style of editing predominates. Here there is no attempt to "mask" the editing process as there is in the classic continuity style, where editing becomes "invisible" due to the rules associated with creating spatial and temporal coherence. In the montage style, sequences of sound and image are

often constructed without an obvious logical coherence, thus drawing attention to the editing process itself. Unexpected juxtapositions are created between shots in terms of their graphical elements, their rhythmic elements and the temporal elements of shots. In this mode, meaning is relational in that it is created through the associations made by the juxtapositions of shots, rather than meaning being contained only within the shots themselves. This form of editing can be seen as expressive and impressionistic, where splicing shots together moves beyond functional simplicity, as exists in the continuity style, and becomes a major element of a more complex signifying process.

The Russian formalist filmmakers developed montage editing in the early 20th Century. Work by Vertov, Eisenstein and Kuleshov paved the way for an alternative mode of editing. Their argument centered on the ideas associated with what became known as *intellectual montage*. In this mode of editing, the collision between shot A (the thesis) and shot B (the antithesis), creates a third level of meaning (the synthesis). In Kuleshov's classic experiment, we see a shot of a person and then see a shot of a bowl of soup. Due to the juxtaposition of shot A to shot B, the viewer assumes that the subject is hungry. However Kuleshov then uses shot A and follows this with a new shot B, that of a coffin. The viewer assumes that the subject is sad and in mourning. This is a very simplistic way of understanding intellectual montage, however it neatly shows how through the juxtaposition of shots, specific meanings can be created. Here the formal elements of film become a

structural device for making the viewer aware of the constructed nature of reality. In the reflexive mode, these formal devices become the central focus of attention: 'If the historical world is a meeting place for the process of social exchange and representation in the interactive mode, the representation of the historical world, becomes, itself, the topic of cinematic mediation in the reflexive mode.' (Nichols 1991: 56)

Nichols sees this mode as producing a more critically aware viewer by claiming that, 'the reflexive documentary prompts the viewer to a heightened consciousness of his or her relation to the text and of the text's problematic relationship to what it represents.' (Nichols 1991: 60) In a sense, this mode of documentary produces what Nichols calls 'epistemological doubt', whereby knowledge becomes, 'hypersituated, placed not only in relation to the filmmaker's presence, but also in relation to fundamental issues about the nature of the world, the structure and function of language, the authenticity of documentary sound and image, the difficulties of verification, and the status of empirical evidence in western culture.' (Nichols 1991: 61) Reflexive documentaries draw attention to the very problem associated with documentary itself: the uncertainties associated with it being a *window on the world*. Any representation of the historical world can only be a mediation, whereby the filmmaker makes a myriad of aesthetic choices that can affect meanings associated with any such representations. The reflexive mode invites the viewer to contemplate the concept of mediation and knowledge

production through its own devices of film construction: sound, image and sequence.

Nichols actually makes the claim that the reflexive mode can have a revolutionary purpose. By revealing that representations of reality are social and ideological constructs, Nichols believes that once the viewer becomes aware of this, this can contribute to them becoming active agents of social and political change due to them doubting the certainties of knowledge; essentially the viewer becomes a skeptic:

> When a reflexive mode of documentary representation did gain some degree of prominence in the 1970s and 80s (with a few notable precursors like *Man With A Movie Camera*), it clearly derived both from formal innovation and political urgency. The poststructuralist critique of language systems as the agency that constitutes the individual subject (rather than empowering it); the argument that representation as a semiotic operation confirmed a bourgeois epistemology…the assumption that radical transformation requires work on the signifier, on the construction of the subject itself rather than on the subjectivities and predispositions of an already constituted subject all converge to insist that the representation of reality has to be countered by an interrogation of the reality of representation. Only this

can lead to significant political transformation.' (Nichols

1991: 63)

If the aim of documentary is a progressive one, in that it can contribute to social and political transformation, then for Nichols, the most effective way of doing this is to encourage a transformation in the way we perceive the representations of reality. He claims that the reflexive mode is best placed to encourage a perceptual transformation and documentary can be 'a potentially more powerful political tool than the straightforward, persuasive presentation of an argument.' (Nichols 1991: 63)

Performative Mode:

If the reflexive mode acts as a critique of how knowledge is mediated, the performative mode acts as a critique about the nature of knowledge itself. In relation to this mode Nichols poses a number of questions:

> 'What counts as understanding or comprehension? What besides factual information goes into our understanding of the world? Is knowledge best described as abstract and disembodied, based on generalizations and the typical, in the tradition of Western philosophy? Or is knowledge better described as concrete and embodied, based on the specificities of personal experience, in the tradition of poetry, literature and rhetoric?' (Nichols 2001b: 131)

Nichols argues that it is the latter that informs the performative approach, in that knowledge and meaning is inherently subjective. As such, documentaries in the performative mode are 'affect laden' and 'give added emphasis to the

subjective qualities of experience and memory that depart from factual recounting.' (Nichols 2001b: 131) Nichols argues that these films are often made from the perspective of the filmmaker themselves, and as such, are often autobiographical. The personal nature of these documentaries invite the filmmaker to move beyond the discourses of sobriety associated with certain others modes of documentary, such as the expository and observational modes, and adopt a much more stylized approach to filmmaking techniques. For Nichols, the representational strategies of this mode act as a 'deflection of documentary emphasis away from a realist representation of the historical world and toward poetic liberties, more unconventional narrative structures, and more subjective forms of representation.' (Nichols 2001b: 132)

A useful example of the techniques that Nichols associates with this mode can be seen in *Tarnation* (dir. Jonathon Caouette 2003). In this film Caouette uses a collage of home video footage, often heavily processed and edited in quick fire montages, to bombard the viewer with a kaleidoscopic journey into the mind of a boy who has had an extremely troubled upbringing. There is no attempt by the filmmaker to offer what might be called an objective portrayal of his life history, rather sound and images, which are often discordant, disorientating and deeply disturbing, offer an insight into the subjective experiences of the filmmaker himself, whereby the 'referential quality of documentary that attests to its function as a window onto the world yields to an expressive quality that affirms the highly situated, embodied, and vividly

personal perspective of specific subjects, including the filmmaker.' (Nichols 2001: 132) Nichols argues that the impact this has on the audience allows affinities between subject and audience to propagate, showing how formal techniques associated with this mode give the viewer an insight into emotional and psychological domains of a subject's existence. Here documentaries become evocative rather than merely informational.

Nichols' concept of documentary modes has been criticized by some scholars, with Platinga (1997) claiming that Nichols analysis was hierarchical in that he favoured some modes over others; for example dismissing the expository mode as overly didactic and naïve and lauding reflexive as the most important of the modes. Bruzzi (2000) was also critical of Nichols' modes arguing that they were too rigid and compartmentalized, stating that the distinctions he made between each mode were confusing.

With Bruzzi's critique in mind, I agree that there are some limitations in Nichols' documentary modes and it is apparent that his approach is overly rigid in the way he compartmentalizes certain approaches to documentary film work. In fact the boundaries that he draws between each mode are often rather vague and some aspects of, say, the reflexive mode, could easily belong to the interactive mode or performative mode. Equally some of the features of the observational mode could also appear in the poetic mode. However in Nichols' defence, he does concede that his categories of documentary types are far from perfect, both in terms of their characteristics and chronology:

'The order and presentation for these six modes corresponds roughly to the chronology of their introduction. It may therefore seem to provide a historical documentary of film, but it does so imperfectly. A film identified with a given mode need not be so entirely...The characteristics of a given mode function as a *dominant* in a given film: they give structure to the overall film, but they do not dictate or determine every aspect of its organization. Considerable latitude remains possible...A more recent film need not have a more recent mode as its dominant.' (2001: 100)

Having said that, even though there are problems with his way of delineating certain styles of filmmaking, his work has helped to identify and categorize specific formal features that are dominant with each form. Recognition of these formal features provides the practitioner with a range of possible approaches to developing representational strategies; as such this section on Nichols is not necessarily a critical evaluation of the insights and short-comings of Nichols' approach, rather it as an attempt to show how his work can allow the practitioner to conceptualize and inform his/her own discursive approach to documentary filmmaking.

Nichols' typology of documentary practice has helped further scholarly analysis of the non-fiction film, however he was not the first to develop a taxonomy of documentary categories. Barnouw in his 1974 book *Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film* (later revised in 1983), outlined a

similar approach, with his categorisation of different types of documentary films, giving labels to the documentarian such as *Explorer, Painter, Poet, Observer, Guerilla*, and like Nichols, his assessment of representational strategies created a chronological lineage. While Barnouw's approach lacks the theoretical rigour of Nichols' work, it does go further than Nichols by providing a more explicit explanation of how the socio-cultural context of documentary production has impacted upon the representational strategies created by filmmakers, something that Nichols does not address in much detail.

What Nichols' and Barnouw's texts achieve, above and beyond making a significant contribution to creating an analytical vocabulary for the analysis of documentary film, provides the practitioner with an interesting "instruction manual" to inform the filmmaker's own approach to developing their representational strategies. However it is also apparent that theorists who are not practitioners, or at least have limited experience of producing films, have generally written much of the theoretical debate concerning representation within documentary. I would argue that this has been a contributing factor to the dissociation of theory from practice: much of the theoretical writing on documentary has been produced in retrospect, in that analysis is "imposed" upon the text by analysts who comment on the work of others, rather than practitioners making explicit the ways in which theory has informed their own practice. Two filmmakers, who are exceptions to this general rule, are Dziga Vertov and Jean Rouch. Both of these filmmakers produced writings that may

be referred to as "manifestos" for documentary production, where their approach to filmmaking was thoroughly informed by theoretical discourse. Both of their work can be seen as manifestations of theory and, as such, their films act as experiments; these filmmakers can be seen as pioneers of documentary, who aimed to produce specific approaches to representation in order to explore specific aims and objectives in relation to the impact their work has on an audience. The following chapter looks at the ideas and approaches of both Vertov and Rouch and highlights how Rouch helped theorists and practitioners to rediscover the seminal work of Dziga Vertov.

Chapter 3: Vertov's Kino Pravda and Rouch's Cinema Verité

'[film] above all is a striving to see better, a striving to explain the

elusive visible world with the help of the film camera, the striving to

penetrate so deep into life that the notion of the "intimate" ceases to

exist' (Vertov in Hicks 2007: 35)

Dziga Vertov is a central figure in the development of documentary film; any

cursory glance at the contents of books on documentary is likely to reveal an

analysis of his films and the theories he developed in relation to documentary

practice. However, this has not always been the case: Vertov's contribution to

documentary filmmaking and film theory had been largely ignored until the

1960s; even Jay Leyda's comprehensive study of the history of Russian and

Soviet film, *Kino* (1960), devotes a mere handful of pages to Vertov. In fact the

case could be made that Vertov has always been a marginalised figure in the

world of cinema: Annette Michelson outlines Vertov's fractious relationship

with the Soviet film establishment of the early 20th Century, describing him as

the 'one artist most problematic in his radicalism for even the greatest of

peers' (Michelson 1984: xvii). For evidence of his exile she points to his

absence in a photograph of major Soviet filmmakers taken at *The All-Union*

Creative Conference of Workers in 1935; a photograph which included

Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Tissé, Raizman, Romm, Donskoy, Yutkevich, Bek Nazrov,

Chiavreli and Vasiliev, but no Vertov (nor his mentor Kuleshov).

It was French filmmakers Jean Rouch and Jean Luc Godard who revived

interest in his filmmaking and writings. Godard went on to form a collective of

politically active filmmakers in 1968, known as *The Dziga Vertov Group*. It was
Vertov's commitment to creating a body of films that was representative of
Marxist-Lenin socialist philosophy that inspired Rouch and Godard to explore
the principles of Vertovian cinema further. Rouch's production partner, Edgar
Morin, coined the term *Cinema Verité* in reference to Vertov's body of earlier
work, which Vertov had called *Kino Pravda*. Both terms can be loosely
translated as meaning film-truth, however the terms were not to be taken so
literally; neither filmmaker claimed that their documentary work would reveal
the truth, rather that Kino Pravda and Cinema Verité 'meant *the truth of
cinema* and not *the cinema of truth*.' (Van Cawenberge in Winston 2013: 189)
Both filmmakers adopted reflexive techniques, in that the filmmaker was
visible on screen. Any truth that was revealed was a truth of "encounter": the
encounter between filmmaker and subject and the encounter between the
screen and audience. Both Vertov and Rouch believed that documentary film
can, on the one hand, exist as a window on the world, whereby the audience
gains access to a record of actuality and, on the other, documentary film can
encourage reflexivity within the audience and function as a mirror in which the
audience is able to critically reflect on the material conditions of their own
existence within that world and, as such, reveal a true picture of socio-
economic relations. This is how Vertov and Rouch claimed that documentary
film had the potential to reveal social truths based on a Marxist interpretation
of society and, as a result of their revelations, documentary film could
encourage the audience to become more politically active, due to this greater
degree of class consciousness.

While the intentions of the filmmakers could be interpreted as somewhat speculative (in that film could somehow instigate social revolution), their commitment to documentary film functioning as an agent for social change is something that still inspires generations of documentary filmmakers. What made Vertov stand out from his peers was the sheer complexity of the representational strategies that he went on to develop. What links Rouch to Vertov is not necessarily a shared formal approach to representation, rather it is their shared view that film footage must be gathered and organised in specific ways in order to reveal *film-truth*. It is for this reason that both Vertov and Rouch can be seen as true pioneers of documentary film, aiming to develop their own "manifestos" on filmmaking, rather than merely following a previously established dogma of documentary representation.

In order to evaluate Vertov's perspective on the principles of filmmaking, it is prudent to begin by looking at his writings before any attempt to analyse the films he made. A major tenet of his philosophy is evidenced in his eschewing of the fiction film: 'WE proclaim the old films, based on the romance, theatrical films and the like, to be leprous. Keep away from them! Keep your eyes off them! They're morally dangerous! Contagious!' (quoted in Michelson 1984: 7) For Vertov, the true revolutionary potential of film could only be achieved if life was captured as it is, so that he could 'free film from the bourgeois obfuscations of story and the effete pleasures of theatrical performance in order to arrive at the truths of the actual world' (quoted in Ellis and McLane 2006: 28). He wrote a number of polemical manifestos, in

which he urged *kinoks* (fellow filmmakers) to become 'craftsmen of seeing-organizers of visible life' (quoted in Barnouw 1983: 54). In order to achieve film truth or *Kino Pravda* as Vertov called it, footage of everyday life must be captured in its most natural and un- staged form. He called this approach *life caught unawares* and stated that 'all people must continue to act and function in front of the camera just as they do in everyday life [and] strive to shoot events unnoticed and approach people in such a way that the cameraman's work does not impede the work of others' (quoted in Ellis and McLane 2006: 31-32). This approach is reminiscent of Nichols' observational mode of documentary filmmaking, however it is in the way that Vertov deals with footage during the editing process that has differentiated him from filmmakers operating in the observational mode.

Montage editing became the chief organizing feature of footage, which Vertov referred to as "fragments of actuality", and his film experiments produced what Michelson calls the 'elaboration of a new "vocabulary"' (Michelson 1984: xxviii). Vertov argued that a montage style of editing creates a higher level of meaning through the combination and collision between shots. Meaning is not simply contained within the images per se; rather a new level of meaning is created when two shots are juxtaposed. Petrić calls this approach 'disruptive-associative montage', whereby Vertov develops his discursive position through the use of often unrelated shots, which establish an 'ideational connection' (Petrić 1993: 95) between two shots. The concept is closely associated with Eisenstein's theory of dialectical montage, which outlines how a third level of

meaning is created (synthesis) through the juxtaposition of shot one (thesis) and shot two (antithesis).

Vertov argued that montage was not something that was haphazard, in that images were co-joined at random. Rather the *kinok* must first have a theme, which would be revealed through the direct observation of people and places, whereby 'the kinok-observer closely watches the environment and the people around him and tries to connect separate, isolated phenomena according to generalized or distinctive characteristics. The kinok-observer is assigned a theme by the leader.' (Vertov in Michelson 1984: 69) The *leader* here is Vertov himself, who organized his fellow kinoks in ways similar to how a captain would organize his troops. Their mission was to reveal truth, a truth borne out of a Marxist-Leninist analysis of socio-economic conditions. An example of the way in which themes are grouped together in order to produce an overarching political theme can be seen in one of Vertov's early works, *Kinoglaz* (1924). The film acted specifically as a campaign for price control and for ending alcoholism alongside a meta-commentary on the positive aspects of social education. Some of the themes included in the film were concerned with the new and the old; children and adults; country and city; the themes of bread and meat and alcohol and cocaine. Through a process of montage editing, the kinok aimed to produce meaningful statements that would not only reveal problems associated with alcoholism and the use of cocaine (a *specific* aim of the film), but also to create a sense of collectivism in society by celebrating the lives of the ordinary workers, whose labour would help to serve the revolution

and the creation of a Socialist state (a more *general* aim of the film). The film encouraged workers to see themselves as part of a collective movement who are involved in creating a new Socialist society. The micro-themes in the *Kinoglaz* (for example, encouraging sobriety) were part of a filmic structure that had an overarching macro-theme of collectivism. This is evidence of Vertov's belief that specific approaches to capturing fragments of actuality and their subsequent ordering and treatment in documentary, can have a direct impact on the spectator, an impact that would play a central role in The Bolshevik Revolution. In fact Lenin articulated the role that film could play in The Revolution by stating in a speech in 1922 that 'of all the arts, for us cinema is the most important' (Lenin quoted in Nemes 2003: 383).

