

**The Construction of Reality In Documentary Film
and
Its Influence on The Viewer**

by

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Submitted to the Board of Cinema Studies
School of Film and Media Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

January 2019

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Introduction

Amidst a hunting party, Nanook the Bear prepares for his next meal. Inuits are seen both on foot and in boats along the arctic water, searching for walrus to hunt. A title card reads “With the discovery of a group asleep on shore the suspense begins.” On the rocky shore lay many unsuspecting walruses. The hunting party carries their gear toward their prey. One of them goes prone and closes in with the predatory stance of a lion. Another title card appears, stating “A ‘sentinel’ is always on watch, for, while walrus are ferocious in water, they are helpless on land.” The sentinel quietly waits for the right moment. The walruses spot the hunting party, and the sentinel charges, harpoon in hand and strikes. The strike lands, but the job is not yet done. The hunting party grabs onto a rope attached to the harpoon and wears the walrus out until it can fight no more. After much patience and effort, the hunting party goes home happy with the next meal for their families.

This scene, found in Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), details the hunting practices of the Inuit located near Hudson Bay in Canada. Flaherty utilizes several title cards along with a hunting scene to document the practices of the Inuit. However, it is well known in the film community that many of the events that took place in *Nanook of the North* were staged. The Inuit lifestyle that Flaherty portrayed in his film was outdated. The Inuit had long been familiar with Western technology by the recording of this film. For example, in the hunting scene above, none of the hunters were actually familiar with the use of the harpoon. Their people had become accustomed to the use of guns in hunting instead, and Flaherty had to ask them to do the scene with the harpoon. While the scene is staged, the events that take place do hold accuracy in a previous Inuit lifestyle, and the walrus shown being hunted was actually killed. Flaherty

combines the fictive elements of the scene with historical tradition to document an accurate representation of how the Inuit would have hunted walrus with a harpoon. He establishes the documentary as a hybrid form which puts the “magic” of the camera and historical reality together.

John Grierson, Scottish documentary filmmaker, is proclaimed as the “father of documentary,” having coined the term “documentary” himself. He expressed that it was “the dramatization of reality”, thus existing between the blurred lines of fiction and nonfiction (Jacobs, *Documentary* 375). However, documentary’s indexicality toward the historical real has captivated what Bill Nichols has called the viewer’s epistophilia, or their pleasure in learning from documentary (Nichols 31). Taking advantage of this epistophilia, new definitions of documentary began to emerge.

This paper explores the shifting construction of reality in documentary film from Grierson’s definition of the form to the 1960’s movement of objective reality. This shift occurred in the 1960’s as the *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema film movements arose in France and the United States respectively. These two movements will be defined, and the possibility of their objectivity will be examined. Four films which utilize *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema in some way will be examined. In particular, the construction of reality in the film will be analyzed by the filmmaker’s implicit and explicit views on documentary film’s responsibility toward its audiences, as well as how the films are interpreted by the viewer. The four films that will be examined are Jim McBride’s *David Holzman’s Diary* (1967), Frederick Wiseman’s *High School* (1968), Orson Welles’ *F for Fake* (1973), and Michael Moore’s *Roger & Me* (1989).

The Construction of Reality in 1960's Documentary

From Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* to Alan Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1956), documentary engaged in Grierson's definition of documentary. But, technological advancements in film in the 1950's gave rise to new interpretations of documentary film. Plastic substituted for metal to create the lightweight camera, and microphones became a portable instrument, which allowed filmmakers to walk freely throughout the world with camera crews consisting of only one or two personnel (McLane 222). French filmmaker Jean Rouch utilized this technology to create a style of documentary known as *cinéma vérité* (truth film). Rouch's interpretation of documentary was influenced by Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* (1922), or film truth, a propagandist newsreel that Vertov used to spread communism in the new Soviet Union (Jacobs, *Documentary* 375).

The events that took place inside documentaries up to this point were often scripted and took liberties with what was factual. *Cinéma vérité* took a different approach to documentary, using the lightweight camera, portable microphone, and only available light to record the world as it was, without any scripting of scenes. Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) puts the conventions of *cinéma vérité* on grand display. In the film, the subject appeared to lead the camera, rather than the other way around. The intention of this approach was to allow the subject to move throughout their daily life without having to wait for extensive camera crews to prepare for the next shot. Yet at the same time, as this subject moved throughout their day, they were aware of the presence of the camera and engaged it directly. Furthermore, the director would interact with the subject and insert him/herself into the scene, asserting their own opinion

on the subject matter. Based upon the involvement of the director in the film, Nichols called this the interactive mode of documentary (Nichols, *Documentary Modes* 38).

In the United States, Robert Drew, amongst others such as D.A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, Terrence Macartney-Filgate, and the Maysles brothers, utilized some of the techniques in *cinéma vérité* to create their own “truth” films, and subsequently created direct cinema. With Drew’s film *Primary* (1960), made for the presidential election campaign of then Senator John F. Kennedy (McLane 224), he and his associates sent out two-man crews, one man to record sound and the other to operate the camera, to capture their subject (McLane 225). Unlike *cinéma vérité*, this meant that there wasn’t any presence of a director in *Primary* that would intervene with the subject. As a whole, direct cinema in the United States would take on this method of allowing the scene to develop “naturally” and without any outside interference. Furthermore, the subject was not encouraged to interact with the camera, and filmmakers found that it was better if the subject was engaged in some other activity, attempting to forget about the camera and sound recorder (McLane 229). Nichols took note of these differences and categorized direct cinema in the observational mode of documentary (Nichols, *Documentary Modes* 38). Direct cinema filmmakers believed their techniques created a “pure” form of documentary and claimed their films could serve as an “objective” recorder of reality.

Erik Barnouw sums up the differences between Rouch’s *cinéma vérité* and Drew’s direct cinema rather well:

The direct cinema documentarist took his camera to a situation of tension and waited hopefully for a crisis; the Rouch version of *cinéma vérité* tried to precipitate one. The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility; the Rouch *cinéma vérité* artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of

uninvolved bystander; the cinéma vérité artist espoused that of provocateur. (Barnouw 254-255)

This definition represents the two different modes in their purest intentions and methods, one that allows the events recorded by the camera to create a narrative “naturally”, and the other utilizing the director to capture the narrative. However, both fall short of achieving any kind of purity. The claim of the purity of these methods can be misleading to the viewer. Cinéma vérité and direct cinema have grabbed onto the viewer’s epistophilia through implication of historical “authenticity,” captured by the immediacy of the camera. One only needs to look back to Dziga Vertov’s Kino-Pravda to see the influence that film can have when the viewer is made to believe in its authenticity. Vertov was able to accelerate the spread of Communism in the Soviet Union once he had established the “impression of authenticity.” Nichols described the importance of this “impression of authenticity”:

Authenticity stems from the image-forming process itself; it is not determined by verifying of the style of a brush stroke or a signature, an authenticity that guarantees “de Kooningness” or “Renoiricity” rather than a bond between image and referent. But the primary importance of this indexical quality to the photographic image (and magnetic sound recording) is less in the unassailable authenticity of the bond between image and referent than in the *impression of authenticity* it conveys to a viewer.

(Nichols, *Sticking to Reality* 150)

While documentary has maintained an indexicality toward the historical real, it is the “impression of authenticity” which Nichols speaks of that should raise caution. Direct cinema and cinéma vérité contradict themselves through their own “impression of authenticity”, rather

than acknowledging that a reproduced image will never be more than the director's interpretation of what had occurred. Nevertheless, the rise of direct cinema and cinéma vérité thrust the notion of authenticity forward as the most important attribute in documentary. Yet, along with this rise of authenticity came a discourse which sought to critique and examine it.

The 1960's was an era defined by government scandal, the hippie counterculture movement, and the controversial Vietnam War. More than ever, people questioned their trust in the government. From 1964 to 1973 [the duration of the U.S.' official engagement of war in Vietnam] public trust in the U.S. government fell from an all-time high of seventy-seven percent down to just thirty-six percent (Fingerhut 2). With the assassination of high-profile political figures [John and Robert Kennedy] and human rights activists [Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.], the Watergate scandal, and the unpopular decision to go to war in Vietnam, the public began to seek truth elsewhere. For U.S. filmmakers of direct cinema, this was the perfect moment to fulfill the public's needs. Direct cinema was appealing to this public because of "purity" of its form. To some viewers, direct cinema's minimalistic style of editing and the lack of a visible presence from the director seem to portray the events on screen in an "objective" manner.

There are several problems with the observational and interactive modes of documentary. Both tend to mislead the viewer towards these ideas of "truth" and "authenticity". Authenticity is a quality in a work whether it be art, news, or something else that is given by a figure who holds power in that respective field. By deeming something as authentic, that figure is telling others that it adheres to an objective truth which cannot be denied. Filmmakers should be cautious when approaching truth in order to prevent misleading those who follow their work. In today's "fake news" era, what is authentic is deemed by the most powerful figure in the government, President

Donald Trump. The problem with this is that President Trump has consistently shown his own bias towards certain news outlets over others, preferential treatment towards like-minded individual, and dissemination of incredibly misleading or just purely non-factual arguments to the public. President Trump has provided his truth to the American people as an objective truth in regard to the current state of our country.

David Holzman's Diary and the Deconstruction of Documentary

Jim McBride's *David Holzman's Diary* (1967) was a mock-documentary film that takes on the appearance of the journal entry film, a type of autobiographical documentary that gained prominence in the 1970s. McBride constructs the film through the documentary techniques of direct cinema in order to mimic the "impression of authenticity", convincing the viewer of the film's objective gaze. Mock-documentary operates in three degrees of distance from documentary: parody, critique, and deconstruction (Lipkin et al., Docudrama 16). *David Holzman's Diary* operates on the degree of deconstruction, challenging the ideals of objectivity in direct cinema. Taking place in the same moment as cinéma vérité and direct cinema, this film is a key catalyst for the deconstruction of the documentary. McBride offers a fresh view of documentary, and film as an art form, that has been affirmed by several filmmakers to this day.