Much of Vertov's early work can be seen as experiments that helped to develop what he referred to as the *kino-eye*. This referred to the unique ability of the camera to reveal a picture of the world that the human eye could not achieve. Matlinsky (2013) claims that this new way of seeing the world is achieved, '*systematically*, through a series of innovative methods of capture and montage...to make sense of the "chaos of visual phenomena"' (Matlinsky 2013: 92). Once these visual phenomena have been reordered by the *kinok* and edited into sequences, theses films have, 'the potential to train the mind an eye' (Matlinsky 2013: 92), in order to reveal *kino pravda*.

Matlinsky labels Vertov's work as a "voiced" cinema, suggesting that his films are heavily authored in ways that encourage the viewer to become a more critically aware spectator, which Vertov saw as an essential element in the

creation of a new Socialist society, as Matlinsky points out, Vertov 'required a level of fierce sensorial, intellectual, and critical attentiveness-the kind of subject, he believed, required to properly participate in revolutionary transformation.' (Matlinsky 2013: 93)

The culmination of Vertov's work is his seminal film *The Man With a Movie Camera* (1929). Vertov claimed that this film would become a theoretical manifestation of his ideas and beliefs on the potential of film to reveal a previously hidden truth. He achieved this by first capturing everyday life as it is and then reordering the film footage in strategic ways where the camera acts as '1.kino-eye, challenging the human eye's visual representation of the world and offering its own "I see" and 2. The kinok editor, organizing the minutes of life-structure seen *this way* for the first time.' (Vertov in Michelson 1984: 21) The result was a kaleidoscopic assault on the viewer, rich in metaphor, symbol and metanym, which manifested itself as an exploration of the language of film itself.

Vertov's influences, early in his career, were connected with the various art movements that he became associated with: constructivism heavily influenced his particular style of montage and the rhythmic nature of his film editing was heavily influenced by futurism. The aesthetic approach of constructivist art was based on, 'the juxtaposition of different materials to produce a more meaningful structural whole' (Petric 1993: 3-4). Images, words, sounds and film footage were treated in particular ways in order to invite the audience to perceive the world in a different manner; as Petric points out,

'defamiliarization...entails depiction of a familiar environment in an unusual way, thus provoking the viewer to experience an unconventional perception of the world' (10). This process of defamiliarization was achieved through *zatrudnenie* (making it difficult) and *oestranenie* (making it strange). For example, the constructivist photographer Rodchenko would use extreme compositional techniques, such as oblique low angle shots of buildings and unusual lighting conditions in order to develop symbolic associations with everyday objects. Vertov's *The Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) adopted Rodchenko's compositional techniques and combined these with a deconstructed montage technique of editing, which made the text difficult to read. Vertov argued that this film could become a tool for revolution, not only in the social sense, but also that film had the ability to revolutionize human perception, '[film] above all is a striving to see better, a striving to explain the elusive visible world with the help of the film camera, the striving to penetrate so deep into life that the notion of the "intimate" ceases to exist' (Vertov quoted in Hicks 2007: 35). Petrić (1993) equates the concept of *oestranenie* with Brecht's theory of *verfremdungseffekt* (alienation), claiming that Brecht was heavily influenced by the theories developed by the Russian Formalists. Both Brecht and Vertov shared contempt for theatre and the fiction film. Both claimed that the theatre and the theatrical film were aimed at engaging the audience's emotions rather than their intellect. Brecht's innovative theatrical techniques of making the familiar strange became a way of distancing the audience from identifying emotionally with the character in order to create a more critical spectator. This is similar to the constructivist claim, 'that poetic

structure should be "difficult" and "strange" in order to stimulate the reader to discover subtle and often unlikely meanings that are obscured by the convention of everyday speech." (Petric 1993: 11). For Vertov, perceptual revolution could only be achieved by a rejection of the bourgeois fiction film and it to be replaced with factual filmmaking in order to 'develop a new theoretical concept based on an aesthetic attitude totally different from that which governed the obsolete bourgeois film.' (Petrić 1993: 15)

The Man With a Movie Camera became the realization of these theoretical principles and provides the viewer with a complex cinematic experience. The film can be read on a number of levels; on one level it can be read as a critique of bourgeois Russia: there is a famous scene within the film where an image of the Bolshoi Theatre, the epitome of bourgeois cultural life, appears to split into two and collapse on itself. This scene can be interpreted as representing the symbolic collapse of the Russian Tsarist regime. Within the film there are repeated images of a traffic policeman directing automobiles, intercut with images of an editor cutting film. This can be interpreted as the filmmaker acting as a guide, much like the policeman guiding traffic, whereby the kinok can guide the spectator into seeing the world anew. This reading, of a world being reborn, is reinforced by repeated imagery of "new beginnings" and "openings". For example there are shots of curtains and blinds being opened, the birth of a baby, eyes opening, a divorce and a marriage; all of these images can operate on a symbolic level, signifying a new way of seeing the world, which will lead the masses toward a land of new social opportunity in

revolutionary Russia. Turvey (2011) claims that this is achieved through

Vertov's montage editing, whereby we see different human activities being

linked by the splicing together of disparate scenes, which 'attempts to show

Soviet citizens that they are united in the common goal of building the new

Communist society' (144). The film constantly intercuts images of machines

with images of humans at work. Both futurism and constructivism celebrated

the machine and its potential for social, cultural and aesthetic change and

Vertov's ideal view of the world was one where man operates as the perfect

machine.

While reveling in the cult of the machine and celebrating the role of the

worker within an industrialized world, Vertov also aimed to demystify the role

of the filmmaker in an attempt to show that the kinok is simply a worker just

like those in the factory. Throughout the film we see images of the

cameraman capturing everyday life and we see the editor splicing together the

film fragments. Vertov intercuts the images of the filmmakers at work, with

images of the factory worker as a way of linking together different forms of

human endeavor. Here Vertov is showing the spectator that the work of the

filmmaker is much like the work of an engineer, with both fruits of their labour

being equally important in terms of social utility. Vertov makes the case that

his film serves a psychological purpose: 'In revealing the machine's soul, in

causing the worker to love his workbench, the peasant his tractor, the

engineer his engine – we introduce creative joy into all mechanical labor, we

bring people into closer kinship with machines, we foster new people.' (Vertov

quoted in Turvey 2011: 142) Throughout the film the viewer is invited to make such symbolic associations where the use of 'parallel editing is intended to provoke the viewers to think about juxtaposed shots and to establish ideological connections between various events' (Petrić 1987: 84).

The sense of 'creative joy' that Vertov mentions can be seen in the very nature of the film's climax. The speed of editing increases to create a visual crescendo, which captures the sense of dynamism that is associated with both the futurist and constructivist movements. At the heart of both of these movements was the idea that art could be the device that could forge a redefinition of the perceptual world. The dynamic nature of their aesthetic was encapsulated in the term *kinaesthesia,* used by one of the founders of the futurist movement, Fillipo Marinetti. For Marinetti, the combination of art and technology could redeem society from the deleterious sensibilities of contemporary culture, 'futurism is grounded in the complete renewal of human sensibility brought about by the great discoveries of science' (in Tisdall & Bozalla 1977:8) Much evidence of this can be seen in *The Man With a Movie Camera*, with its focus on the complex factory machines and motor vehicles such as trams and automobiles. Through the associations created by montage, Vertov weaves patterns that create a sense of man and machine as one: revolution will be successful if man drives machines in particular ways. It is through these signifying patterns that Vertov believed film could be used to nurture and maintain the revolutionary spirit of the early 20th Century

Bolshevik movement. Film is, in essence, a tool for change and a weapon of the revolution.

The work of Vertov could be classified under the category of what Bill Nichols calls the reflexive documentary, as outlined in Chapter 2. Vertov draws attention to the filmmaking process by having the cameraman and editor in shot (as in The *Man With The Movie Camera*). However he also draws attention to the constructed nature of documentary film through the use of montage editing; thus the viewer is made aware of the film making process itself. Editing is no longer rendered "invisible" through a *continuity* style, as in much fiction filmmaking; rather it is made apparent through the very language of filmmaking itself - montage. For Vertov, this would invite the audience to question the constructed nature of the text, and as such, question the constructed and ideological nature of knowledge production. Again the similarities with Brecht's concept of alienation can be found in the ideas associated with Vertov.

For Vertov then, it was not simply a question of *content* being that which determines meaning, rather it was the *form* of documentary representation that becomes the major determining factor. This formalist approach is wholly based on a practice that is informed by theory. This is what makes Vertov such an important pioneer in the development of documentary film. Most film theorists are not practitioners and most practitioners are not theorists, as Ruby points out, 'few filmmakers have been able to generate theories of filmmaking. In general, Western creative and intellectual life has not produced

many who are both makers and thinkers…*Man With a Movie Camera* is the only documentary film I know that is an explication of theory' (Ruby 2000: xi). This view can be given credence if one is to look at the range of documentary production books available. Most read like technical manuals, explaining techniques such as how to position an interviewee in front of a camera, or what decibel level a sound recorder should aim for when recording speech. Very few documentary books link theoretical discourse with documentary practice. Perhaps this is why Bill Nichols argues that documentary has suffered from it being associated with discourses of sobriety, as many books that set out to teach how to make documentaries, champion the established techniques such as observationalism, the use of voice over narration, or the prevalence of interviews in documentaries. All of which has contributed to a restriction of the aesthetic development of documentary.

The association of documentary with "seriousness" means that the exploration of representational strategies is under-developed due to restrictive conventional techniques, which inform much contemporary documentary practice. Aesthetics associated with the expository, interactive and observational modes, still tend to dominate approaches adopted by many documentary filmmakers. However if one is to analyse the representational techniques associated with the early avant-garde film pioneers of the 1920s, then one is able to uncover a rich heritage of innovation and when coupled with a definite sense of revolutionary intent, these films acted as a call to action for the audience, but not simply in terms of social action, rather the

revolution that these artists sought was both social and perceptual. To these artists, the cinema existed as a form of social, ideological and perceptual activism, echoing the broader concept of the avant-garde artist as *provocateur*: 'the very metaphor of "avant-garde" points to [an] activist moment…if the avant-garde has an etiquette, it consists of perverting and wholly subverting conventional deportment…and the antagonism is elevated to a cosmic, metaphysical antagonism: a defiance of the universe" (Poggioli 1968: 27-33).

Rouch, a French visual ethnographer, nurtured the idea of provocation being central to the development of the documentary film. He and Edgar Morin, a French Sociologist developed a new style of filmmaking, which Morin claimed (in reference to their seminal film *Une Chronique D'Été*), to be 'an experiment in cinematographic interrogation… "two authors in search of six characters"… a sort of pyschodrama…which through filmed conversations of a spontaneous nature would get in touch with fundamentals.' (Beattie 2004: 89). In *Une Chronique D'Été* (1960) the subjects were asked questions such as 'How do you live?' and 'What do you do with your life?' These questions encouraged the subjects to engage deeply with how they saw their own lives and the world at large. The 60s were a decade of major social, cultural and ideological change; Rouch and Morin believed that their style of filmmaking could uncover broader socio-cultural truths and anxieties by adopting a very personal approach through the use of probing questions and encouraging debate between the subjects; in effect they were *provoking* responses from the subjects. By asking

the subjects to focus on their own subjective experiences, Rouch and Morin believed that this form of filmmaking could serve the purpose of self-understanding and as such, through revelation of the self, could bring about social understanding and cultural cohesion, much in the same way that Vertov set out to do, albeit through a different formal approach. The subjects were encouraged to discuss social issues such as race, gender, colonialism and work, however throughout the filming sessions, Rouch and Morin were in control of both the way conversations developed and the way that the film was shot, edited and structured; they were the *provokers* of truth, rather than the *revealers* of truth.

In this mode the interview becomes a central feature, however *Chronique* had reflexive elements in that the interviewers were seen on camera, as opposed to not being seen or heard, as is the case for many documentaries of the interactive mode. Their role was as avid participants of the process and they had no wish to conceal their presence as in previous modes discussed earlier.

In terms of the editing process, it differed significantly from previous observational and expository modes, in that there was no attempt to make the editing process "invisible", by creating spatial and temporal continuity as was evidenced in the observational mode; rather the editing process could create unexpected juxtapositions in terms of the graphical relations of shots, temporal relations between shots, as well as the spatial relations of shots, as is more consistent with the reflexive mode. Rouch acknowledged he would, 'contract time, we extend it, we choose an angle for the shot, we deform the

people we are shooting, we speed things up and follow one movement to the detriment of another' (Rouch in Beattie 2004: 90). In fact, much of the editing of *Chronique* and some of Rouch's other films was actually done in camera. Footage was often shot-to-edit, which in itself would produce certain discontinuities and unexpected combinations of shots. Editing is often a very precise process, whereby editors focus on individual frames at the 'in' or 'out' points of shots. However when editing is done in the camera there is a lack of precision, which will give a certain aesthetic to sequences. Rouch wanted to convey a sense of spontaneity in his films and this technique would have made a significant contribution to that effect.

As well as having certain reflexive elements to the film, their approach also takes on some of the qualities of Nichols other modes such as the performative and observational*.* Both Rouch and Morin can be seen as *performers* in two ways. Firstly they are performing for the camera as well as performing their role as ethnographers to the subjects. Secondly they are also *performing* the role of editor on screen; all the while the camera observes both filmmaker and subject.

Both Rouch and Morin believed that the rapid modernization of France and the increasing purchasing power of the general public in the 1960s were contributing factors in the transformation of French society as a place where people were alienated from each other. The public had become more concerned with their own personal possessions and individual problems, which was, according to Rouch and Morin, detrimental to the social and cultural

fabric of French society. The filmmakers set out to survey how materialism and the search for individual happiness had affected the lives and aspirations of the six subjects of the film. However the film was not simply a survey as such, the film also acted as an ideological tool, which could resist these negative forces, as Morin points asks, 'can't cinema be one of the means of the breaking the membrane that isolates each of us from others on the metro, on the street, or on the stairway of the apartment building?' (quoted by Van Cauwenberge in Winston 2013: 191). This statement echoes the collectivist capabilities of documentary film that Vertov espoused. In this instance documentary film, much like Vetov argued previously, had revolutionary capabilities if it was to be produced in certain ways. Both Vertov and Rouch formed manifestos in relation to how filmmakers should approach the recording of actuality and the subsequent creative treatment of it. Central to this were formalist concerns that placed emphasis not on *what* was being said, rather on *how* things were being said. Here the camera can be seen as a metaphoric weapon, attacking the power of those associated with knowledge production and its transfer, whom in Marxist philosophy are seen to be the custodians of social and ideological control.

As much as *Chronique* can be seen as a sociological document, it also serves as an ethnographic statement made by the filmmakers: 'The film is a research project. It is not a Sociological film. Sociological film researches society. It is an ethnographic film in the strong sense of the term. It studies mankind' (quoted by Van Cauwenberge in Winston 2013: 191). However, this study of mankind

was made in the hope that the film object could act as a metanymic statement for broader social, cultural and political concerns. In order to convey a macro-discourse of critiquing consumerist society, they needed to encourage the micro-musings of their six subjects in order to get their meta-message across.

In the work of Rouch, there are other examples of a Vertovian approach to filmmaking, in that by capturing the actuality of the lived experiences of people, footage can be constructed in various ways to act as a sociological statement. How their approach did differ though, was that Vertov adopted more of an observational style of gathering footage. He was "out there" in the field, whereas Rouch brought those "out there" into a field that was very much of his own making. At the time this approach was seen as going against the grain, especially when compared to the approach of the Direct Cinema movement. Some of these filmmakers saw the approach of Rouch as somewhat suspect, one such filmmaker, Ricky Leacock, was particularly harsh in his criticism of Rouch's approach. He claimed that Rouch's films were too 'talkative' and that by intervening in the pro-filmic event he was in fact 'forcing meaning and interpretation' (quoted by Van Cauwenberge in Winston 2013: 191) on the viewer, rather than showing him/her how the world was, which is what Leacock et al claimed to be doing. In response Rouch claimed that the Direct Cinema filmmakers were naïve to believe that their films were truthful or objective as Van Cauwenberge points out:

> Rouch criticized Leacock for his lack of reflexivity, stressing the
>
> unavoidable subjectivity of the filmmaker's gaze, insisting that

Leacock's unobtrusive, observing camera was far from neutral.

Taking an ironic stand towards the 'naivité' of Leacock's attempt

to reach a zero level of reality in his films – that is, free from any

culturally ingrained idea about what it should be – Rouch said

Leacock was in fact 'selling Coca Cola to the world' – that is,

reproducing cultural stereotypes while pretending not to. (in

Winston 2013: 190)

Not only were Rouch and Morin trying to create a new form of documentary filmmaking, they were also forging a new form of ethnographic study: one that redefined the ethnographer as *participant*, rather than *observer*. Situations were set up for the camera, rather than situations simply unfolding in front of the camera. As such the role of the ethnographer is no longer an observer of the behaviour of *The Other*, rather the ethnographer becomes a participant of the community and his/her presence becomes a catalyst for an interaction between filmmaker and participant. This represented a seismic shift in the role of the camera to document ethnographic and anthropological data. Previous to Rouch and Morin's "experiment", the camera as tool for the ethnographer had been treated as a scientific instrument, with the purpose of providing a *mimetic* record of reality via objective documentation. Rouch saw the role of camera as *stylo* rather than mirror: truth could be *written*, rather than *reflected*. Thus, emphasis is placed on the subjective interpretation of the ethnographer, rather than merely presenting data in a so-called "objective" manner, which was central to the claims made by those associated with Direct Cinema.