McBride opens the film by immediately introducing the main character, David Holzman (L.M. Kit Carson). He is carrying a new lightweight camera over his shoulder and an audio track plays where he is testing the microphone. From the beginning, McBride has established the use of the same kind of filmmaking that was becoming very popular in the 1960s. This sets up the viewer to believe that *David Holzman's Diary* is just like any other work of direct cinema they

have been seeing since the beginning of the decade. Holzman plays with the camera for a while, and the viewer learns that he has just lost his job and has received a letter from the draft board of the Selective Service System stating that he has been selected to participate in military service (Vietnam War). In a fit that could be described as a mental breakdown, Holzman decides that he is going to film his own life and try to find “the truth” in it. The film depicts direct cinema’s invasion of everyday life as Holzman alienates himself from everyone around him. Through Holzman’s lens, McBride critiques both the Direct cinema and cinema-verité movements of the 1960s. Jim Lane recounts a revealing moment he shared with direct cinema filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker:

Carson reveals his critical perspective toward direct cinema when he writes that as he was “walking out after a *Diary* screening, (D.A.) Pennebaker said to me: ‘You killed cinéma vérité [direct cinema]. No more truthmovies. No’” Carson responds, “Truthmovies are just beginning.” Carson’s statement provides clear evidence that the makers of *David Holzman’s Diary* viewed their project as an iconoclastic transition from direct cinema to a new phase of documentary production. (Lane 35)

Carson delegitimizes the truth shown in direct cinema by establishing *David Holzman’s Diary* as the beginning of “truthmovies”. Furthermore, the film convinces one of the original founders of direct cinema, D.A. Pennebaker, of the shortcomings of the mode. By calling a fictional film a “truthmovie,” documentary’s indexicality toward truth and the historical real is put into question. But this is McBride’s intent, to challenge the claim of authenticity in documentary. The façade of film as a document to David Holzman’s life plays on this claim. Also, McBride uses powerful

monologues which divulge information regarding what he believes to be the truth of documentary. There are two messages in particular that express both direct cinema's claim of authenticity and McBride's reflexive argument against that claim. The first occurs at the very beginning of the film as David Holzman is creating the first entry in his video diary. The entry begins with David talking to himself as he adjusts the focus on the camera. He seems frustrated and turns the camera off. The screen goes black for a few moments, then we see him as he sits back down; the camera in complete view through its reflection in a mirror in the background. He opens up the entry, stating the date as July 14th, 1967. David explains in direct address to the camera that he lost his job and has been selected for the draft. He states these two reasons as the motivation to create a record of his life. He then says the following:

Objects, people, events...seem to speak to me. They, they seem to carry some meaning, that I can't quite get. My life, my life, my life, though ordinary enough, seems to haunt me in uncommon ways. It seems to come to me from somewhere else, somewhere. And I've be trying to understand it, but it seems I can't get it. So, the noted French wit Jean Luc Godard, said "What is film? Film is truth 24 times a second." So, I thought that, if I put it all down on film, and I run it back and forth, and I put my thumb on it, and I stop it when I want to, then I got everything I got it all. I should get it all... [halfheartedly laughs] I should get it all, I should get the meaning I should understand it.



Fig. 1. Dieringer, Joe. "David Holzman Directly Addressing the Camera." David Holzman's Diary, SCREEN SLATE, screen-slate-rails.herokuapp.com/system/images/W1siZiIsIjIwMTg0MDEvMjYvMjMvMTAvMDYvYTNkNjIyODMtNWNjMC00MTc2LTkyMjItNDA1MTk4NjI1N2Y4L0ZiYXR1cmVkJTE4MDIwMS1EYXZpZEhvbHptYW4uanBnIl1d/Fatured-180201-DavidHolzman.jpg?sha=313e4f8b11de7e5c.

The most significant line amongst Holzman's confused ranting is Godard's quote "Film is truth 24 times a second." McBride includes this quote as a representation of the argument for the objective nature of direct cinema, only to continuously challenge that argument in a subtle, yet effective manner. In an interview, McBride responds to his inclusion of this quote by Godard, stating that he does not think even Godard himself believed the quote as he had come up with many provocative statements throughout his career (Stewart). Drew and other founders of direct cinema themselves would proclaim Godard's quote to be true. Stella Bruzzi pulls a few quotes that prove they believed in the objectivity of direct cinema:

In examining the zealous pronouncements of the 1960s observational filmmakers themselves, it becomes instantly apparent how this misjudgment occurred, for it was they who

cemented the view that the belief in purity and objectivity was sustainable. There is a certain evangelical quality about many of the comments, such as Al Maysles' statement "I regard our films as the purest form of cinema"...But as a result of such fervent utterances – to which one could add many others such as Robert Drew's assertion that "the film maker's personality is in no way directly involved in directing the action" (quoted in Winston 1993: 43) – this perception of direct cinema has stuck. (Bruzzi 76)

Unfortunately, these proclamations of objectivity made their mark on the history of documentary and gives that impression to many viewers.

Another monologue represents the counter argument, given by David's friend, Pepe, who is critiquing the footage that has been shot so far. A mural with the image of a man dressed similarly to Pepe fills the background of the scene. For six minutes, he goes off on a long rant, discussing what problems he has found with the film, and then says:

As soon as you start filming something, whatever happens in front of the camera, it's not reality anymore. It becomes part of something else. It becomes a movie, and...you stop living somehow, and you get very self-conscious about anything you do, should I put my hand here, should I put my hand here? Should I put myself at the start of the frame, should I place myself inside the frame? And your decisions stop being moral decisions and they become aesthetical decisions and your whole life stops being your life and becomes a work of art, and a very bad work of art this time.

Pepe has revealed to the audience the dilemma of direct cinema and cinéma vérité. These movements, which so dearly hold to the ideals of objectivity and reality, fail to ever depict the world as it really was in that moment because the camera has interrupted reality and created a separate, subjective, reality just by being present. Also, he points out the tendency for scenes and shots to be pre-planned, as part of a narrative for the film, rather than spontaneously occurring as the directors would have the viewer believe [just as Holzman does in this scene with Pepe].

There are two main factors that contribute to this film being called a “truthmovie.” First, *David Holzman’s Diary* is filmed with the knowledge of how to make a work of documentary, and more so direct cinema, and as a result itself feels as though the film operates in the same reality that the audience exists in. And second, McBride flips the camera on itself, exposing not just what is shown in front of it, but the operative functions of the filmmaking process that take place behind it. The reflexivity of the camera in the film allows the viewer to be aware of the filmmaking process, and more particularly, the nature of direct cinema filmmaking. These two factors are the ground upon which McBride builds his critique of direct cinema and its attempt to present reality.

As a work of fiction, *David Holzman’s Diary* provides a great deal of insight to the fabricated nature of the documentary. McBride cleverly works inside the realm of fiction, using the technical aspects of documentary filmmaking to construct a reality that appears as though it exists in the collective reality that all human beings share. This is the core argument that McBride uses against direct cinema, that is, the ability to manipulate what is recorded by the camera and represent that manipulation as wholly objective and existing in our collective reality. McBride chooses instead to work between the lines of fiction and non-fiction, specifically using

the self-referential mode (David Holzman is an embodiment of McBride in the film) to show the possibilities of truth through alternative modes of film.

Michael Renov, in his *The Subject of Documentary*, discusses the nature of the autobiography and raises a few points that can be connected back to McBride's critique of direct cinema. First, he notes that the autobiography is "transforming the ways we think about and represent ourselves for ourselves and for others" (Renov 111). What Renov seems to imply here is that the way in which an individual represents themselves is a recreation of their identity based upon their own perceptions; in other words, who they actually are and who they claim to be may not be congruent. However, that is not to make everyone out to be intentionally deceptive, as the way a person endeavors to represent themselves can indeed be close to their actual self, and often expresses the ideals and values within them. Second, Renov likens memory and history to be of the same nature; they are revisionary entities, meaning, they are altered after the initial experience to be reinterpreted through the director's gaze. He then relates this relationship to that of filmmaking:

(...) [T]he gap between experience (the moment of filming) and secondary revision (the moment of editing) produces an ineradicably split diaristic subject. The temporal and epistemological syncopation of selves (the *writing versus written* self) is, I would argue, quite different for the moving form than for the written diary, which instantiates a perpetual present tense ("Right now I am writing my diary"). (Renov 114)

There are two different interpretations of the image. First, there is the original moment of filming which takes into consideration the camera angle, lighting, sound, and more to create the best shot for the moment. And then there is another phase of interpretation of the image in the editing

room, where different filters, sound effects, sequencing and more is used to create a new, modified image. An interesting note to make is the relevance this subject has today to social media. Anyone who has tried to take a “selfie” knows that they look better from some camera angles rather than others. By selecting one of those angles, they are representing themselves in a way that they want others to view them. This is true for the director as well, who wants his/her scene to be understood through their interpretation of the image. Although it can be acceptable for the autobiographer to do this, what about the films of direct cinema? Their claim of representing the world as it is surely is weakened by the notion that the camera is incapable of such an objective view of the world.

David Holzman's Diary was widely praised amongst critics upon its release but remained in obscurity to the general public. The film was often believed to be a documentary by viewers until the credits rolled, and then audiences were left in shock to find out that it was all staged. Jacobs details one of the accounts at a 1968 Flaherty Seminar:

This fictional feature which combines verité with the styles of Warhol and Godard purports to be a personal documentary in which the filmmaker hero describes and films a whole week in his hectic life. When the film is over, the closing credits reveal it is fiction. The Flaherty audience of experts had been fooled and was now outraged. (Arnold 486)

The film coaxed them in with the texture of authenticity and the promise of learning, only to reverse all of that on the closing credits. McBride brilliantly constructs the argument against the value of authenticity in documentary film, effectively deconstructing the preconceptions of believers of that specific value from the inside.

Direct cinema continued to gain popularity in the late 1960's. Despite the praise that *David Holzman's Diary* received amongst critics for highlighting many of the shortcomings of direct cinema, documentary film became known for its objective representation of reality. However, not all documentary filmmakers using the techniques of direct cinema believed in its claim of objectivity. Frederick Wiseman is an example of a filmmaker who uses direct cinema as a means to express his own subjective viewpoint on the subject he is filming. Just one year after *David Holzman's Diary*, Wiseman released a film that would appear as a direct cinema film yet contains many subtleties that separate itself from direct cinema.

High School and a Departure from 1960's Documentary

Frederick Wiseman's *High School* (1968) is a documentary that depicts the daily events of Northeast High School in Philadelphia. The film details the clashes between students and teachers over individualization and the role of freedom in a school setting. The film is often categorized as a work of direct cinema. Wiseman, however, resists such categorization, distancing himself from Drew, Pennebaker, and the others in the direct cinema movement. While Drew Associates touted their work as a pure form of documentary, Wiseman attempted to create a form that relied on his own point of view. Released just one year after *David Holzman's Diary*, the film shows some points of departure from direct cinema that coincide with McBride's critique of "truthmovies".