In conclusion, what is pertinent in the work of Vertov and Rouch, with regard to my own filmmaking, is that both of these filmmakers were aiming to change the way the viewer interpreted reality, not simply via the content of their documentaries, rather it was through the formal aspects of documentary films that the perception of reality could be reconceived. Implicitly both filmmakers adhered to the Marxist principle that the masses were in a state of false consciousness and both saw their role as documentary filmmakers as being one that could reveal social truths as a way of countering this false consciousness, in order to promote the exact opposite: class consciousness. While I may not have such revolutionary aims, I am particularly interested in how the perception of reality can be affected by formal experimentation in filming the *actual*. As such, both Vertov and Rouch stand as pioneers in terms of the innovative representational strategies that they have developed, as well as in terms of the way they have critically evaluated their films through their own theoretical writings on documentary process and documentary representation.

Chapter 4: Symphonies of Cities

Formal experimentation using actuality footage has a long history in cinema. Alongside Vertov, early pioneers such as Leger, Man Ray, Vigo, Richter, Ruttman and Ivens all used documentary footage as the raw ingredients of their filmic experiments. What unites all of these artists was their interest in the concept of rhythm, meter and tone in relation to film. Thus, many of their films had titles that related to music or dance, for example Leger's *Ballet Mechanique* (1924) Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and Richter's *Rhytmus 21* (1921). In fact the interest in using musical metaphor in film gave birth to a sub genre of documentary: *The City Symphony*. The subject matter of these films was associated with the everyday activity of metropolitan life. Films in this sub-genre often follow similar simple narrative arcs, namely a dawn-to-dusk unfolding of a day in the life of a city.

Arguably, the first film to emerge from this genre was Julius Jaenzon's *New York* (1911), however it was not until the 1920s that *City Symphonies* emerged in numbers. The first film to be labelled as a *City Symphony* was Strand and Sheeler's *Manhatta* (1921), however it was Walter Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphony of the City* (1927), which was seen to have created this sub genre of documentary film. Add to the list Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* (1926), focusing on Paris, Joris Iven's *Rain* (1929), a delightful look at patterns of rainfall in Amsterdam, Dziga Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929), actually a symphony of three Soviet cities, and Jean Vigo's *A Propos de Nice*

(1930) and one kind find a substantial and significant body of work. Many of the *City Symphony* makers came from a painterly background and are closely associated with the broader European avant-garde artistic movements of the 1910s, 20s and 30s, which had a major impact upon the representation strategies these artists developed and leaving a lasting legacy on documentary film as a whole. Barnouw succinctly sums up the link between avant-garde artists and documentarians:

At first their experiments seemed remote from documentary, but they acquired a documentary link. The artists often photographed familiar objects – 'fragments of actuality' in Vertov parlance – and used them as the basis for their interplaying movements. Thus they carried the ideas of Vertov to an ultimate conclusion. The artist was beginning with actuality, then creating his own expressive synthesis. (Barnouw 1983: 72)

The 'actuality' that Barnouw talks of relates to the capturing of the everyday activity of a city and the 'expressive synthesis' being the way the footage is organized and sequenced in the edit into complex compositions. As such, the focus of each film was not necessarily on plot or narrative, rather they were more concerned with rhythm, patterns and movement (hence the use of the term symphony), with the sense of rhythm deriving from both movement

within the frame and also from the movement between shots, created through the editing process. Generally the only obvious plot in these films was simply the unfolding of life in the city from dawn until dusk. The films reject an explicit rhetorical structure and look to capture the mood, rhythms and tones of a city. As such, the discourse of a city symphony film was not always obvious; having said that, there are elements of social critique that can be found in many of the films. For example, Vigo's *Nice* was seen as a scathing attack on the English and Russian bourgeoisie who holidayed on the Cote D'Azur, while Vertov's *Movie Camera* was seen as an assault on classical arts and Russian bourgeois culture in general.

While these films could be seen as clearly belonging to Nichols' poetic mode, they could also be seen as reflexive, whereby they act as a comment about documentary representation itself: 'Most documentary production concerns itself with talking about the historical world, the reflexive mode addresses questions of *how* we talk about the historical world…the point of such strategies is arguably to make the viewer reflect on their role in interpreting the material' (Nichols in Ward 2005: 19-29). Here the viewer is invited to engage with film on a level that is above and beyond simply following a narrative as it unfolds on screen (as might be the case in the theatrical film), rather emphasis is placed on the formal qualities of film itself. The everyday is abstracted into patterns and sequences that can be seen as separate from the referential qualities of objects such as trains, trams and machines, all of which often feature in the city symphony. This defamiliarization renders the

everyday strange, in the tradition of much constructivist art. Platinga claims

that the style of these avant-garde non-fiction films 'makes referentiality

difficult and becomes itself the primary object of interest…these films are

reflexive in a specific way in that they are fundamentally "about" the

documentary and are "about" representation itself' (Platinga 1997: 179). This

idea of using formal technique in order to encourage the viewer to question

the nature of representation in documentary film, is something which has

informed my approach to documentary filmmaking, whereby I make the claim

that:

> If we accept that documentary is a socio-cultural construct that is
>
> affected by a range of factors … this implicitly renders documentary as
>
> ideological text as opposed to objective text. Thus when I create a
>
> documentary I am not attempting to work by a set of predefined *realist*
>
> conventions in order to make a truth claim…I simply aim to imbue the
>
> reality that I experience with a degree of significance through the use of
>
> representational strategies…pioneered by the Russian filmmakers of the
>
> 1920s in the hope that the dialectic relationship of juxtaposed visual and
>
> aural signifiers will produce a level of meaning that is not achieved
>
> through the realist conventions of mainstream documentary
>
> filmmaking. (Marley in Cooper et al 2008: 51-52)

What perhaps makes the City Symphony makers stand out from the more established canons of documentary filmmaking is that their films do not necessarily treat social concerns as separate from aesthetic concerns. Social comment is often apparent in these films, with montage editing acting as a device that can link shots and sequences in order to create symbolic associational meanings; here social and political commentary in these films emerges as a result of specific formal strategies being deployed by filmmakers, rather than through a rhetorical or expository structure. Renov makes this connection between the formal and political concerns inherent with this genre by claiming that the city symphonies of Ruttman, Vertov and Vigo acted as evidence of the importance of the expressive function in documentary, whereby the 'cycle of "city symphony" films declared their allegiance in varying degrees to the powers of expressivity in the service of historical representation.' (Revov 1993: 33) He goes on to argue, like Nichols (1991) and Beattie (2008), that the repression of the aesthetic in documentary has had a negative impact on the development of the genre. He claims that the formal approach of the city symphony makers could have a powerful impact on the audience, stating that the 'artfulness of the work as a function of its purely photographic properties was now allied with possibilities of editing to create explosive effects – cerebral as well as visceral.' (Renov 1993: 33)

A pertinent example of these explosive effects can be seen in the first four minutes of Ruttman's *Berlin.* The early part of this film consists of a montage

of shots of a train arriving at Berlin's main station. While there is a sense of narrative in the sense that the train is slowing down and arriving at the station, the shots are sequenced in such a way that attention is drawn to the formal aspects of the shots, rather than their referential qualities. As such, images collide on screen, whereby we see trees flashing by from the train, juxtaposed with the moving patterns of the train track, shot at high speed, then cut to a passing of a train moving left to right, then cut back to the movement of electric cables passing by at speed, in the opposite direction. These shots are combined with extreme close-ups of the train's coupling gear, moving frenetically, accompanied by shots of the train's wheels turning rapidly. The pace of the editing is quick, which helps to defamiliarize the objects that appear on the screen. Here the viewer is experiencing film, as they would experience music, however this is music for the eyes, not the ears. The sense of rhythm, tone and texture is what guides the viewer as opposed to any particular storyline. Eventually the pace of editing slows down as the train pulls into the station. A sense of calmness ensues and we see the first aerial shot of Berlin, as the day unfolds.

Essentially what Ruttman has done here is to encourage the viewer to see film as a rhythmic phenomenon, rather than something that is merely dictated by narrative. Here the spectator can *experience* the excitement of traveling at speed, the affect becomes visceral, rather than merely cognitive.

Similarly, Vertov's *Man With a Movie* camera utilizes the power of montage to affect the viewer in particular ways. Whereas Ruttman's opening montage

starts at a frenetic pace and then slows down to reveal the unfolding of a day

in the life of a city, Vertov's closing montage is an incredibly fast paced

cacophony of images. The montage becomes a disorienting experience, with

some shots only lasting for one or two frames. The final shot, of an eye

superimposed over the closing of the aperture of the camera's lens, is almost

met with a sense of relief. The frenetic pace creates a breathless viewing

experience; here, again, we can see evidence of how the formal structuring of

film can have a direct visceral impact on the viewer. For Vertov this was

extremely important, as it helped the viewer to free themselves from the

tethers of narrative: the viewer would begin to experience the true nature of

film as an expressive form, which Vertov believed could ultimately alter the

way we perceive the world. The true revolutionary potential of film was not

simply located in the content of images and sound, rather it was located in

how these fragments of actuality were synthesized into meaningful

statements. It is with this in mind that I aim to construct documentaries in

particular ways, with the intention of inviting audiences to engage with

documentary film on a deeper, more affective level. As such, a documentary

can be *experienced*, rather than simply *watched*. My particular interest in

creating city symphonies, is that they become the ultimate challenge for a

documentary filmmaker, whereby the filmmaker captures the banality of the

everyday as his or her raw material and through the intrinsic quality of the

specificities of film itself (montage), the filmmaker has the opportunity to

make the banal epic. If a filmmaker can do that through expressionistic, rather

than expositional means, then it suggests that the signifying potential of film

is being explored with a greater degree of significance, over filmmakers who deploy more established techniques associated with mainstream documentary filmmaking.

Closing Statement:

The theoretical context, outlined in the previous four chapters, have informed my attempt to create what might be called a "thicker" text: the construction of a film that can have an impact upon the viewer in a way that a mainstream documentary film, which primarily operates on a cognitive and emotional level, seldom does. Thus the city symphonies that I create aim to be a more *immersive* experience. Here the viewer *feels* the city, rather than being simply *informed* about the city, as one may experience by watching a documentary about a city in a more traditional expository mode.

Here it is my claim that there can be no *objective* representation of the city, any representation of a city is naturally a subjective evocation of it and that is why an acknowledgement of the more poetic, reflexive and performative techniques of documentary filmmaking become more important in capturing the *essence* of a city. For example, a rapid visual and sonic montage is more likely to convey the hectic fragmented nature of modern urban life than a voice over or an interview about city life could ever could; thus shifting the signifying potential of documentary from informational text to expressive text. For filmmakers such as Vertov, Ruttman, Vigo, Ivens and Cavalcanti, rapid montage and disruptive juxtapositions were central features of their approach to representing the city, resulting in films that offered a fragmented

view of the city, using cinematic techniques with the aim of disorienting the viewer.

It is through this avant-garde formalist approach to cinematic representation that allows the spectator to engage with representations of the city in a more sensorial way and as such documentary film can be conceived as something that is affective and can function as reflexive metaphor of the very culture that the city symphony aims to capture. If modern urban culture can be conceived of as complex, fragmented and disorienting, then in order to capture that culture, the filmmaker can utilize techniques that are informed by that which he or she is attempting to represent.

The urbanization of culture has an obvious impact not only on the way we live our lives, but also in the way we perceive the world. Walter Benjamin made the claim that modernity (which he saw beginning around 1850) heralded a new "mode" of perception that was characterized by *distraction*. In the pre-modern era Benjamin claims that humans were less distracted and had more time to contemplate compared to the urban dweller, who will lead a more complex and fragmented existence. Benjamin felt that film, due to the very nature of montage, had the ability to capture, and indeed inform, this perceptual change:

> 'The film corresponds to profound changes in the apperceptive apparatus - changes that are experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street in big-city traffic…The distracting element [of film] is …primarily tactile, being based on changes of place and focus which

periodically assail the spectator…No sooner has [the spectator] grasped a scene than it has already changed. It cannot be arrested…The spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of film.' (Benjamin in Turvey 2011: 164-165)

Gunning applied Benjamin's concept of film as distraction in his analysis of early cinema, calling it a *cinema of attractions*. Gunning argues that early cinema was driven by a sense of exhibitionism, 'rather than a primitive sketch of narrative continuity…[whereby] modes of exhibition in early cinema also reflect this lack of concern with creating a self sufficient narrative world upon the screen.' (Gunning 1986: 65) He argues that early films used images not as a narrative device, but as attractions in themselves. He cites Eisenstein as the originator of the term attractions in relation to first theatre and then film, 'Eisenstein hit on the term "attraction". An attraction aggressively subjected the spectator to "sensual or psychological" impact. According to Eisenstein, theater should consist of a montage of such attractions, creating a different relationship to the spectator entirely different from his absorption in "illusionary imitativeness"' (Gunning 1986: 66) While Gunning conceives of early cinema as the period up until 1907, he argues that the cinema of attractions became influential in the development of avant-garde aesthetics of the following decade adopted by the likes of the futurists and constructivists, where representational strategies are more concerned with a sense of exhibitionism rather than 'diegetic absorption' (Gunning 1986: 66).

Emphasis is on spectacle rather than narrative development. As such, if film is conceived of as attraction, rather than story, then the representational strategies adopted by the city symphony makers can themselves be seen as contributing to a cinema of attractions, with the emphasis on *showing* rather than *telling*. This immediately puts the city symphony makers at odds with the idea that documentary should inform the viewer, generally through a mode of documentary which *tells*, as in the dominant modes of documentary practice. Even though the avant-garde association with early documentary filmmaking was short lived and 'had only a brief moment of glory' (Barnouw 1983: 80), the impact of the films and writings of their makers still resonate with some scholars and practitioners today. However the lack of documentaries that adopt abstract modes of representation, suggests that mainstream modes of representation have come to dominate much documentary output. Perhaps this deference to the avant-garde in documentary is evidence of how rationalism has become a central feature of documentary discourse, with John Grierson being a significant influence of the course of documentary's development. He saw the avant-garde influence on documentary as counterproductive to the progressive aims of documentary practice. He rejected the approach of Ruttman and Vertov as mere 'formalist trickery', which had little documentary value, 'Grierson found Ruttman's associational montage…wanting in its capacity to produce insights into daily life' (Beattie 2008: 38).

Grierson insisted that avant-garde practices within documentary representation were antithetical to the civic project of documentary, claiming that 'Modernist elitism and textual difficulty were qualities to be avoided' (Nichols 2001: 582) and that documentary 'was from the beginning an anti-aesthetic movement' (Grierson in Beattie 2008: 10). However for others an avant-garde mode of representation within documentary practice invigorated the non-fiction film, liberating it from the shackles of what Nichols' labeled as 'discourses of sobriety' (1991: 68). Beattie echoes Nichols' concerns by claiming that documentary's focus on the serious and the rational denies the audience a sense of pleasure: 'one effect of the imposition of a representation of a rational truth as the core of documentary is to reduce documentary to the realm of the serious where pleasure and associated conceptions of fun are weakened or attenuated – to the point that documentary is characterized as a discourse of sobriety' (Beattie 2008: 29).

It is with this view in mind that I aim to create documentaries that have, what could be called, pleasurable qualities. For example, in my *A Film About Nice* (2010), I include long takes of a speedboat dragging a holidaymaker attached to a parachute, 50 metres above the sea. The blueness of the sea and sky, set against the deep yellow of the parachute, can be perceived as an attractive image. The minimalist nature of the shot appeals to the eye, with the contrast of yellow against deep blue. The steady movement of the boat on water and parachute in the sky offers a peaceful and calming visual experience. The length of the take is a long one, allowing the boat to enter screen-right and

the parachute to leave screen-left. The sequence ends with the boat traveling

toward the shore in real time and as it slows down the parachute and

holidaymaker gently drift down and splash into the sea, rendered in slow

motion. I take the time to allow the delicate folds of the yellow parachute to

collapse on the water, as the sun reflects off the ocean (for a more in depth

analysis of *Nice* see Section 3). It is worth pointing out at this stage that I

conceive the sonic realm in documentary as having an equal, if not higher

status, to the visual realm in documentary. Again my search for a "thicker"

text demands that sound footage is gathered in specific ways and is

sequenced with same degree of consideration and precision, as I would do

editing visual footage. This is where my films rely on the adoption of

techniques associated with the Modernist avant-garde and build on their

concepts in order to further develop the representational potential of

documentary.

Obviously, the majority of film-work by the early City Symphony makers was

largely silent due to audio technology being heavily undeveloped in relation to

its visual counterpart. Even where potential of sound was being explored by

filmmakers such as Vertov in *Enthusiasm* (1931) and Ruttman in *Weekend*

(1930), the quality of recordings were incredibly poor and it was often difficult

to hear the sound object in the first place. Therefore any potential close

analysis of their techniques was made difficult.

 Contemporary sound technologies are incredibly versatile and lend

themselves to be thoroughly explored in terms of their signifying contribution

to the documentary text. As a brief example, in the scene described above, the sound design plays an important role in achieving my intentions. I want the viewer to find a sense of pleasure in the speedboat scene. I want the viewer to find calmness in the scene. I want that calmness to envelop their senses. I want the scene to have a positive impact on the audience. I want it to be enjoyable. I want them to feel calm and appreciate the beauty implicit in the world out there. The seaside, on a sunny day, is largely a place of pleasure and indeed leisure, just as watching a documentary can indeed be associated with pleasurable experiences. There is no intent to *explain* anything about these events; rather the intention is to allow the viewer to contemplate on the formal qualities of the scene itself. An attempt, if you like to create a sensory impact on the audience by *showing* rather than *telling*.