Though not entirely different from direct cinema, Wiseman's method of filmmaking does not claim to reveal any objective truth, but rather allows his own opinion to be expressed without him speaking a word in the film. In an interview with Alan Westin, Wiseman expresses

how he goes about filming the various American institutions that are the subjects of his films. Once an institution has been selected, he does not do any research on it. Instead, he lets the filming of events serve as the research on the institution (Kahana 556). Distancing himself further from [Drew and the others in] direct cinema, Wiseman stated that he doesn't know how he is going to portray the institution, but "starts off with a bromide..." a stereotype about the institution and continues from there (Kahana 557). Whereas other direct cinema films often had preplanned shooting sequences and events that would take place in the film, Wiseman would only take this commonly expressed viewpoint about the institution. These viewpoints, expressed by the public against the institution in question, are made often without evidence. Wiseman sought out to find that evidence, or lack thereof in the "bromide", by recording these institutions.

During filming, Wiseman retains a "fly-on-the wall" approach, never intervening in a scene. Wiseman's hand in the manipulation of events takes place through his editing. In the interview, Wiseman says:

My point of view toward the material is reflected in the structure of the film—the relationship of the sequences to each other and the themes that are developed by this particular order... Since the reality is complex, contradictory, and ambiguous, people with different values or experience respond differently. I think that there should be enough room in the film for other people to find support for their views while understanding what mine are. Otherwise I'd be in the propaganda business. (Kahana 557)

This statement solidifies the differences between Wiseman's films and other filmmakers who operate under the name of direct cinema. In the interview, Wiseman acknowledges his own

manipulation of the sequence of events in the film in order to get his point of view across. From there, the viewer is free to interpret his film however they wish. Never does he proclaim to provide the objective version of events. Nichols refers to this implicit argument as a “see-for-yourself” perspective. He says this is more common in fiction and runs contrary to “viewer expectations of documentary” so it “may seem manipulative because it is oblique” (Nichols, *Telling Stories* 126). Yet, Wiseman does not proclaim his subjectivity at the beginning of his films. It is up to the viewer to discern the subjective nature of the film, which can be quite difficult due to its striking resemblance to direct cinema films.

Despite the fact that Wiseman himself dislikes the ideas of direct cinema, his films often end up being categorized as such. *High School* is ultimately acknowledged for its similarities to direct cinema through recording. By using the “fly-on-the wall” approach to filmmaking, Wiseman footage coincides with the “authentic” gaze that is typical of direct cinema. He chooses to remove his physical presence from the film in the same way that Drew claimed to, so that the scene may develop naturally. These likenesses inevitably point towards the same “impression of authenticity” that documentary has been wrongly associated with.

Wiseman did make some subtle choices that can be indicative of subjectivity in *High School*. His camera utilizes a telephoto lens, flattening the distance to the subject (and often it cuts the human form into legs, chests, and mouths.) By flattening the image, the distance between the viewer and the subject “shrinks”. The camera takes on a voyeuristic gaze in these moments, which adds a layer of intimacy between the viewer and the subject, which seems to operate contrary to the objectivity of the camera in direct cinema. Even Drew’s *Primary* included subjective shots (one shot which filled the frame with Jackie Kennedy’s gloves was met with critique), failing to achieve the “objective” filmmaking style of direct cinema. Furthermore, *High*

School reveals Wiseman's messages largely through the edited sequence of events that take place during the film. The viewer does not come out with a clear answer on what should be done, rather they are exposed to a gap between the ideology of an institution and its practices (Kahana 559). Conclusions that can be drawn are ambiguous at best, but the process through which Wiseman delivers his message can be thoroughly examined.

One scene from *High School* captures an example of the gap between the school's ideology and its practices. An advisor is speaking with a student regarding the length of her dress for an upcoming dance and tells the girl that her dress does not meet the acceptable length. Wiseman's cinematographer, Richard Leiterman, tilts the camera down to show where the girl points right above her knee. According to the advisor, the spot right above her knee is not an approved dress length. Certainly, for contemporary audiences this would seem absurd, as there is hardly anything revealing about the area around a person's knee. In the 1960's, however, this was one of many points of contention in American cultural standards. The edited image on screen acts as Wiseman's voice, utilizing the tilt down to question the strict rule on dress length and suggesting the rule to be ridiculous. The advisor then goes on to say, "It's nice to be individualistic...but there are certain places to be individualistic." This line exposes the contradictory nature of the high school's officials. In his interview with Alan Westin, Wiseman says:

In *High School* the ideology of the school is revealed in the daily bulletin, the signs on the walls. There's one that says: "The mind is like a parachute, it functions best when open." The announced values are democracy, trust, sensitivity, understanding, openness, innovation—all the wonderful words we all subscribe to. But the

practice is rigidity, authoritarianism, obedience, do as you're told, don't challenge. (Kahana 559).

The film highlights many injustices forced upon the students of the school. But this is not an easily identifiable objective truth that anyone could discover by walking in through the doors of the school. Wiseman spent countless hours filming, and countless more editing to expose these issues. Nichols speaks of the cold, objectifying scrutiny Wiseman has towards the authorities of the institutions he documents and how it is the same scrutiny that these authorities place upon those they are in charge of (Nichols, *Sticking to Reality* 140). The significance of this scrutiny is to show Wiseman's depiction of the powerlessness of individuals in these institutions. By consistently defending the lower tiers of the hierarchy, Wiseman separates himself from the "debatable ethics of objectivity." (Nichols, *Sticking to Reality* 140)

The final scene of the film completes Wiseman's critique of Northeast High School. During an assembly meeting, a female staff member from the school reads aloud a letter from an alumnus who is currently in the military. Much of the scene is shot in a close-up of the staff member, as she reminisces over the student and reminds the audience of his "sub-average qualities." Occasionally the camera will show the faces of the audience members, who appear quite indifferent to the letter. The female staff member, devoid of any emotion apparent on the screen, jokes about the difficulty of reading through the letter without choking up. Wiseman seems to jump on this opportunity to show again the disparity between what the authorities of the school say and their actual practices by keeping the camera focused on the female speaker's face for the rest of reading of the letter. After finishing reading, she looks and says, "Now when you get a letter like this, to me it means, that we are very successful at Northeast High School, I think you will agree with me." Her face becomes visibly gleeful and she tosses her head as does a

young child showing off their pride at what they have accomplished. Wiseman has a different view:

This boy wanted to show his appreciation to the school for all it had done to teach him about duty, authority, and self. His uncritical, unthinking acceptance made him just like a Chevrolet rolling off the GM line. (Kahana 556)

Wiseman allows the recording of the speaker to reveal his main criticism of the public-school institution. As the film ends directly after this scene, the conclusion can be made that the school officials care for nothing other than making their students obedient and unthinking. Throughout the film, the message is seemingly discovered by the viewer, as Wiseman encourages the viewer to interpret the film for themselves.

It may be clear to those familiar with film that the director has constructed the telling of the story, but it is entirely possible to believe that for many, *High School* appears to be “objectively truthful” as any other direct cinema film. Admittedly, there is not much written on *High School* and its reception by the public upon the time of its release. However, due to legal issues, Wiseman agreed not to screen the film anywhere near Philadelphia, as Northeast High School was not fond of how Wiseman edited the film (Everhart). Over thirty years later, in 2001, Philadelphia had its first screening of *High School*. Several individuals who were a part of Northeast High School, remembered the film as specifically conveying a negative portrayal of the institution. They believed that Wiseman came in with certain predispositions over the public high school and shot in accordance with those predispositions (Everhart). There is some truth to this claim, as it was mentioned earlier that Wiseman films an institution with a basic idea of disclosing what is going on within it. But the editing process is where Wiseman reveals his message, having shot a hundred hours or more of footage in Northeast High School.

The general reaction of viewers from the rest of the U.S. to the film is that it properly represents the high school experience of viewers regardless of where they grew up (Everhart). Since *High School* has often been mislabeled as a direct cinema film, it makes a connection towards the “objective truth” that was claimed to be achievable in the 1960s. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that many viewers took Wiseman’s message for a general truth about how high schools were operating at the time. This effect can be doubled as the title of the film is just *High School*, an intentional vagueness so that the film can be realized as representing all high schools in America. Although there are scenic shots that reveal the film to be shot in Philadelphia and establishing shots of the exterior of the high school, its name is never explicitly mentioned [and it is left to the viewer to discern.] The film then rests upon the contradictory styles of the “impression of authenticity” and Wiseman’s interpretation of the High School. Having established that, the viewer’s epistophilia works to push away the subtle subjectivity of the editing and instead absorbs the film as exposing the true nature of the secondary education system. Although, for many viewers, *High School* has provided an accurate representation of their own high school experience, it cannot be put on display as the objective representation of *the* high school experience. There is no proper category for Wiseman’s films except for exemplifying his own filmmaking style and interpretation of the truths that documentary film can expose. But, Wiseman’s films get placed somewhere in the lines of direct cinema [ignoring the subjectivity of his films] by scholars, critics, and viewers alike. As a result, *High School* and many of Wiseman’s other films influence the viewer’s preexisting opinions of an institution [and align them with Wiseman’s view of the institution] towards an “objective” view of that institution.

By the 1970's, direct cinema and cinéma vérité's rapid influence on documentary film had reached a peak. The deconstruction of documentary, established by Jim McBride's *David Holman's Diary*, began to gain popularity. Directors began to question the value of the of "authenticity" in film and art and created reflexive films and blended together fiction and non-fiction. Subjectivity was embraced as a valuable asset to art, as it expressed the director's interpretation of the film. This also made the films susceptible to viewer interpretation, creating their own subjective meaning from the information provided.

***F for Fake* and the Value of Authenticity in Documentary, Film, and the Arts**

F for Fake (1973) is the final film ever made by famed actor, director, writer, and producer, Orson Welles. It escapes categorization of any one genre of film but combines the deconstruction and essay film together to question the value of authenticity in art. Welles acts as host and narrator in the film, spinning a tale about the infamous art forger Elmyr de Hory and his success in duping art "experts" [Welles uses the term "expert" mockingly] into believing his paintings are authentic works of art from reputable artists. He also talks about two other forgers; Clifford Irving, who wrote a fake and unauthorized autobiography on Howard Hughes, and Welles himself, specifically relating to his fictional radio broadcast *War of the Worlds* that supposedly sparked mass hysteria across the country. This is one of the multiple layers in the film which deal with the issues of valuing authenticity in art. Welles lets the viewer in on a secret about the film during his introduction and tells them that he is going to tell the truth for the majority of the film but will say nothing but lies at the very end. The film often talks about the magic of illusion, and often bridges the lines between fiction and non-fiction. But Welles'

ultimate goal in the film is to teach the viewer in the tricks of the documentary and warns them against “gullibility” (the preferred state of the viewer in documentary) as truths and lies can infiltrate the film at any moment (Benamou 146).