At this point, it is also worth noting that to simply label an artist as avant-garde, and indeed to label specific representational strategies as avant-garde, is problematic in that the label assumes some form of identifiable collective, or coherent group of artists who share similar approaches to representation. There can be no single unified avant-garde (Woolen 1975), but beyond that, how can one come to a reasonable definition of the concept of avant-garde in itself? In reference to cinema, Rees argues that the avant-garde acts as a critique of the representational strategies of popular cinema and of those who have an appreciation of popular cinema, 'the avant-garde rejects and critiques both the mainstream entertainment cinema and the audience responses to it' (Rees 2010: 1). Nichols goes somewhat further than Rees and

argues that an avant-garde mode of representation 'subverts and shatters the coherence, stability, and naturalness of the dominant world of realist representation' (2001a: 592). Thus, it is possible to perceive the avant-garde as being both a reaction, and a form of action – a *reaction* against the mainstream textual form and the social context in which that form thrives, as well as being a call to *action* for the artist to develop representational strategies that produce a "re-seeing" of the world and liberate the audience from the shackles of convention. If one is to accept this assertion then the artist implicitly becomes an *agent provocateur*, 'the very metaphor of "avant-garde" points precisely to the activist...a marching toward, a reconnoitering or exploring of, that difficult and unknown territory called no-man's land. Spearhead action, the deployment of forces, maneuvering and formation, rather than mass action and open fire.' (Poggioili 1968: 28) This spirit of action and provocation is to be found in both the work of Vertov and the constructivist movement as a whole.

In summing up, my film work aims to act as perceptual provocation. I aim to provoke a critical response in the viewer/listener, with the simple objective of producing a more analytical reader of media texts. I attempt to achieve this response through the use of specific representational strategies, which have been informed by the theoretical debates outlined above. What follows in Section 3 is an explanation of my working practices and critical reflection on the processes and strategies that have helped me to explore the explication of theory within a practical context.

Section 3: Critical reflection on the practical portfolio

 <u>Me With a Movie Camera</u>

In this section I aim to provide a critical evaluation of the practical work that I have
carried out for this PhD thesis. Whereas Section 1 presented an overview of the
theoretical discourse, which has helped forge specific approaches to my filmmaking,
this section is more reflexive in its approach. While there is a direct correlation
between the two sections, this section is more concerned with evaluating the
strategies and working practices that I have adopted in order to develop a practice-
as-research portfolio

It is also worth pointing out here that the critical analysis of *A Film About Nice* (2010)
is extremely detailed in terms of its textual analysis. I provided this level of depth so
that the reader becomes aware of how the attention to formal detail is absolutely
crucial to my work. This level of detail is not necessary for the textual analyses of the
other films in the portfolio, as the aesthetic approach to making *Nice* has provided a
template for all my other films. The other films within my portfolio, excluding
Wayne Smith: *A Coach's Story* (2017), are, in essence, a variation upon the theme of
Nice.

<u>Prologue:</u>

I started making documentaries at the age of twenty-five in 1993. I had been out of
education since I was 16 years old, leaving the Laurence Jackson School,
Guisborough, Teesside, in 1984, with three grade C GCE O-levels in Maths, History
and Physics. While school was an enjoyable time for me, academically I was poor.

Not necessarily through a lack of aptitude, rather through a lack of application.

Upon leaving school all of my peers went on to 6th Form. I went on to a Youth

Training Scheme at ICI Wilton and trained as a metalworker, welder and electrician. I

wasn't very good at that either and left ICI after the yearlong scheme and was one

of the few not to be offered a 3-year apprenticeship. The day I found out about not

being "kept on" at ICI, I recall coming home on the bus from the Redcar works and I

looked around my council estate and realised how little interest I had staying around

these parts. I went in to my house and said "Mam, Dad, I am moving to London on

Monday". Despite my mother's tears, I did just that.

London was a real shock to the system. I had only visited one city before in my

entire life, Liverpool earlier that year and making the move from a largely rural area

in the North East, to an incredibly large city like London, proved to be challenging.

Despites the challenges (mainly due to a lack of finances) London seemed exotic, it

was exciting and most of all, it was alive. I remember 'going up West' and gawping in

awe at street signs such as Regents Street, Mayfair, Pall Mall, Oxford Circus; names

that I had only previously associated with the board game Monopoly. I was

somewhere at last. This is when I began to start thinking about documenting the

world around me.

Despite being very poor at art in school, I always wanted to be creative. However my

skills let me down. For my 16+ final project I received an award of 'Unclassified',

which had meant that I had received a grade of less than 20%. It wasn't even a Fail;

it was Unclassified. I felt demoralized, however I was hardly surprised: my 8 week

project, which I called *Black and White*, consisted of three pieces of A2 paper, each

one painted with one of the three primary colours and mounted on the wall in the classroom. The work was displayed alongside all my peers' fantastic drawings of crushed Coke cans and sheep skulls. A sign, handwritten by myself, was hung next to the "paintings" and read: 'There can be no black nor white, only infinite variations of that theme.' I had hoped that someone might have "got" what I thought was a rather clever piece of work, clever in the sense that I had avoided putting my rather limited drawing and painting skills to the test; it was conceptual; it was Art with a capital A. In reality it failed miserably. From then on I knew that I needed to find a medium through which I could express my creative impulse. This is when I first bought myself a cheap plastic stills camera and the documentary work started from there.

That time I spent in London, from 1984 to 1988, gave me a taste of the 'world out there' and I used my camera to capture a piece of it. Because I had never really been anywhere outside of the North East as a child growing up, I had a fascination with anything that was different to the culture that I had known as a child. The council estate where I lived was full of families on or below the breadline. Teesside, as a whole, is largely a socially deprived area. My mother and father didn't drive and as a family of 6, with a father in manual work and a mother in part-time work as a dinner lady, we had very little money to spare. We did, however, go on holidays; sometimes on the Working Men's Club summer coach trips to Scarborough and Filey, other times some families from our estate would club together and hire a Dormobile and drive us to Cornwall, or best of all, we would all go to Butlins or Pontins. These were the most exciting times of my childhood. The sense of

anticipation of seeing somewhere new would occupy all my waking hours before a holiday was planned. Between the ages of 16 and 25, I made sure that every penny I had was saved for trips to places that I had never been. These included trips to the Sahara Desert, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, most of Western Europe, islands off the African Coast, Scandinavia and Leicester. I still have boxes of photographs from my visits to these places, divided into different albums according to geographical location. Even though I did not realise it at the time, these photographs represented my first foray in making documentaries. While I had always been interested in the beauty of landscapes, I quickly realized that it was the people in those places that I was most interested in. I enjoyed the idea of taking photographs of people carrying out everyday activity and then wondering what stories they had to tell: another sign of my documentary impulse.

As time went on and I carried on working in jobs that gave little satisfaction apart from supplying me with money to travel, I knew that by the age of 25 something had to change. It was time to get a university education. However, I had no formal qualifications, plus I assumed that university wasn't a place for working class lads like me. However in July 1993, I saw a degree programme in Liverpool John Moores University: Media and Cultural Studies with Screen Studies. I read the brief course outline and knew that this was the course for me. I contacted the admissions department and began trying to persuade the then course leader to allow me entry onto his course as a mature student. Eventually, after hounding the course leader for several weeks, I was invited to an interview. He said he was impressed with my passion, however he said he was worried about my ability to deal with academia.

After pleading with him to allow me on the course, which he eventually did, I then had to convince the DHSS that by allowing me to sign on the dole and receive a Giro every two weeks for the next four years of my part-time degree, it would provide me with better life chances than simply accepting the dead end jobs they had insisted that I must take in the past. To my surprise they agreed and after receiving my BA (Hons) in Media, Cultural Studies with Screen Studies in 1997, I now sit here, 20 years on, hoping to obtain my doctorate. It has been a long and rewarding journey to becoming a graduate, a Master of Arts, a senior lecturer, a documentary filmmaker and now, hopefully, a Doctor of Philosophy. Below is my account of how and why I find myself sitting here, typing up this thesis.

A Statement of Intent

'The idea that truth is only what is seen by the human eye is refuted

both by microscopic research and all the data supplied by the

technologically aided eye in general. It is refuted by the *very nature of*

man's thought.' (Dziga Vertov in Michelson 1984: 125)

Surely a central trait of any documentary filmmaker is that they have a sense of

intent. Documentary films *do* something that is above and beyond what a fiction

film generally aims to do. Documentary films cannot simply be entertaining, because

arguably a lot of documentaries are most certainly not, in the strictest sense of the

word, *entertainment*. They are more than commercial ventures, because of course

documentary is not a very profitable area of cinema production and exhibition. They

cannot merely be art, because arguably not all documentaries are artistic. However

what claim can be made about documentary film, is that over its relatively short

history, it has become been a major player in contributing to social, political and

cultural knowledge. It has helped to challenge dominant discourses in society, it has

highlighted social ills, exposed criminal activities, brought down leaders and helped

convict murderers. Documentary output makes an important contribution to any

functioning democracy and, as such, documentary can be seen as a progressive

project. However up until fairly recently, documentary film was largely marginalized

in terms of its visibility in cinemas, as well as an academic discipline.

Even though documentary is a burgeoning subject within Film Studies, much of the

writing associated with the analysis of representational strategies in documentary

practice is written from the perspective of those who "look for meaning" within

films, rather than from the perspective of those filmmakers who try to encode

specific meanings within their own practice. With this in mind, here we can see

evidence of the theory-practice divide that has blighted much of what is written

about documentary. In my opinion, publications on documentary analysis can often

come across as too theoretical, and as such operate on a rather abstract level,

whereas on the other hand publications that are associated with practice are often

"dry" and "superficial" in that they merely focus on the technical aspects of

documentary practice: a "how to" manual, offering no examination of how

theoretical discourse can inform documentary practice. There are exceptions to this

rule (see for example Wayne, 1996; Kydd, 2011; De Jong et al. 2012); these

publications provide more than a "how to" approach and offer a more critically

informed guide for documentarians. As a filmmaker, I have tried to adopt a scholarly

approach to producing films through using theoretical discourse to inform my

practice. Mike Wayne argues that there is a need to collapse the divide between

theory and practice in order to approach filmmaking from a scholarly position.

> 'Rather than seeing theory and practice as distinct and separate activities, we
>
> need to see them as part of a continuum. The terms 'theory' and 'practice' refer
>
> to those circumstances and contexts in which either reflection on practice
>
> (theory) or the implementation of theory (practice) predominate.' (1996: 13)

 Wayne argues that practice informed by theory allows the filmmaker to see her

own work in relation to the gamut of cultural artifacts already in circulation. The

filmmaker is able to see how the work of others may resonate with their own

approach, or alternatively how their own work departs from the existing canons

with the audio-visual sphere.

> 'Without theory though, your understanding of how and where your work
>
> connects with and departs from particular traditions, will inevitably remain
>
> rather impressionistic…theory can clarify the effects in terms of meanings
>
> produced by a set of conventions or strategies…theory relativises
>
> practice…Theory allows us to examine the internal workings of a set of
>
> conventions and this understand that they are not universally valid and that
>
> there are other ways of doing things' (11-12).

Essentially, for Wayne, a theory-informed approach to practice allows the filmmaker

to understand the inner mechanisms of signification, which in turn allows the

filmmaker to have more command over the development of representational

strategies within their own documentary filmmaking.

In applying Wayne's perspective on theory informed practice, it was an epiphany

moment, when late in the third semester of my first year of my degree, I was

introduced to the work and writings of Dziga Vertov. Up until that point I had never

even heard of the man and I had not seen any of his work. However when I started

to read about him, I did so with a sense of elation. It was the first time I had made

connections with my own work and that of a filmmaker and film theorist. It was one

of those wonderful moments, where you read or watch something and it acts as a

thorough and clear articulation of your own thoughts. I had recently finished editing

my first film project when I came across Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929)

in a lecture given by Prof. Sean Cubitt. Cubitt spent much of the lecture focusing on

the defining aesthetic of Vertov's film: montage. He then showed the final two

minutes of the film and as a cinematic experience, it was quite simply exhilarating.

The film that I had just finished was a 20-minute documentary about homelessness.

I soon realized that my film could, if I had known of Vetov's work before I started

making the film, be seen as homage to the great man.

Instead of focusing on homeless people for cutaways, I used a RSPCA dog shelter

instead. I scripted the dialogue myself (I once was homeless and ended up as a

squatter for a year in 1991) and I presented the script it to camera. I used a range of

locations in the dogs home, such as the cages that dogs were kept it, or the area

where they were put to sleep. I wanted to make the viewer uncomfortable, I wanted

the viewer to make the conceptual leap between the way, we, as a society dealt

with homeless dogs and then link that with the way that homeless people are

treated within the UK. The dogs' home was a harrowing place, row after row of

howling dogs all begging for you to take them home, or those that would threaten

you if you came near their cage, the fear and resentment of humans probably a

result of years of abuse. The intensity of the noise was incredible, and the location

suited my intentions of my desire to make the audience feel uncomfortable. I would

cut from an interview with a person living on the street (who was the only homeless

person in the film), to an aggressive looking German Shepherd snarling and barking

at the camera, then cut to schoolchildren sticking their faces in the camera lens

laughing and playing, then back to a dog cowering in the corner of a cage, then back

to me, making some such statement about the amount of people living on the

streets in the UK in 1993, then cut to the manager of the dog shelter reciting figures

of how many homeless dogs have to be put to sleep per week. I attempted to create

an audio-visual assault on the viewer's senses. I wanted to deconstruct narrative linearity in order to challenge the perceptual process of the viewer. Deconstructed montage, in terms of both audio and video footage, was my vehicle to achieve this. It was at this point that I was introduced to Vertov and became aware that indeed there were filmmakers out there who were able to articulate the intentions that I had as a filmmaker. Vertov, was, indeed, a true scholarly filmmaker.

My filmmaking strategies were also influenced by Elspeth Kydd's book, *The Critical Practice of Film*, which builds on the ideas developed by Mike Wayne and uses the term *critical practice* in relation to a to a filmmaker adopting a scholarly approach to their practice. She argues that the critical practice of film 'has the goal of questioning, disrupting and experimenting with normative modes of practice and challenging the restrictions of conventional forms' (Kidd 2011: 4). She goes on to discuss this approach within the specific context of documentary filmmaking, claiming that a 'critical practice approach to documentary involves applying the theoretical ideas on documentary to create a practice that is aware of its own status as documentary and which engages with debates in ethics as well as representational issues' (Kidd 2011: 64). This idea can be linked to Nichols' *reflexive* mode of documentary, whereby a filmmaker allows the audience access to the constructed nature of documentary films, through revealing the means of production. With regard to my own approach, reflexivity does not merely involve allowing the audience to see things such as microphones in the frame or a light on a tripod; reflexivity involves a self conscious "styling", where the audience's attention can be drawn to specific techniques such as montage, as well as creative sound

design. Here the production process is being revealed through specific aesthetic strategies, an approach, which has in turn, become the driving force behind my practice led thesis. This is particularly evident in the first film that I produced for this thesis, *A Film About Nice* (2010), discussed below.

A Word On Sound

The potential of sound to impact upon meaning in documentary film is a central concern to films that I produce. Aesthetic innovation in sound design is much less prevalent in documentary film as opposed to fiction. According to John Corner the 'aesthetic (as distinct from the cognitive) possibilities of sound in documentary are in most cases not mobilized at all.' (Corner 2003: 98). My claim here is that the relationship between image and sound in documentary is hierarchical in that the visual tends to dominate over the aural. Of course dialogue is a central feature of some modes of documentary, namely the expository with the use of voiceover, eavesdropping on conversations in the observational mode and interviews in the interactive mode; however in terms of aesthetics, soundtracks are often constructed according to well-established conventions and such as not afforded the same significance as the construction of the visual track. Examples of this reductionist approach to sound design include the use of a wild track consisting of diegetic sounds, or the addition of music to certain scenes, beyond that the subtleties of sound design are often not the primary concern of most documentarians. We talk of "seeing" or "viewing" a film and we would seldom refer to "hearing" a film. As Chion claims, 'although sound has modified the nature of the image, it has left untouched the image's centrality as that which focuses the attention…[it] has not shaken the

image from its pedestal. Sound still has the role of showing us what it wants us to see in the image.' (Chion 1994: 144)

It is in the area of sound that Cox and I have tried to exploit in terms of producing innovative representational strategies, in an attempt to draw the audience's attention to the audio elements of our films. In order to hail the attention of the viewer/listener, careful attention has to be paid to the way the image track is structured and composed so that 'in order to *allow* the audience to concentrate more on the sonic elements of the production, I propose that the filmmaker adopts a certain kind of approach that does not draw the audience into the search for meaning via narrative development and its logical resolution.' (Marley in Cooper et al. 2008: 54) In essence, I often try to "free up" the cognitive processing of the viewer/listener by reducing the complexity of the visual track in order to allow focus on the aural signifier. Chion argues that the viewer requires more time to process the visual signifier, as opposed to the aural: 'the ear analyzes, processes, and synthesizes faster than the eye…the eye perceives more slowly because it has more work to do; it must explore in space as well as follow along in time.' (Chion 1994: 10-11)

An example of this approach can be seen in some of the sequences in *A Film About Nice* (dir. Keith Marley 2010). In many of the shots, especially those around the beach and sea, the shots are held for a relatively long time and there is minimal animation within the scene. These include images of waves lapping on the beach or a drifting boat glistening in the sunshine. The visual track has a degree of simplicity, which contrasts with the complexity of the composition of the audio track. Here

location sounds are multilayered in complex patterns and are occasionally processed in postproduction, using reverb, delay and equalization (an in depth analysis of both the image and audio track follows below). Here Cox and I were attempting to limit the attention the viewer requires to process the image, in order to allow the listener to focus their attention on the detail of the sound. Cox articulates this process by stating that our 'aim here was to encourage the listener/viewer to concentrate on the sound, even to adopt Pierre Schaeffer's concept of "reduced listening" where one listens to the sound, so as to focus on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and meaning.' (Cox in Cooper et al. 2008: 58)

A Critical Evaluation of *A Film About Nice* (2010)

A Film About Nice is a 37-minute documentary film shot by Geoffrey Cox and myself, in the city of Nice on the Côte D'Azur, France. The film follows the tradition of the city symphony makers of the early 20th Century. The basic narrative structure follows a dawn-to-dusk vignette of a "day in the life" of Nice. The film was particularly inspired by Vigo's *A Propos de Nice* (1930) and was the main reasoning behind choosing the location of Nice. Our overall aim was to gather footage of the more banal aspects of city life, including activity within the port area, market life, beach life, traffic and trains, with the hope of transforming the banality of everyday life into something more appealing and interesting for the viewer/listener.