F for Fake was created during the era of Pop Art, a form which Welles critiques “It is pretty, but is it *art*?” (Benamou 145). Welles is skeptical of the wide cultural acceptance by the public, artists, and “experts” alike of reproductions and imitation in art. He sees this reproduction of industrial and cultural symbols as a bit of fakery. Yet Welles takes this acceptance of Pop Art to raise a question on the nature of fakery and authenticity. Welles’ primary motive in the film is to challenge the art world’s acceptance of “impression of authenticity”. He simultaneously argues for the sake of the art fakers, such as Elmyr de Hory, whose art fooled the “experts.” Welles is challenging the dichotomy between the acceptance of media-based replications as original [Pop Art] and the need for verification by an art expert for the operations of the art market (Benamou 146). Welles’ stance in the film seems to be playing the devil’s advocate, never fully supporting the art forger. At the same time, Welles himself navigates the lines between fiction and non-fiction, making it difficult to place the film as either documentary or essay film, and difficult for the “experts” to categorize it. As discussed earlier, the notion of authenticity in the documentary mode points towards a presentation of the historically real, divulging nothing but truth to the viewer. Welles reveals to the audience this trickery of documentary, exposing the filmmakers who operate under the shroud of authenticity for what they really are, illusionists who use the visual apparatus to fool the viewer into believing their eyes.

Welles opens the film with a fade into a train station. Before anything else is revealed, he says “For my next experiment, ladies and gentlemen, I’d appreciate the loan of any small personal object from your pocket. A key, a box of matches, a coin. Ah, a key it is, good sir.” The camera then pans to the left, revealing two boys behind a black cloaked figure who is soon revealed to be Welles. Welles’ opening comes across as the opening act for a magician. The majority of the shots in this sequence feel like they belong in a fiction film, yet several times the camera shows the small “film crew” shooting as if the film were a work of *cinéma vérité* (or direct cinema), following Welles around as he interacts with the public. A small white screen is set up inside the station, and he stands in front of it to give the true introduction of the film. Welles explains to the viewer that the film centers around trickery, fraud, and lies. Welles then makes a bold statement: “Almost any story’s almost certainly some kind of lie. But not this time, no this is a promise. During the next hour, anything you hear from us is really true, based on solid fact.” This claim is immediately juxtaposed by a screen with rolling columns with the word “FAKE!” Welles simultaneously takes advantage of the viewer’s epistophilia, fooling those gullible enough to believe that he is any different from any other filmmaker, and warns the viewer of the “impression of authenticity” that he has just given. The construction of reality here is not hidden, but even Welles’ combination of fiction and non-fiction show that it is all too easy to be drawn into believing everything that takes place on the screen as real.

In another scene, Welles is seen playing another trick of the eye on the audience as he “compresses” his girlfriend Oja Kodar inside a box, and a suitcase appears to pop out. The promise of stating only the truth is made again when Welles tells the audience “for in case that mumbo jumbo might make it seem that there’s going to be some trickery in this film about trickery, we’ll repeat our promise.” This time the promise comes in the form of writing as a

black title card reads “For the next hour, everything in this film is strictly based on the available facts.” The second time around, this promise feels even less sincere. Welles’ tricks and empty promises make it difficult for the viewer to absorb anything from the film without any skepticism. This skepticism helps suspend the atmosphere of trickery that Welles has established, and therefore, successfully warns his viewers against the tricks of the “charlatan”, the forger, and the director.

The story of the fakers, Elmyr de Hory and Clifford Irving, represent a cautionary tale for anyone engaged in the nefarious acts of forging and thievery, Yet, their tale also helps to carry Welles’ argument in the film. Both Elmyr and Irving serve as examples of the fakeness of the “experts”, who verify the faker’s work believing it to be “authentic”. Parallel to this is Welles’ message against the “impression of authenticity” in documentary. Interviews of Elmyr and Irving are conducted and spliced into the film, guiding Welles’s construction of the story, only to be interrupted periodically by some illusion that forces the viewer to constantly question everything they had just witnessed.

F for Fake focuses on the incapability of the “experts”, supported by comments from Irving and Elmyr. Welles speaks to his viewer through an intricate and rapid paced style of editing. Often, Welles inserts himself into the film, vocalizing his own opinion on the events that take place on the screen, and raising questions for the viewer to ponder on. In the film, Welles highlights both Irving’s successful forgery of Howard Hughes’ handwriting to authenticate Irving’s faux biography and Elmyr’s forged artworks that Irving says were authenticated by the Museum of Modern Art. Shots of Elmyr show him condemning the “experts” of the art world as “it should not exist that one single person makes a decision about what’s good or what’s bad.” Welles vocally agrees to the condemnation of the art experts, mocking them as he states that

these “experts” have just authenticated Irving and Elmyr. This bolsters Welles’ argument against authenticity, considering that those who uphold the value of authenticity truly know little about the what makes something real, and furthermore what is valuable as art.

Welles’ displays of magic in the film provoke the viewer to question what they believe in the film. Elmyr and Irving’s tales that flow between fiction and non-fiction, and *F for Fake* itself borders these lines. The works produced by these “fakers” provoked the questions that Welles attempts to answer through this combination of fiction and non-fiction. When a work of art garners attention by the critics [as Elmyr and Irving’s have] its value as a work of art is not judged by the expression of the artist [which first caught the eye of the masses] but instead by whom the artist is and the authenticity of the work itself. Welles attempts to view these works from a perspective that challenges the “experts”, controversial as it may be, and leans towards support of the “fakers”. Gerd Bayer explains, just as Welles has done, that the experts are responsible for deciding whether a work of art is a success or failure.