The pre-production planning phase was made fairly easy because I had already spent time in Nice and I had already formed an impression of the city, which provided me with a good understanding of the major areas that I wanted to film in;

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including the old town, Place Massena, Promenade des Anglais and the beach area. These are the areas that many visitors to the city will be familiar with and images of these places appear frequently on marketing material associated with Nice as a tourist destination. I wanted to contrast the footage gathered from here with the less well known areas such as uptown Nice, North of Nice Ville train station and also the port area. This would provide the viewer with a more representative image of the city, as opposed to the ones we see regularly see in travel brochures.

During the pre-production phase, initial discussions with Cox focused on how we would construct the overall narrative arc of the film. Both Cox and I agreed that we would adhere to the city symphony tradition of the dawn-to-dusk structure, however I wanted the specific narrative arc to be geographically determined, in that the film would explore everyday life in specific areas of Nice and, with the passing of time, would move to another location, eventually arriving in the vibrant Le Cours Saleya during nightfall, when it would be at its most lively. Cox had not visited the city previously, so I had presented the case to him as to why we should let geography determine the way we construct the film. I explained to Cox how the city was a place of contradictions and inequalities. The whole of the Cote D'Azur wears its wealth and its poverty like a heart on a sleeve. Up market shops such as Gucci, Channel, Hugo Boss, lie in close proximity to fleapit hotels and shady looking dive bars with pimps, prostitutes and drug dealers hanging out on street corners. Extreme wealth and beauty coexist side by side with extreme poverty, ugliness and crime. It was something of this contrast that had attracted me to the city in the first place and it was certainly a theme that I wanted to explore in *A Film About Nice*. The

only image Cox had of Nice was the one that Vigo created in his *A Propos de Nice* (1930). What struck Cox upon arriving in Nice was that the contrast between the rich and poor that Vigo had shown in his film was just as apparent in the 21st century as it had been almost a century ago. In many ways this framed our observations during the initial location recces that we carried out.

I estimated that we would need 5 days in Nice; one day spent on location recces of the areas mentioned above and then 4 days and nights of gathering A/V footage. We decided on dividing the film into eight sections, which were determined by geographic location:

Section 1: *Puget Théniers*

Section 2: *Les Quais de Nice*

Section 3: *La Vielle Ville*

Section 4: *La Nouvelle Ville*

Section 5: *La Plage*

Section 6: *La Vie de Café*

Section 7: *Le Cirque Nocturne*

Section 8: *Un Autre Jour*

Puget Théniers is a small village beautifully situated in the mountains above Nice. I wanted this to be the starting point of the film due to the natural beauty surrounding the village. The reasons for using this as a location to start the

symphony were largely superficial in that the place was so photogenic, however there were also reasons associated with the narrative of film. I wanted the journey to begin with nature then move to the man made environment and then return to nature. It seemed an appropriate "bookending" for the film and would provide the viewer with an obvious beginning and end.

The train journey from Nice to Puget is one of incredible beauty.   The tiny *Train des Pignes* trundles through mountainous valleys and over raging rivers winding its way through the Alpes Maritmes. A fortunate stroke of luck happened when the door in our carriage failed to close as the train departed the station. This allowed me to perch on the step of the carriage and shoot the passing countryside using my environment as camera support, rather like Vertov did in *Man With a Movie Camera*. I regret that Cox did not shoot some footage of me filming frpm the train, so that we could have used that as an intertextual nod to Vertov; however it was not to be, as he was unaware of my opportunist cinematographic moment. Soon enough the guard asked me to retake my seat and the doors were repaired at the next station stop. The footage from the moving train did make it into the final cut.

The film opens with an extreme long shot (ELS) of the mountainous valley looking toward Nice. There are three further ELSs of the landscape, however with each subsequent shot the composition becomes tighter and this trend continues until we reach an extreme close up of a tree branch. Running alongside the compositional zooming in of the image, the sound track (diegetic sound of cicadas calling) increases in volume as the image becomes tighter. In the audio edit, part way through the opening Puget section, Cox introduced a second audio track of cicadas,

which creates a syncopated effect when layered against the other cicada track and provides the listener with a rather unsettling and grating soundscape. The volume of the cicada tracks increases in unison with the shots becoming tighter as the edit progresses. This crescendo effect is abruptly broken by the sound and image of a street cleaner brushing a stream of water running through a village street straight toward the camera. Here, Cox and I were attempting to create a minor "shock effect" for the viewer. We hoped that the beauty of the shots and the increasing intensity of sound an image would create a meditative absorbing atmosphere and thus make the "shock" more effective. It was our intention here to encourage the viewer to see and hear the significance of the way that sound works in combination with the image. In essence, we wanted to create a heightened state of awareness in the viewer/listener, which would be achieved through guiding the attention of the viewer/listener to the subtleties of the audio track.

Through casual observation during showings of the film at academic conferences and in the lecture theatre during teaching sessions, there have been a number of occasions where I have seen the viewer/listener physically jump, therefore this strategy can be seen as effective. It is worth pointing out here that the audio track in this opening sequence, and in fact throughout the film, incorporates sounds that are not always in synch with the image. For instance the cicadas were recorded at a particular location and then used over images from other locations. Also the sound of a train's horn far down the valley was recorded elsewhere and then added to this sequence purely for its sonic value. This is something that Cox and I employ throughout the film. All sounds are recorded in Nice and along the Côte D'Azur,

however the ones that are included in the audio track are not always specific to a particular time or a particular location in the image track. This is an example of how sound can be used to augment actuality, as Cox points out when explaining the way he constructed the soundtrack:

'Broadly, the approach to employing these different sound elements (and *only* location sound was used), was not to distinguish between them in terms of 'music' and 'noise' or to be overly concerned with whether they were deployed synchronously or asynchronously (though the latter tends to dominate), but to orchestrate them together, and with the images, as to…create a "transfigured reality" in a "recreated world."' (Cox 2011: 92)

The scene that follows is a gently paced montage of village life, using mainly synchronized diegetic sound. The weather is warm and sunny, the sky deep blue, the colour of shutters on the cottages a pleasant shade of green, the sound of bird song and the calm hubbub of village life all make for a pleasant scenario. It is a relaxing experience for the viewer/listener, which reflects the pleasant atmosphere of the village. In the train station scene there is further evidence of the way that Cox and I *transfigure reality* through the composition of non-synchronous sounds in the audio track. The sounds used in this instance are recorded during the train journey from Nice up to Puget. The way the sounds are deployed give a definite sense of movement, which is in stark contrast to the emptiness and stillness of the station scene. The audio in this scene preempts the busier city life that we are about to see and hear in Nice. As the volume of the train increases, the film cuts to a shot taken from the moving train; the viewer is now able to see that the sounds are in synch

with the image. Here Cox and I were looking to create smooth transitions from one location to the next, which is a strategy that we use throughout the film.

On the whole, Cox and I treat the visual aspect of the film with certain a degree of musicality. Rather like we have movements in an orchestral symphony, which have definite transitions from one visual movement to the next, here we were looking to create a similar scenario in the image track as well. In the shift from village to train to city, we wanted a smooth transition, therefore we introduced the sounds of a train over the static station scene to act as a sound bridge and then by introducing the image of the train in synch with the sound of that actual train, it allowed a smooth movement from one scene to the next. As the image fades to black, reverb is added to the sound of the train, which is meant to signify the entering of a tunnel (of which there are many on this train route) and the title 'A Film About Nice' fades up at the same time as the track noise is pitched down and a touch of delay added. This was meant to act as a light hearted attempt to add a dramatic tone to the film, but was also an opportunity for Cox to display his dexterity in sound design techniques, without the use of images to distract the attention of the listener. There follows a short section of inter-titles, which read "This film is a city symphony" (fade to black) "It is a film without scenario" (fade to black). Both of these are a nod to the inter-titles used at the start of Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera*, as is the next "It is life caught unawares", which also indicates that the film is shot according to the observational mode. The final two titles are a reference to Alberto Cavalcanti's city symphony of Paris, *Rien que les heures* (1926)*,* "Therefore in this film, as in life," (fade to black), "There is nothing but the hours". Nice is then

introduced using a sound bridge from the audio of train and the introduction of the diegetic sound of a Nice street scene. Here the image fades up to a rather innocuous looking underpass and a pedestrian walking past. We used this image because we wanted the introduction of Nice to be rather banal, as opposed to using an iconic image of Nice such as The Negresco Hotel or The Baie des Anges. We now enter the second movement of the film: *Les Quais de Nice.*

In order to continue in the tradition of creating smooth transitions from one scene to the next, the sound of a scooter panning left to right is carried over into the first shot of *Le Quais.* The "shape" of the sound corresponds to the "shape" of the movement of the crane carrying rocks moves screen right to left. By paying close attention to detail of the "shapes" created by both sound and image, Cox and I are attempting to maintain the smooth transitions between scenes, in this instance using a sound bridge of the scooter along side a moving crane. The shots that follow are fairly slow paced both in the movement within the frame and in the pace of editing. This is early morning Nice. The working day is just beginning and here we are trying to recreate that gentle atmosphere of morning life through the pacing of this section. We then cut to a market scene; again the pacing is slow and deliberate. The shots are composed in what Nichols would call the traditional observational mode. Shoppers are allowed to slowly pass through the frame. There is a distinct lack of urgency in both the way they move and the pacing of the film. The camera acts as uninvolved bystander, capturing *life as it is*.

Like in many other city symphonies, the focus in *Nice* is on recreating the rhythm and patterns of urban life. Boats gently cross the frame, first from screen right to

left and then vice-versa, people pass through the frame, a toy train passes from right to left, each time particular focus is paid to the edit 'in' and 'out' points. In order to maintain the smooth transitions between shots, it is important to ensure the 'in' point of, say, the boat passing right to left, is just at the point where the boat is entering the frame and then set the 'out' point just as it is about to leave the frame screen left. This approach is adopted throughout the film as a way of maintaining a degree of smoothness and continuity to certain scenes, so that when we want to break with this tradition, the abrupt edits (in both sound and image) have the potential to have a greater impact on the viewer/listener.

Cox and I were interested in creating a specific gaze, from which, the viewer listener could experience the city. As we were interested in capturing footage in the vein of an observational mode, Cox and I tended to use compositions that would appear *detached* from the scene. For the majority of the time, the camera would not move within a scene, rather the gaze would be detached from and thus outside of that scene. The sequence shot around Nice Ville train station, adopts this rather voyeuristic gaze, looking in on people going about their daily commute. Cox and I were outsiders looking in on another world and in a sense this observational approach was an attempt to create an overall "tourist gaze" and with the majority of visitors to Nice being tourists, this type of gaze is often adopted as a matter of course. Cox and I made an attempt to create that reflexive experience for the viewer through camera placement.

Further evidence of the implied voyeuristic gaze can be seen in the way certain shots were composed. For example the man sat reading the paper and smoking a

cigarette in the train station's café is shot with a long lens. He was initially unaware

of us filming and this is apparent in the way the shot has an "eavesdropping" feel to

it. Of course there are ethical issues raised with this approach, however we were

careful to let people eventually know that we were filming them and we took their

acknowledgement of us filming as consent. In order to capture a life caught

unawares, we avoided resorting to some of the more surreptitious techniques

adopted by the likes of Vigo, where they would often use hidden cameras.

In the next scene, *La Vieille Ville* (the old town), both Cox and I were interested in

capturing some of the architectural beauty of this part of Nice. These street scenes

have been painted by some of the world's most famous artists including Renoir,

Chagall and Morisot. It was easy to see why they had chosen such a location. The

colours of the buildings in the early morning soft light were incredibly beautiful,

especially when colours such as ochre's, reds and greens were set against the deep

blue of the Provençal sky. Cox and I agreed that early morning would not only be the

best time to capture the hues of the buildings, but it would also mean that the Old

Town would be free from the throngs of tourists who generally start arriving around

10am. The shots of buildings were tightly composed and shot with long lenses in

order to flatten the perspective and give them an abstract "painterly" feel. The

pacing of the edit was slow and deliberate, allowing the viewer to observe the

abstract beauty of the colours and patterns found on the buildings. The audio track

was largely composed of synchronous diegetic sounds, with the odd sound bridge

used to smooth out transitions from shot to shot. This form of representation fits

neatly into the poetic mode, in order to give this short section a certain lyrical quality.

The tranquility of the old town is broken by the following scene, which consists of a montage of moving traffic. It is mid-morning by this time and the pace of the city is picking up. This is matched by the pace of editing, which gradually gets faster, alongside the movements within the frame, which become more hectic. The chaotic feel to this section is signified further through the use of abrupt audio and visual transitions, which are in stark contrast to the smooth transitions established earlier in the piece. The soundtrack is a multi-track layering of various discordant sounds, such as sirens and the screeching of fast moving motor scooters. Here Cox and I are trying to capture the hustle and bustle of a city through the relationships created between jarring juxtapositions of images and sounds in an attempt to signify the mood and atmosphere of the city. This approach largely reflects Nichols the poetic mode discussed in Section 1, whereby the film 'sacrifices the conventions of continuity editing and the sense of a very specific location in time and place that follows from it to explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions' (Nichols 2001b: 102). Like Mitry's locomotive in *Pacific 231* (1944), where the viewer does not necessarily learn *about* the workings of an engine, rather they are 'invited to *feel* the dynamics of the train and to be excited by the speed of movement' (Marley, Section 1); here Cox and I are inviting the audience to *feel* the dynamic nature of the city, especially through the use of a specific style of audio and visual editing, rather than learning about any particular

aspects of the city of Nice. Ultimately, the work is intended to be impressionistic, rather than informative.

After this section, the film falls back into a more serene atmosphere. Cox and I attempt to draw attention to each movement of the film by using an identifiable coda. In this instance, the hectic montage of traffic is replaced with a shot of a jet gliding across the sky and dissolves into a shot of the graceful trams as they glide across the floor. The smooth movement of the trams coincides with audio that has been recorded inside the tram. Each time before the recorded announcements of the tram's PA, a short ambient jingle is played and followed by the recorded message indicating which station stop will be next. The voices used (both male and female) are soothing and wholly compliment the ambient jingle used. Again this acts as another device for Cox and I to construct smooth transitions between the different areas of Nice, with this specific example using both the animation within the frame (the gliding of the trams) and the timbre of the sounds (the jingles and soothing voices from inside the tram). The short montage of the trams uses slow dissolves rather than sharp cuts. This creates interesting patterns of movement on the screen and contributes to the gentle ambience of this scene. If sharp cuts had been used instead of dissolves, then the atmosphere would have been very different and the sense of genteel calm would be lost. Again the use of specific filmic techniques here helps to dictate the atmosphere of the film. The sequence of trams used here is also a direct reference to city symphonies from the early 20th Century. They often included similar sequences of trams, trains and traffic and it was in these early films that vehicles would have acted as a metaphor for modernity and a

celebration of technological progress and a general exalting of the machine. Our film is no different in that.

The tram scene sees us leave Nouvelle Ville and enter La Plage. Cox and I wanted to maintain the motif of smooth transitions from one movement to the next, yet it was this transition that would cause us the most difficulty in its execution. We had waded through many hours of footage trying to find a shot that would compliment the sweeping movement of the trams in order to help shift the location from town to beach. The solution to this problem actually came from using my VJ equipment in a rehearsal for producing a live performance of a city symphony, using video samplers, real time special effects units and live-audio sequencing software (for further discussion on the live performance of documentary see the critical reflection of *Expanded Documentary: Mechanized Deconstruction* below). One of these machines, the *Korg Kaptivator* (a video sampler and sequencer), has the ability to be programmed in such a way as to play back video loops where the transition between loop currently playing ends with a freeze frame when a new loop is triggered to be played, by pressing a touch sensitive pad. The freeze frame then slowly dissolves into the next video clip that has just been activated. This provided a solution for our inability to find a suitable clip to move from town to beach: in the edit suite I superimposed a jogger at the beach with an ELS of a tram approaching the camera in the new town area. When the jogger reached the tram I froze the frame and then repeated the jogger shot from the same in-point and increased the opacity of that layer so that the jogger became more visible. Once the second shot of the jogger reached the exact freeze frame of the initial shot of the jogger, I froze

that frame and repeated the sequence again, once more increasing the opacity of the subsequent shot of the jogger. By the time the shot was repeated for a third time, the tram exits the shot and when the jogger reaches the freeze frame of the previous two shots, I increased the opacity of the third layer so that the jogger leaves the shot, with no trace of the previous freeze frame and the jogger runs along the promenade and we are now at the beach, with the smooth transition achieved successfully. The visual transition was also aided by a sound bridge created by extending the internal sounds of the trams over into the initial opening shots of *La Plage*.

The pacing of the editing in this sequence is again deliberately slow. In terms of time we have now reached mid afternoon, the hottest time of the day. Beach life is leisurely and this is echoed by the pacing of the editing as well as the slow animation within the frame. This is achieved by using shots such as a plane coming into land, a boat hauling paraglider across the sea, bathers gently treading water in the ocean and people basking in the afternoon sun on the beach. The sound here is largely synchronous with the image and is rather unremarkable in that it is wholly diegetic. That is, until we get our first glimpse of a homeless person. Here the image of a sunbathing tourist, in swimming trunks, is juxtaposed with that of a fully clothed man, who we can assume to be homeless, as he id lying on the street asleep with his belongings in a bag close by. The sound used in conjunction with this image is that of a street musician playing piano, who we had previously recorded near Place Massena. The chord is in a minor key and has a rather unsettling quality. We combined this unsettling sound with the image of the homeless man in an attempt

to create a sense of foreboding and to secure the attention of the viewer/listener on the image. This technique becomes an identifiable motif, which we often deploy when the viewer sees an image of a homeless person. Two other examples of a discordant sound used in combination with a homeless person can be seen at around 17'49" and 18'08": the viewer will first see a man in an overcoat begging and then an old man asleep on the street with all his belongings, including a mattress and bags of clothing. Over both of these images, the loud, abrupt sound of a car door slamming is used in order to draw attention to these men, again attempting to create an unsettling atmosphere through the use of sound. After these shots, we cut back to the more serene image of bathers at the beach. This is where the first binary opposition between the relatively rich and relatively poor is established. The homeless people are at rest, as are the bathers, however it could be said that they are resting due to very different circumstances.

In an attempt to establish the disquieting relationship between leisure and poverty, the scene that begins around 19'00" is a complex montage of colliding sounds and images. Here we see many images of the street beggars and homeless people, juxtaposed with others enjoying meals at some of the up-market restaurants in the old town of Nice. The editing of both sound and image is of a rapid pace, with a soundtrack composed of grating sounds of car doors slamming, motor scooters roaring past, sirens wailing, alongside a piece of music in minor key played on an accordion by a street musician. This scene was a further attempt at creating a binary opposition between those who seek leisure in Nice and those who survive on the street. Close-ups of a man eating a meal are juxtaposed with quick fire images of

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people begging, with the overlaid discordant sounds again drawing attention to the street dwellers. At one stage a shot of a beggar precedes a shot of a man at a restaurant laughing, with the sound of the accordion overlaid; in a Kuleshovian sense this suggests that the man is laughing at the beggar (which of course he is not). Here Cox and I wanted to show the disparity in life styles between the relatively wealthy tourists and the street dwellers of Nice. This echoes the scene set up in Vigo's *Nice*.

It has been well documented that Vigo, who had left Paris for Nice in order to recover from a serious illness, hated the bourgeois lifestyle of the British and Russian tourists who frequented Nice in the early 20th Century. In Vigo's *Nice,* he would juxtapose images of the wealthy against the beggars and tramps who had tried to scrape a living in and around the old town and beach areas of Nice. Both Cox and I paid homage to Vigo in scenes such as the one described above. The disparity between the rich and the poor was still as evident in the 21st Century as it was in Vigo's time. Even though it could be seen as distasteful to film someone in close up eating (we had been sure to make it obvious to the man at the restaurant that we were filming, and he nodded in acknowledgement to show he had no issue with it), the whole scenario in Nice was, in our opinion, rather distasteful: the "filthy" rich flaunting their wealth to the "filthy" poor on the street.

Of course we cannot be sure that an audience would decode the meanings that we were specifically trying to encode within the film, however we both felt it was important that we made an attempt to display this huge gulf in wealth between the inhabitants of Nice. This was the profound reality that we had experienced and in

order to represent it, Cox and I adopted non-realist filmic conventions, such as image and sound montage, in order to draw attention to the experience we had of Nice. The montage, it was hoped, would be unsettling for the viewer on both a cognitive and sensual level. This movement ends with the use of another visual coda: that of a boat gently pulling into shore, with a dissolve of a parachute as it gently falls into the sea as a way of wrapping up the scene. The afternoon now dissolves into early evening.

The early evening section utilizes largely static images of rooftops, buildings, seagulls sitting on chimney pots and cafes against the setting sun. The soundtrack is composed of synchronous and non-synchronous sounds of seagulls, swallows, the sea lapping, the distant hubbub of café life. This is a time of calm in the film. There is nothing remarkable in the editing, the sound, nor composition of the shots. However this is abruptly broken as we enter the penultimate movement, *Le Cirque de Nocturne*. Nighttime in Nice really is a time of vibrant celebration, especially in and around the old town and the beach. The calm of the previous scene is interrupted as we cut to Capoeoira performers, accompanied by a Brazilian folk band. The sequence that follows was incredibly complex to construct. We used a series of images of dancers performing to their various musical accompaniments. This proved very difficult to transition smoothly from one scene to the next, however here my skills as a DJ, with my ability to match beats, became very useful. Even though it took an enormous amount of time to match the music and the timing of the dancers together, it was a very rewarding challenge to successfully complete. Close attention had to be paid to the beats per minute of the various pieces of

music, as well as their pitch. At times the various pieces of music would have to be slowed down so that the BPM of the music was in synch with the next piece of music that was being mixed in. The music, at times, had to be pitched up or down to compliment the transition from one tune to the next. Our overall aim in this section was to offer the listener a pleasant sensual sonic experience. Cox's musical background, with regard to his compositional skills as both a classical composer and popular music producer, informed the way in which he devised the more complex sequences such as the one described above:

> '...the combination of street music and other kinds of sounds is always predicated on that fact that it should make some kind of musical sense and that it should be an enjoyable listen in its own right...In practice, what this means is that editing decisions were made on this basis so if a certain sonic or visual edit did not satisfy these requirements, a new one needed to be found.' (Cox 2013: 101)

While the sound composition of *Le Cirque de Nocturne* aimed to provide the listener with sensory pleasure, there were moments of disquiet and disharmony. The sonic signifiers here included brooding chords from an accordion or piano, both played by street musicians and then combined with discordant sounds such as a baby crying or a siren from a police car. These moments coincided with images of street dwellers and beggars: a sound motif that was, by now, well established in the film. Again, we aimed to draw attention to the binary opposition of wealth and poverty in Niçois society using sonic gestures as a form of 'signposting' for the listener in order to,

‘…point up the stark contrast between the life-situations of the

individuals depicted. This of course takes us back to Vigo again with his

view of Nice as a "whole town begging from sheer laziness", though it

was more our intention to make a simple contrast between those more

or less fortunate (and their immediate proximity) than to cast

aspersions about laziness (or indeed decadency).' (Cox 2013: 96)

In this section of the film, both Cox and I increased the deployment of visual effects, such as the use of slow motion photography, dissolves, pull focus, superimpositions and slow-shutter speed cinematography. We felt it was appropriate to use these effects in this section as they added a greater degree of aesthetic vibrancy, which matched the vibrancy and revelry of nighttime Nice. The sequence eventually finds a more sedate pace through the use of long takes of sweeping panoramic shots of *Le Promenade Des Anglais.* The night section ends with a shot of an empty beach at nighttime and the sound of stiletto heals on a pavement drifting into the distance.

Un Autre Jour heralds a new day and so the cycle of dawn to dusk begins again. Morning is signified through the inclusion of shots of empty beaches and sun loungers being arranged. We return to a market and the monotony of everyday life. The editing is fairly slow and the overall feel is of morning calm. Diegetic sounds are used in synch with the images, until an abrupt moment where we reintroduce the image of a homeless man sleeping on the pavement. Again Cox and I overlay the image with discordant sounds; in this instance we hear the sound of a car door slamming as the image appears, as well as the ominous sound of a piano and a police siren. The symphony of Nice ends with an image of the accordion player, who we see for the first time, just as he sends his musical performance.

We return to nature, with the aid of an audio transition between the sound of the accordion (with added reverb and delay in order to sustain the note) and the sound of a motor scooter and the reintroduction of the cicadas. The image sequence is in reverse when compared to the opening of the film: the shots begin with extreme close ups of trees and eventually give way to extreme long shots of the mountain vistas. This acts as a visual and sonic "bookend" for the film whereby the listener is reminded of the city they have left behind, signified through the use of some of the sounds of Nice already heard earlier in the film. The sounds are treated with echo, delay and reverb in order to suggest that what we have seen and heard is now simply a distant memory of the manmade world we have now left behind and so the cycle of life ends as it has begun: back to nature.

Overall, *A Film About Nice* was a challenging starting point for my thesis. I deliberately chose what I would call a banal subject - the substance of everyday life, in order to try and make something "epic" out of the ordinary and the everyday. It was a film that lacked any real dramatic narrative development and as such would always run the danger of "losing" an audience. In fact one student neatly summed up his disdain for the film when he asked the question: 'What is the point of that?' Upon reflection, it really was quite a pertinent question, what, indeed, was the point in that? My response to the student was that I was attempting to take rather unremarkable footage and render it remarkable through formal technique. I wanted nothing more than to capture the "essence" of Nice, as expressed through the language of film. However in reality I had a more serious objective: how could I use

film techniques in order to make a political statement through its form rather than content?

It was in this quest that I found influence in the writings and work of filmmakers such as Vertov and Vigo. Their real political work was done at the level of audience perception, rather than through overt political statement. The representational strategies they adopted became political statements in themselves. Both of these filmmakers encouraged the viewer to see the world a new and their innovative films invited the viewer to experience film on a deeper intellectual level. They were reflexive texts in that attention was drawn to the specificity of the medium itself. These were film workers who explored its potential signifying capabilities in terms of its formal qualities, rather than through exposition. As such the central focus of this PhD is not necessarily concerned with *what* my films try to say, rather the focus would be on *how* they say. As a consequence of this approach, the *form* of any film I would make for this thesis would always take precedence over the *content*.

A Critical Evaluation of *Mechanized Deconstruction* (performed at *Documentary Now* University of Westminster January 2011)

If *A Film About Nice* made an attempt to engage the viewer/listener on a sensorial rather than cognitive level, then *Mechanized Deconstruction* was a research project that aimed to provide a more immersive sensorial experience for the viewer/listener. At the *Documentary Now 2010* conference*,* Cox and I introduced the concept of *Expanded Documentary.* This form of documentary took inspiration from *Expanded Cinema* (EC), which emerged in the 1960s. The idea of EC saw film move away from the cinema theatre as a site of exhibition, to that of the gallery and

gig space. During the 1960s, against a backdrop of rapid development of electronic audio-visual devices and the proliferation of mass media technologies, audio-visual art began to flourish, with Nam June Paik, Malcolm LeGrice, John Cage, Peter Kubelka and Tony Conrad being seen as the initial pioneers of this burgeoning art form. Leighton argues that at the philosophical heart of this movement was the idea that art could serve a progressive socio-cultural and ideological purpose, whereby art, 'possessed special and redemptive powers that, when combined with technology, could counteract what was perceived as the latter's deleterious effects' (2008:15). As such this new electronic art existed as a form of social, ideological and perceptual activism, much like the work of filmmakers such as Vertov and Vigo discussed above.

Andy Warhol's *Velvet Underground* made a significant contribution to the concept of EC, realized through their "happenings", which were events that consisted of a kaleidoscopic mixture of cinematic visuals, music and live performance. Film footage would be projected onto multiple screens, as well as the projection of psychedelic patterns formed by dripping coloured inks onto oil. Perhaps the most famous happening of all was *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* (1966). This event included the projection of film footage, alongside the use of strobe lighting; slide projections; musical performance by *Velvet Underground* and a performing dancer troupe. The result was what Gene Youngblood called a 'hellish sensorium…Warhol's show…is an experience, not an idea.' (Youngblood 1970:103) It is important here to note the use of the term 'experience'. Experience is a central feature of expanded cinema; as

such, the need to "be there" is essential in terms of *experiencing* the perceptual affects of EC.

Walter Benjamin's concept of the auratic nature of the original work of art is useful here when analyzing the nature of EC. Benjamin argues that a sense of aura is lost through the mechanical reproduction of a work of art. While Benjamin is discussing this in relation to the reproduction of a painting, where the viewer needs to look at the original in order to "feel" its aura, one can apply his ideas to EC from the point of view that any mechanical reproduction of the event will naturally lose its aura. An example of this is Ronald Nameth's 18-minute film, also called *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* (1966), which was filmed at the happenings over a period of a week in New York City. While Youngblood claims that the film expresses 'the ethos of the entire pop life-style' and shows how the film *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* captures the essence of the event by offering 'a spectacular sense of frantic uncontrollable energy, communicated almost entirely by Nameth's exquisite manipulation of the medium' (Youngblood 1970: 103), that essence *cannot* ever be captured in its entirety because the aura is lost in the mechanical reproduction of the said event. The spectator of the film will always be an *observer*, whereas a person who experienced the actual event is a *participant.* In a phenomenological sense, they *are* the event. According to Youngblood, the experience associated with being at an EC event can actually expand the consciousness of the participant:

> When we say expanded cinema we actually mean expanded consciousness.
> Expanded cinema does not mean computer games, video phosphors, atomic
> light, or spherical projections. Expanded cinema isn't a movie at all: like life it's a
> process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his

consciousness outside of his mind, in front of his eyes. One can no longer

specialize in a single discipline and hope truthfully to express a clear picture of

its relationships in the environment. This is especially true in the case of the

intermedia network of cinema and television, which now function as nothing

less than the nervous system of mankind. (Youngblood 1970: 41)

The overall objective of EC was to explore the how the uses of new electronic media can impact upon existence as a whole. Youngblood points out that EC is the melting of all art forms, such as film, photography, music, live performance and so on, into the multimedia event. This new immersive experience also aimed to break down the barrier between performer and audience and as Rees points out, EC 'challenged existing notions of cinema as a commercialized regime of passive consumption and entertainment.' (in Curtis et al. 2011: 13). These new events were unashamedly utopian in terms of their ideals and this is certainly reflected in the writings of pioneers such as Youngblood and Marshall McLuhan.

This utopianism has parallels with the ideals associated with Dziga Vertov, outlined in Section 1. Vertov and his associates in the constructivist and futurists movements, heralded new industrial technologies, much like those who were connected with EC, heralded new digital technologies. They also share a similar creative sensibility in that kinesis is a central aesthetic feature of both futurism and constructivism, as much as it is in EC.

The term *kinetic* generally indicates motion of material bodies and the

forces and energies associated with it. Thus to isolate a certain type of

film as kinetic and therefore different to other films means we're talking

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about different forces and energies than about matter. *Kinaesthetic*,

therefore is the manner of experiencing a thing through the forces and

energies associated with its motion. This is called *kinaesthesia,* the

experience of sensory perception…It's not what we're seeing so much as

the process and effect seeing: that is, the phenomenon of experience

itself, which exists only in the viewer. (Youngblood 1970: 97)

This interest in the way media can impact and mould human perception was also shared by Vertov, who developed his "Theory of Intervals", which Petrić claims 'draws a lot from the constructivist conception of film as a "building" comprised of many bits and pieces whose ultimate meaning depends on the interrelationship between various components.' (Petric 1978: 27) He goes on to argue that Vertov 'achieved a high degree of cinematic abstraction through the battle of different visual structures and movements, producing a "kinetic impact", the basis of *kinaesthesia,* the most unique experience that cinema can provide ' (Petric 1978: 27). This emphasis on the interrelationship between film's components, echoes the ideas of Youngblood and his insistence on the unification of intermedia, whereby the 'dynamic interaction of formal proportions in kinaesthetic cinema evokes cognition in the inarticulate conscious, which I call *kinetic empathy*.' (Youngblood 1970: 97) It is apparent that both Vertov and those associated with EC were intent on creating an experience that could change the perceptual nature of humans. A form of propaganda no less, but one that was not necessarily driven by rhetoric, rather

one that was driven by energy and forces, or what Vertov called, in his "We"

manifesto, *kineticheskoe rezreshenie* (kinetic resolution).

In linking the practices associated with EC, with those of documentary, I am

making an attempt to expand the form of documentary film, in order to

relocate documentary away from the two dimensional, toward a multi-

faceted and multimedia event. The overall aim is an attempt to capture the

kinetic impact associated with the happenings of the 60s. As a way of

authoring these documentary events, I use technologies that are more

associated with club and DJ culture. Instead of the author-as-filmmaker, the

author is now VJ, or as I prefer to call it, the *audio-visual engineer*.

The definition of the term VJ is far from absolute – some refer to a VJ as the

'video jockey', the 'visual jockey' or 'video jammer', whatever the term one

uses to describe the VJ, their contribution to club culture remains largely

unexplored when compared to that of the DJ (disc jockey), at least in

academic circles. Evidence of this can be found in the lack of scholarly writing

on VJ culture. The techniques and aesthetics associated with the VJ are both

numerous and diverse. The aim here is not to discuss any particular artist,

style or technique in detail; rather, I aim to assess the potential role of the VJ

as someone who can engage particular audiences with innovative forms of

visual and aural ethnographic knowledge through the live performance of

audio-visual documentary within the club arena. It is my argument here that

through the live performance of documentary, the club space can be

redefined as both a place of pleasure and also one of social learning. If

documentary film in general can be seen as having social and cultural education at its philosophical core, then the VJ as documentarian has the ability to expand the documentary form and relocate its exhibition to a space where new audiences are sought. In addition, the extended function of the VJ will enable new insights into the role of the DJ as curator of found media recordings. What follows it is an account of the ways in which audio-visual documentary can contribute to club culture, as well as an explanation of how DJ culture can propagate new forms of documentary practice. As a result the VJ/DJ is able to create an immersive aural and visual symphonic experience for attendees at events and as VJ Oxygen points out 'VJs enhance the overall atmosphere by visualizing sound. Improvising with various [digital] media, VJs enable us to experience new forms of expression in live visual performance more than any other art form. Vjing is about the now. An instant reflection. A moment in time…' (in Faulkner 2006). Here Oxygen echoes what Younglood describes as the immediacy of experience at one of Warhol's happenings.

Visual projections have a long history of use in the club environment and are becoming more popular through the development of commercially available VJ technologies such as the *Korg Kaptivator*, a piece of VJ hardware that can sample and sequence visual loops, not unlike the way grooveboxes, such as the *Akai MPC,* treat beat loops. Increasingly DJ software packages, such as *Serato* and *Virtual DJ*, have the ability to combine sound and image sequencing through the use of VJ plug-ins. Alongside these are stand alone VJ packages, such as *Grand VJ, Resolume* and *Modul8*, which have the ability to

synchronise visual movement with the output of the DJ through MIDI. These developments have allowed the club experience to become an increasingly visual, as well as aural experience. What I would argue here, however, is that much of the visuals we see in club spaces lack any real *documentary value*. In my experience as a clubber over the past 30 years, the majority of the visuals that I have seen tend to be graphical in nature, often abstract patterns such as fractal imagery, and are what I would call "eye candy" acting as some kind of "visual confectionary". While these can be interesting to watch in themselves and can literally be mesmerizing, I often felt a sense of disappointment when watching them and I would argue that they serve no real purpose other than simply to entertain in a rather superficial manner.

There are some exceptions to that go beyond the "visual confectionary" seen in most club/live music events. Aston (2017) points to the recent collaboration between documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis and the musician and artist, Robert Del Naja (AKA *3D*). Curtis provided the visual backdrop to Del Nala's band, *Massive Attack*, during a gig at Manchester International Festival 2013. The event took place in a disused warehouse at the back of Piccadilly Station. The stark interior of the warehouse was adorned with multiple screens, configured into a 3 sided wall of images, with the audience of around 1500 people surrounded on 3 sides by a barrage of images, accompanied by the foreboding trip-hop of *Massive Attack*. The soundtrack also included audio-samples from news stories, well known films, television adverts, political speeches and so on. The overall aesthetic is closely reminiscent of the

"happenings" discussed above. An incessant cacophony of sound and image bombards the audience. The images Curtis uses are sampled from a range of sources, such as films, television programmes, news reports, television adverts, CCTV cameras, military footage and the quick-fire montages are often played in time to the beat of the music, rather like a VJ would do in a club environment. This is very much in keeping with the concept of *expanded documentary*, whereby actuality footage is sequenced in particular ways in order to have a powerful impact on the spectator.

The overall cinematic experience is very much in keeping with Youngblood's (1970) concept of *kinaesthetic cinema* discussed above and can also be closely related to the montage work of Dziga Vertov. It is evident that Curtis and Del Naja aimed to present a certain ideological perspective on the cultural logic of late capitalism. Their message can be read as an anti-capitalist polemic, which, through the use of montage editing, set out to encourage the audience to see the world according to their interpretation of it. Again, this is very much in keeping with the constructivist approach to representation.

Curtis and Del Naja can be seen as building on the aims of provocative artists and filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov, and by using similar techniques of signification, such as deconstructed montage and immersive live performance, are in essence maintaining a link between the avant garde of the 1920s, the pop-artists of the 1960s, and the rave culture of the 1990s. Similar to Vertov's intention of creating a more informed reader of a film through filmic technique, Curtis and Del Naja invite the audience to

experience a much "thicker" cinematic experience, in order to engage with sound and image on a deeper level, and as Aston points out, 'the audience is bombarded with an intense sensory experience, intended to actively engage the viewer.' (Aston 2017: 228)

For Aston, like Youngblood, the idea of experiencing an event live is absolutely key to the effectiveness of expanded cinema and expanded documentary. Aston calls this an *emplaced interaction* of the audience and argues that the live audio-visual documentary event engages our senses in ways that the traditional documentary form are not capable of, and 'can be a way to engage our full complement of senses by bringing us together through physical co-presence.' (Aston 2017: 234) Here the reader can see that the scholars of documentary film still laud the potential of audio-visual culture as being progressive, in that they can facilitate a sense of social and cultural cohesion. It seems that the spirit of filmmakers such as Dziga Verto is very much alive today, with the concept of kinesis at the core of contemporary aesthetic approaches of audio-visual documentary practice.

I make the claim here, that through the incorporation of what I call "actuality footage", i.e. documentary footage of actual real life phenomena, into the club/gig arena, the VJ has the ability to make a contribution to social and ethnographic knowledge, and as such, make a link between DJ culture and civic education. In this way, clubbing could be seen as sharing a purpose and philosophy with public service broadcasting: one that intends to (in very Reithian terms), inform, educate and entertain.

I also propose here that while VJ culture may be regarded as a development in expanded cinema and can indeed expand the documentary form, likewise, VJ culture can be regarded as an expansion of DJ culture, in which the VJ adds to the experience of recorded music, whereby the performing musician is absent and, as such, the VJ can fill this role of performer. As Crevits points out in his discussion of house parties of the 1980s: 'The religious aspect of these parties comprised a leader and followers, and the visual presence of a single DJ could not fulfil that need. The use of multiple screens…replaced the lost power of a leader by putting emphasis on a total spectacle' (in Faulkner 2006: 14). My concept of expanded clubbing is closely related to what Crevits calls 'total spectacle', again echoing the immersive experience of the happenings, however it is through the use of actuality footage within the audio-visual performance that I make an attempt to forge the link between VJing and documentary culture. Ultimately this is what defines expanded documentary and indeed expanded clubbing, as a form of civic education rather than merely having entertainment value.

My first live performance of documentary took place at The Regent Street Cinema as part of the *Documentary Now* conference 2011, one year after I first introduced the idea of expanded documentary/expanded clubbing at *Documentary Now* conference 2010. Cox and I were invited to do a live performance of expanded documentary at the 2011 event, however I submitted a proposal to *perform* a conference paper instead, which would, in a wholly reflexive way, reveal our working practices and the aesthetics

associated with those practices. With a full theatre of around 250 delegates, Cox and I took to the stage with a range of VJ/DJ hardware and software and proceeded to perform our conference "paper", of which a live recording was made.

The performance began with a live image of Cox and I sat at our machines. This was achieved by adding a live camera to one of the channels on the video mixer, which captured the VJs about to perfrom. This was an attempt to add an extra layer of reflexivity to the overall piece. This was a direct link to Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera*, where the cinema goers in that film could see themselves watching a film about the making of a film. In this case, we had a camera filming us, doing a performance of a live documentary, about the live performance of a documentary, while at the same time we had a camera on the audience, filming them watching us. Unfortunately the signal from the camera on the audience failed, so this reflexive element could not be included in the mix.

The piece itself is a rather crude combination of sounds and images from a range of work by Ruttman, Vertov and Vigo and includes some of Vertov's sound work from his film *Enthusiasm* (1931). Added to this we used images from our city symphony about Nice as well as a "mini" city symphony of Toxeth, Liverpool, which happens to be the area that I live. In footage that was recorded specifically for this performance, I ask the question: 'What happens when we allow the machine to randomize the narrative?" At this point, Cox and I press a button on each of our laptops, which does indeed

randomize the playback and treatment of sounds and images. What is interesting here is that the outcome of this randomization can produce unexpected juxtapositions and redefine narrative structures. The piece thus becomes reflexive of the machine itself. In a sense one could argue that the text itself is free from the ideological influence of the static nature of the narrative in traditional documentary films. Here the machine becomes the author. Of course I still have to choose which images and sounds should be included in the file banks, however this form of expanded documentary can produce new forms of exposition, developed by machine, rather than a human.

The recording of the event allowed Cox to produce certain sequences or use certain special effects that we would not necessarily have thought of in the first place, had it not been for the randomized elements of the piece. These unintended combinations have helped to inform some of our sound and image editing work on projects we have since worked on.

Feedback on the performance was largely positive, however Particia Zimmerman described it as 'an ambitious but somewhat aesthetically and conceptually undeveloped live video performance inspired by Vertov's city film mixed with club culture as an alternative to a traditional academic paper.' (Zimmerman 2011) I disagree with Zimmerman's claim that the piece is conceptually undeveloped. I would argue the concept was certainly developed, evidence of which is contained in the discussion above. Regardless of one's take on the performance, I propose that the documentary "event"

can go some way in facilitating an expansion of the documentary form and with it, encourage critical debates about the nature of documentary as live performance, as well as invigorating the form of documentary film itself. If nothing else, the practical research I have carried out in this area has helped to inform certain aesthetic strategies I have since adopted in more traditional forms of documentary practice, whereby narrative structures are reconstructed in the edit suite, rather than being improvised on the fly, as they are in the live performances I have produced.

Two Live Performances and one short cinepoem: *From Toxteth to Nice* (2011); *Deconstructed Voices* (2012) and *There* (2014)

After the performance at *Documentary Now 2011*, I continued to develop the concept and practice of live performance as a way of expanding the documentary form. As a city symphony maker, I have always had an interest in the representation of *place* and it was this interest that informed a number of practical research projects that would contribute to my PhD thesis.

From Toxteth to Nice (2011) was performed live at The Watershed, Bristol by Geoffrey Cox and myself and was incorporated into the *i-docs 2011* conference. The experience proved to be a rather painful learning process for both Cox and myself, in that we both saw the performance as a disaster. Having said that, we both felt that there were certainly mitigating circumstances, which if the reality was different, could have resulted in a performance that we could have perceived as a success rather than a failure. Despite the rather sobering nature of the experience, it was a useful exercise

as it highlighted how important the context of viewing is when *experiencing* a live documentary event.

When we were initially invited by the organisers of *i-docs* to perform at their conference, the brief was a rather informal one: we would be closing the conference and throwing an "A/V party", which blurred the lines between documentary and VJ/DJ culture. In essence both Cox and I saw it as a way of providing what we called "visual and aural wallpaper", acting as a backdrop in a socializing space for delegates to mingle. We aimed to shift between an electro-acoustic performance of aural documentary footage, accompanied by visual documentary footage and the tunes provided by the two DJs hired to play (Myself and DJ Paul Moylan). We were asked what seating arrangements we would like as a set up for the arena and while this might sound like an incidental detail, it actually became a crucial element in the "failure" of our event. Cox and I felt that an informal arrangement was required, therefore we opted for the "cocktail party" set up. This consisted of a number of round tables with chairs, set out in a rather random pattern throughout the room. There would also be high-level tables, around which delegates could stand and chat and enjoy a drink. This set up would have been ideal, as it allowed the delegates to intermingle, move around the space and if they so wished glance up at the images and listen to the sounds as a backdrop to their evening of socializing.

A week or so before the event, Cox and I were informed that the night had been opened up to the paying general public, with tickets costing £7.50.

Immediately Cox and I felt somewhat uncomfortable with this, as we imagined that the paying public would obviously "expect" something for their money. Cox and I had initially seen our role as providing a (hopefully) pleasant and interesting accompaniment to a social event for conference delegates, however this appeared to have changed rather dramatically. Our fears were further compounded once we arrived at the venue: instead of having the "cocktail party" set up, the seating arrangement consisted of tiered seating, facing a screen with a single table, in front of the screen, behind which, Cox and I would "perform". This rendered the event as one associated with cinema going and went against the grain of what we had originally intended to provide. The performance was to last for one hour and would basically consist of a two hundred strong audience watching two guys standing on a stage, pressing some buttons, however we were no Kraftwerk!

It was a very long and painful sixty minutes that we endured and an experience that I would not want to go through again in a hurry. We knew from the moment that we saw the seating arrangement that this would be a disaster. But however painful the experience, we did learn an important lesson about situating an audience within such an event and just how much the context of viewing can affect that of reception. The way that the audience was seated, as uninvolved spectators gazing at the performers on stage pressing buttons on machines and dragging a mouse across a computer screen, was hardly enthralling viewing. The link between club culture and documentary culture could no longer be forged as a result of this set up, and

as such, the aims and objectives of the performance (to create a link between club culture and documentary) were compromised.

With regard to the content, rather than context of the performance, audio and visual footage shot in Toxteth, as well as audio-visual loops taken from *A Film About Nice* were used, alongside samples from other well-known city symphonies. The performance followed the usual dawn to dusk narrative structure, however both Cox and I realized that we were rather "exposed" in our lack of both content and innovation during the performance. Neither of us imagined that we would be performing in front of a transfixed audience in this way and upon reflection both Cox and I knew that if we were to persevere with developing the live performance of documentary, then we needed to enhance it by including other elements into the mix.

There was a definite need to add a more dynamic and interesting dimension to our events. As a result of this desire to expand the form and content of our performances, we developed the project *Deconstructing Voices.* Instead of the live element simply consisting of Cox and I editing images and sounds in an improvisational manner, we invited poets to perform their work live, with Cox and I augmenting their poems by looping their words, cutting up the structure of their poems and reordering them using real time audio effects units and sequencing software. Cameras were brought into the mix, shooting real time footage of the poets and these images would then be remixed and combined with the other images that we had already sampled. This performance was better received and both Cox and I believed it to be much more of a success.

This use of poetry in documentary allowed us to follow in the tradition of some of the early British documentary filmmakers, who made poetic-expository films such as *Night Mail* (1936 Watt and Wright) and *Coal Face* (1935 Cavalcanti)*.* Here Cox and I wanted to create a more contemporary version of poetry, which would be in fitting with the sample/mash up culture of late early 21st Century audio-visual practice. In 2012 at the *Chapter and Verse Literature Festival* Cox and I performed the piece *Deconstructing Voices* to an audience of around 60 people in The Bluecoat Theatre, Liverpool. Using audio-visual footage from a range of city symphonies, including those that we had produced, as well as the work of Vigo, Ruttman, Cavalcanti and Vertov, Cox and I, alongside 3 poets, produced a performance lasting 45 minutes. The piece built on some of concepts and practices of *Mechanized Deconstruction* and *From Toxteth to Nice* in an attempt to represent a sense of place. One of the poets, Lena Valutye from Lithuania, wrote a poem, titled *There,* about her homeland. The poem referenced a pastoral as opposed to the urban landscapes one would find in a city symphony. Previously, fast paced montage had become a defining aesthetic in much of the work Cox and I had done together, especially with regard to live performances. This approach, however, did not suit the atmosphere of *There* and this subsequently has had a significant impact on the way I make documentaries. I had often adopted a dynamic approach to editing, using fast paced montage; seldom did I choose to slow down the pace of my films. As Valutye voiced her poem during the live event, I unwittingly slowed down my live editing process and found myself using images that had minimal animation within the frame. These images

complimented the words of the poem and heralded a new, more considered, approach to my documentary filmmaking.

As a result of this new direction, I approach both the composition of shots and their subsequent sequencing, in a much more measured and precise way. Previous to this my style was arguably "gritty". In fact that is an adjective that many people have used to describe both my aesthetic, as well as my procedural approach to documentary filmmaking. Working within the context of live performance has certainly impacted upon the way that I now work.

An example of this new approach can be seen in the documentary cine-poem *There*, that Cox and I produced after its initial live performance. The pace of the film is extremely slow and is complimented by the sense of minimal movement within the frame. This was a deliberate attempt to encourage the viewer/listener to focus on both the words and sound design of the film. There is no direct connection between the words and the images, however through the choice of shots, in which content could be seen as minimalist, Cox and I are again aiming to increase the significance of the aural signifier, by reducing the complexity of the visual image. This lack of visual distraction allows the viewer/listener to focus their attention on the sonic signifiers, with the idea being that the authors have gone some way in reordering the hierarchy of significance between the visual and aural signifiers.

Spa Mill in Slaithwaite, West Yorkshire, is the last remaining yarn spinning mill

in Britain. Situated in the Colne Valley, the mill represents one of the final

working remnants of the textile industry that played such an important role in

the spread of industrialization across the globe.

Cox and I approached the mill owner, asking if we could make a film that

aimed to capture the atmosphere of the day-to-day workings of the mill. The

owner was more than happy to accommodate us, explaining that he would

very much like to have an audio-visual artifact that could preserve the history

of the mill. It soon became apparent that that the business could fold as a

result of economic uncertainties in the global textile industry.

The workings of the mill itself provided a rich landscape in terms of interesting

visual and sonic signifiers. Cox and I had to explain to the mill owner that the

film we would produce would not follow in the canonical documentary modes

of the expository or interactive and therefore would not go any way into

explaining the yarn making process - rather we wished to adopt a more poetic

approach, which would capture the atmosphere of the workplace. The owner

was more than happy for us to produce a poetic film, even though it would

lack an informative element.

It was intended that this film would represent the pinnacle of my research,

where the subject matter of footage would wholly suit the formalist approach

that I had been developing over the course of this thesis. The incredible

complexity of the soundscape of the mill would allow Cox and I to focus on its subtleties and allow us to treat the aural signifier with as much significance as that of the visual. The film would follow in the tradition of the industrial symphonies, which had emerged in the 1930s and were informed by the approach of the city symphonists a decade earlier. Notable examples of industrial symphonies include Joris Ivens' *Philips Radio* (1931); Bert Haanstra's *Glas* (1958) and Paul Dickson's *Stone Into Steel* (1960). All of these films incorporate a rhythmic montage style of editing and the cinematography often adopts unusual compositions reminiscent of the constructivist photographer, Rodchenko. The overall aesthetic closely relates to the concept of ostranenie: the presentation of everyday activity in an unfamiliar way achieved through abstract compositional style, montage editing and obscure narrative structures.

The technique of making the familiar strange runs throughout *The Mill* by using extreme close up macro photography, unusual compositional style and a subtle treatment and layering of diegetic sounds. The overall aim of the film is to encourage not only reduced listening, whereby the listener focuses on the sonic qualities of the audio track rather than its referential quality, but also to encourage what I call *enhanced viewing*. Here the viewer is encouraged to focus on the compositional, geometric and rhythmic qualities of the image, achieved through a process of defamiliarisation, whereby the abstract compositional aspects of the shot distance the viewer from its referential aspects.

This defamiliarising approach also informs the way that the audio track is treated. This is achieved by using high quality microphones placed in close proximity to the machines so that sounds can be recorded in extreme close up, producing a recording of tremendous clarity and detail. As a result of this approach the listener accesses sounds that would normally be imperceptible to the human ear, adding to the "making strange" of the working environment of the mill. Here it is my claim that through the adoption of a more abstract approach to documentary filmmaking, the viewer/listener experiences an enhanced impression of a specific environment, whereby a sense of realism is achieved through the non-realist filmic techniques described above. In this instance, "enhanced" refers to the viewer/listener experiencing a sensorial rather than cognitive vignette of the everyday life of a working mill. This idea is closely related to Vertov's concept of *kino pravda* whereby the representational strategies Vertov deployed act as the 'elaboration of a new "vocabulary"' (Michelson 1984: xxviii). Cox and I build on Vertov's strategies, by adopting his *kino-eye* to cinematography, as well as applying his speculative writings on the *radio-ear* to the realm of our audio design. Of course Vertov was not able to effectively develop his *radio-ear* concept in a practical context, due to the limitations of sound technology at the time, but due to significant developments in audio technology, Cox and I have used Vertov's ideas to inform our own practice in order to invite the listener to *hear* the world anew, rather like Vertov encouraged his viewers to *see* the world anew.

The Mill: Study No.1 follows a simple narrative arc: the films begins with a fairly slow paced montage of external shots of the mill, while interior diegetic sounds are layered over the image to give a sense of the indoor space. Each shot was of an equal length, in order to develop a measured and metronomic structure to the piece. The atmosphere in this short section is a tranquil one. This comes to an abrupt end when the image jumps to extreme close ups of heavy machinery, combined with a pounding audio track composed of mainly synchronous diegetic sounds. Here Cox and I aimed to express the intensity of the mill, through juxtaposing this sequence with that of the previous tranquil exterior sequence, rather like we did in the early stages of *Nice*. The editing process was particularly complex in this section, both in terms of audio and video footage. Matching the rhythms and movements of the machines was a challenge, as we wanted to create a definite ¾ time signature here. This metered style of editing was used to encourage the viewer/listener to "lock into" the rhythms of the mill, as well as drawing attention to the stylistic approach of the filmmakers.

The film was divided into various movements, echoing the symphonic approach. Our production notes included:

1. The geographic context of the mill (external shot sequence) - tranquil

2. Interior "hectic rhythmic section" - chaotic

3. Establishing the machines using medium shots of machines – calmer

4. Balletic section with introduction of humans to the scene – graceful

5. Surreal section with use of macro photography and high shutter speed video – ethereal

6. Closing sequence, minimal movement within the frame – stillness/emptiness

By dividing the film into movements, it allowed Cox and I to focus on creating specific atmospheres for each movement (such as "ethereal", "graceful", "chaotic" and so on). This is where a strict formalist approach provides the tools to convey a particular atmosphere. Here Cox and I try to *show* the mill to the viewer/listener, rather than *tell* them about the mill. Beattie's (2008) concept of *documentary display* is of particular relevance to our approach here, in that Cox and I aimed to shift the documentary text away from the sober discourse that Nichols (1991) speaks of, toward a text that aims to entertain and provide sensuous pleasure for the viewer/listener. Knowledge production becomes visceral, subjective and affective, rather than merely cognitive. It is my argument here that the avant-garde nonfiction has the ability to signify in particular ways through the use of poetic and reflexive techniques, which ultimately draw attention to the process of meaning making itself, whereas the discursive capabilities of the more conventional modes of documentary, such as the expository, observational and interactive modes, are limited in their signifying capabilities. This deeper level of signification allows the viewer/listener to engage with documentary in a different way to a more conventional approach, as Platinga points out:

'The avant-garde nonfiction film encourages an interplay between two ways of viewing the film. On the one hand, the spectator perceives the referent through the iconic, indexical images (and perhaps sounds); on the other hand, style makes referentiality difficult, and becomes itself the primary object of interest. When we view an avant-garde nonfiction, we constantly slide between seeing the images as either a window on the world or a sequence of non-referential images…these films are reflexive *in a specific way* in that they are fundamentally "about" the documentary and are "about" representation itself.' (1997: 176-179)

This sliding between seeing the images as window on the world and a sequence of non-referential images is particularly evident in the "Surreal Section" from 6'13" to 7'43". Here I used an 85mm macro lens so that I could achieve extreme close up images of the detail of some of the mill's machines, and, by opening up the aperture to its widest setting, I was able to capture a very shallow depth of field, which rendered the background as a blur. I also used a very high shutter speed of 1/2000 of a second, which meant that the movement of the yarn was now visible to the camera's eye, whereas the human eye was not able to capture such high-speed movement. These cinematographic techniques, coupled with a precise, often symmetrical compositional style, gave the sequence an abstract lyrical quality, which is very much in keeping with the poetic mode of documentary. The abstract quality was augmented by the sound track, which adopted similar processing techniques to the image, For instance, the close-up macro photography was matched with close up audio recordings. Here Cox and I were able to isolate

some of the individual sounds that were imperceptible to the human ear,

rather like the fast shutter speed provided images that were imperceptible to

the human eye. For Cox and I, this section operated as the manifestation of

Vertov's *kino-eye* meeting his *radio-ear*:

> '"Film Eye" builds "film things" out of shots according to the "theory of
>
> intervals." This theory is based on the perceptual relationship of one shot
>
> composition to another; on the transition and juxtaposition between visual
>
> impulses. This connection between shots based on "intervals" is very complex,
>
> and consists of many interactions. Among the most important are: (1) the
>
> interaction of shot scales (close-up, medium-shot etc.), (2) the interaction of
>
> angles, (3) the interaction of movements within shots, (4) the interaction of
>
> light and dark, (5) the interaction of shooting speeds. Depending on these
>
> factors, the filmmaker decides: (a) the order and (b) the duration of each
>
> separate shot (in feet or frames). In addition to the relationship between any
>
> two shots (intervals) one must also consider the relationship of a single shot to
>
> all other shots; for they all must be integrated into a "montage battle" (Vertov
>
> in Petric 1978: 36)

The Mill: Study No.1 addresses all of the five interactions that Vertov highlights

above, with the movements of the machinery providing perfect fodder to

create a *montage battle*. For Cox and I to perfect this approach to filmmaking,

precision and attention to detail is absolutely key in terms of: the composition

of shot scale; the way that camera angles are composed; the way that the

movements within the frames are captured; the exposure of the shot in order

to produce particular shadows and highlights and the shutter speed and

frame-rate calculations in order to produce specific visual effects. And the only

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way to get close to Vertov's *kino-eye* is through the careful consideration of all the factors he outlines in the quote above. Where Cox and I are in a privileged position, however, is that developments in contemporary sound technology have allowed us to explore the concept of Vertov's *radio-ear*, in a practical context, something which primitive sound technology prevented Vertov from doing:

> 'We are promoting propaganda using facts, not on the level of vision alone, but on that of hearing too…If, with respect to vision, our kinok-observers have recorded visible life phenomena with cameras, we must now talk about recording audible facts. We're aware of one recording device; the gramophone. But there are other's more perfect; they record every rustle, every whisper, the sound of a waterfall, a public speaker's address…Technology is moving swiftly ahead. A method for broadcasting images by radio has already been invented. In addition, a method for recording auditory phenomena on film tape has been discovered. In the near future man will be able to broadcast to the entire world the visual and auditory phenomena recorded by the radio-movie camera.'
>
> (Vertov in Michelson 1984: 56)

These prophetic words were penned in 1925, a full 34 years before the invention of the synch-sound *radio-movie camera*. Where Vetov did have a (limited) opportunity to explore the potential of sound design, he organized audio footage, or *sound facts,* much in the same way as he organized his images: 'we did not limit ourselves to the simplest concurrence of sound and image, but followed the line of maximum resistance – under existing conditions – that of *complex interaction of sound with image.*' (Vertov in

Michelson 1984: 111) It is within the complex interaction of sound and image that my praxis has been realized.

Afterthought:

While my practical portfolio does make an attempt to address my research questions in a direct and tangible way, I cannot help but feel that my portfolio is lacking in something that I see as essential if documentary is to be seen as a progressive project: people and their stories. The initial impetus for wanting to be a documentary filmmaker was to offer a platform for people to tell their stories. For example, in *The Mill*, we do not learn anything about the people who feature in the film, many of whom would face the prospect of being made redundant. It was as if my focus on *form* over *content* had in some way disallowed me from being able to tell stories *about* people. Having said that, this does not render my thesis as having no point, in fact what this thesis has allowed is a total refocus on my approach to documentary filmmaking, with a key question being, how can formalist concerns contribute to telling stories *about* people in a deeper more meaningful way? For example I am currently making a pilot film for a feature length documentary about epilepsy. The central character is Wayne Smith, who at 18 years of age, suffered a head injury during a kickboxing tournament and was left in a coma. Smith was given nil chance of survival and yet with doctors about to switch off his life support machine, he opened an eye and thirty years on, he is now a successful trainer at his boxing gym in Toxteth, Liverpool. Smith now has restricted movement

on his right side, however it is his battle with epilepsy, which he developed after the injury, which occupies much of Smith's waking thoughts and this battle will become the central narrative feature of the film.

Much of the film's aesthetic will be seen as *traditional* in the sense that it will incorporate voice-over exposition and interviews with Smith as a way for the audience to learn about his experiences with severe head injury and his coming to terms with what he calls, the "everyday nightmare of living with epilepsy". However, the film will also have sections that can be seen as more formalist in their approach, which will disrupt the film's traditional style of exposition. This is where my practical research portfolio has had a major impact on refocusing my approach to making documentary films. I made the decision to adopt a more formalist approach after having a conversation with Smith in the pre-production phase of the pilot film. He recounted what it was like when he visits a venue that he is not familiar with. His first thoughts are 'what happens if I feel a seizure coming on?' His eyes will flit between searching for fire exits, assessing staircases, or looking for quiet spots where he can go if he feels a seizure coming on. In order to capture a sense of what he is feeling, rather than have him describe what is occurring, I will recreate his experiences using techniques more associated with experimental filmmaking. It is my claim here that by adopting a more avant-garde mode of representation in terms of sound and image, the spectator has the opportunity to get "closer" to what Smith is feeling, than they would if the film resorted to merely offering an explanation of Smith's experiences through

voiceover or interview. Here the use of more formalist techniques encourage the viewer to engage with the text on a more sensorial level, rather than a cognitive one, which ultimately can give a greater degree of insight and understanding of a particular emotion or scenario associated with Smith's experiences. The key challenge for myself in my future filmmaking practice is how to unify the conventional with the experimental.

I have included two other films in my portfolio, however I will not provide an in depth analysis of these films, as they are simply meant to act as an audio-visual "work out" for the audience. *In Dreams* and *Driven By Machines* are exercises in the exploration of rhythm, movement, colour and sound. They do have narratives, however like in dreams and hallucinations, an obvious narrative is not always apparent or explainable.

Epilogue:

Upon completion of this thesis, I ask myself, 'what has this thesis achieved and what is my *original contribution to knowledge*?' I assume this the place where I have to convince the reader of my achievements and of my original contribution to knowledge. Is this the place where I need to accept or reject any hypotheses I may have started with? Is this the place where I begin the conclusion with: 'The evidence provided suggests that…' If it is all of these then I now have the uneasy task of trying to answer those questions. However for me, it has not been about developing hypotheses, it has been about answering the research questions cited at the beginning of this thesis, with the major emphasis focusing on one question in particular: how can theory inform practice within the context of documentary filmmaking? In many ways the most revealing answer to that question is contained in the films themselves. If any conclusions are to be drawn, then those conclusions are contained in the films themselves. As a cautionary note, if it is accepted that all meaning is contingent, then any conclusions drawn from my practical portfolio depend on the interpretations of the viewer/listener rather than the researcher.

In the critical reflection of the practical portfolio I have addressed the question of how Nichols' modes have acted as a template for the development of particular representational strategies in my own work and how they may then impact upon audiences in particular ways. I have also offered an explanation as to how modes of representation associated with the Modernist movement have informed my work, as well as showing how sound design can make a

significant contribution to meaning in documentary practice. I have also shown how contemporary technologies, not normally associated with documentary practice, have helped to creative innovative and unexpected narrative structures in my documentary films.

To close, I would like to say that the outcome of my research indicates that the impact of theoretical discourse on my practice has resulted in *formal* concerns taking precedence over *content*. It is plain to see that the work and writings of Dziga Vertov have had a significant impact on the way that I make documentary films. Vertov has provided a conceptual framework that it still relevant today. His films beget other films: Vertov predicted that films such as *Man With a Movie Camera* would act as a compendium of film language and that future generations could consult it for guidance, and that is exactly what I have done over the course of this thesis. His writings still continue to provoke debate and influence filmmakers around the world. His legacy will always continue to live on, because he is one of the originators of documentary film. Vertov is the master of film praxis; he is the true innovator of film language; he is the founding father of *scholarly filmmaking*.

And while my films are not *political* in the way that Vertov's films are, my films do have a political dimension: one that can be linked with the politics of perception and the politics of representation. I too share Vertov's desire to encourage a new way of seeing and hearing the world, by using the arrangement of audio-visual "facts" as a vehicle for change. It has always been my belief that developing new and innovative ways of representing the world

can have a positive impact on the viewer/listener. Alternative modes of representation invite a heightened form of engagement with the text; the viewer/listener, if she is to benefit from this heightened perceptual capability, cannot be a "lazy" viewer/listener. They should, at times, be made to work when viewing and listening, just as the pupil is made to work hard in school, or the footballer on the training pitch. The viewer/listener will have to accept that sometimes, narrative structure may indeed be difficult and that sometimes, the everyday may indeed be rendered strange. But that need not be a problem and yet it does appear to be problem: do audiences really want to "work" when viewing and listening? Are forms of contemporary media simply a form of distraction from the banal repetition of the everyday and, as such, most media output (including documentary) encourages the viewer/listener to avoid working hard at all?

How can the documentary filmmaker change this situation then without having to metaphorically sever the eyeball? This is the very challenge at hand for the *scholarly* filmmaker. A challenge made more difficult as our ways of seeing have been anchored in the past by a tradition of producing texts that are "easy" to read and "easy" to follow. As viewer/listeners we revel in narrative resolution; we yearn for cause-and-effect logic; we want closure, explication and clarity. However if this is to change, and I believe that it needs to change, especially within the context of debates around the dumbing-down of television and the banal narcissistic nature of self-representation on social media networks, then it is up to the scholarly filmmaker, who is versed in both

theory and practice, to encourage different ways of seeing and different ways of hearing. My simple claim here is that if, through specific modes of representation, we adopt a theoretically informed approach to documentary filmmaking, then we have the ability to awaken the viewer/listener from their current slumber and we can create a more critically aware reader of media texts, which will be achieved by looking through the *kino-eye* and listening with the *radio ear*.

As such, I maintain that formalist concerns remain the central focus in my practice, the real skill in documentary filmmaking is not always related to a filmmaker's technical dexterity behind the camera or in the edit suite, but also in the way that documentarians interact with the subjects of their films; it is in this interaction between the two parties where film-truth really exists.

Fittingly, I would like to end this thesis with the words of Dziga Vertov, as it was him who made me realize that making documentary films is better than being a welder, even if it doesn't pay nearly as well.

> 'From the viewpoint of the ordinary eye you see untruth. From the viewpoint of the cinematic eye…you see truth. If it's a question of reading someone's thoughts at a distance…then you have that opportunity right here. It has been revealed by the kino-eye. It is possible, by means of the kino-eye to remove a man's mask, to obtain a bit of kinopravda. And it was the revelation of just this, by all means available to me, that I designated as my entire future path in cinema.' (Dziga Vertov in Michelson 1984: 124)

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Glas (dir. Haanstra 1958)

Housing Problems (dir. Anstey 1935)

If War Should Come (dir. Not credited 1939)

Kinoglaz (dir. Vertov 1924)

Man With a Movie camera (dir. Vertov 1929)

Manhatta (dir. Sheeler and Strand 1921)

New York (dir. Janzen 1911)

Night Mail (dir. Watt and Wright 1936)

Pacific 231 (dir. Mitry 1944)

Philips Radio (dir. Ivens 1931)

Primary (dir. Drew 1960)

Regen (dir. Ivens 1929)

Rien que les heures (dir. Cavalcanti 1926)

Rhythmus 21 (dir. Richter 1921)

Stone Into Steel (Dickson 1960)

Taris (dir. Vigo 1931)

Tarnation (Caouette 2003)

Une Chronique D'Eté (dir. Rouch 1960)

Weekend (dir. Ruttman 1930)

Words and Actions (Anderson 1943)

All the films in this practical portfolio can be found by copying the following

web addresses into your browser:

A Film About Nice

https://vimeo.com/208977546

Mechanized Deconstruction

https://vimeo.com/210559075

There

https://vimeo.com/208979476

Mill Study No.1

https://vimeo.com/205044352

Driven By Mcahines

https://vimeo.com/210555816

The text visible on the lens reads: CANON C-8 WIDE ATTACHMENT 87