As Welles has so cleverly shown in *F for Fake*, the success or failure of art depends on the verdict of the critics. Accordingly, one of the characters in his film asks: “But if there weren’t any experts, would there be any fakers?” The importance of framing for any aesthetic work is one of the central concerns of Welles’s film. It repeats the structural claims present in mockumentary’s insistence on addressing the fragile nature of represented reality.

(Bayer 172)

The quote “But if there weren’t any experts, would there be any fakers?” provokes the viewer to question their understanding of authentic art. If there were no art experts in the world to critique work on the value of authenticity, all art would be authentic and unauthentic; its relevance in the

world based on its existence alone. This revelation connects to the futility of attempting to provide an objective reality in documentary film. Once the experts are gone, unable to proclaim Wiseman, Rouch, or Drew as providing the “purest” form of documentary and exposing their viewer to the very truth they had hoped for, the façade of objective reality inside the film will become unnecessary. The film can be appreciated instead for the qualities that the director instilled in it that show a unique interpretation of reality, yet one that the viewer can still identify with and draw conclusions from.

Welles eventually tells his own tale of how his fakery brought him to fame. Adding a bit of irony to the expert’s love of authenticity is that perhaps Welles’ biggest launch into fame was due to his fictional radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* (1938) which caused “mass hysteria” across the United States. He claims that half of the U.S. population was sent into a frenzy, and that claim was upheld for quite some time. Orson Welles’ next biggest break was co-writing, directing and playing the role of newspaper tycoon Charles Foster Kane in *Citizen Kane* (1941). The character of Charles Foster Kane was itself an impersonation of newspaper tycoon, William Randolph Hearst, and originally modeled after aviation tycoon and Hollywood producer, Howard Hughes. Welles fakes these business magnates, and creates the incredibly powerful yet terribly unhappy character, Charles Foster Kane.

F for Fake shows a montage of newsreel footage that rings familiar to anyone who has seen *Citizen Kane* before. The fictional newsreel footage of Charles Foster Kane in the film is nearly identical in style, structure, and content to that of the footage of Hughes. Welles identifies these fakes that he is guilty of in order to raise a question: Do these fakes constitute Welles as a fraud, as unworthy of being called an artist? The question has already been answered in this paper; these fakes were met with reverence and high praise by the “experts.” Despite the legal

troubles that ensued in the aftermath of the airing of *The War of the Worlds*, Welles subsequently found his way into Hollywood.

The supposed countrywide panic that Welles created was actually misconstrued and over-hyped by the news outlets. In an article on the online magazine *Slate*, writers Jefferson Pooley and Michael J. Socolow demystify Welles' infamous broadcast. This article establishes that America's newspapers intentionally over-hyped the panic that was caused as a tactical maneuver to create distrust in radio. The reason for the coordinated maneuver lies in the fact that, since the Great Depression, radio had been steadily taking away advertising revenue from the newspapers due to its popularity (Pooley and Socolow). One of the bits of evidence they provide against the supposed mass hysteria considers a survey taken by listeners that night.

The night the program aired, the C.E. Hooper ratings service telephoned 5,000 households for its national ratings survey. "To what program are you listening?" the service asked respondents. Only 2 percent answered a radio "play" or "the Orson Welles program," or something similar indicating CBS. None said a "news broadcast," according to a summary published in *Broadcasting*. In other words, 98 percent of those surveyed were listening to something else, or nothing at all, on Oct. 30, 1938. This miniscule rating is not surprising. Welles' program was scheduled against one of the most popular national programs at the time—ventriloquist Edgar Bergen's *Chase and Sanborn Hour*, a comedy-variety show. (Pooley and Socolow)

The survey was a small sample size when compared to the twelve million people listening to radio that night. Even so, this sample size shows the disparity between those affected by the faux

craze created by the newspapers and the very modest number of people actually listening to the CBS broadcast Welles was telling the story on. Furthermore, of those surveyed, none believed that they were listening to a news broadcast, and instead believed Welles' story to be a radio play.

As *F for Fake* approaches its end, so too does Welles' promise of conveying a truthful story. This time, there is no apparent trickery; Welles is testing what the viewer has learned from him thus far in the film. He concludes with a tale about Oja and Pablo Picasso. A shot of Welles and Oja traversing a thick fog provides the only conceivable clue towards another trickery. He even calls this a true story and a "reenactment of recent history." Such reenactments were not so common in documentary at the time *F for Fake* was made (it became more prominent after Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line*, 1988), yet Welles has tried to warn the audience that this is no documentary film. Towards the end of this sequence, it is revealed that Oja used Picasso in order to get recognition for her dying grandfather, another art forger. Then, a constructed dialogue takes place between Welles and Oja as a conversation between the grandfather (Welles) and Picasso (Oja). Picasso is outraged that the experts had mistaken twenty-two paintings as his own. Again, the value of authenticity is put into question. But, this whole tale about Oja, her grandfather, and Picasso is fake. Welles reminds the viewer of his promise to be truthful and says that hour has been over for the last seventeen minutes. He then finishes with what he believes to be true "No, what we, professional liars hope to serve is truth. I'm afraid the pompous word for that is art. Picasso himself said it. Art, he said, is a lie. A lie that makes us realize the truth." It is difficult to accept the term professional liars as an interpretation of the artist but nonetheless the filmmaker is judged far too often on the realist aesthetics of their work. Satyajit Ray shares in Welles' opinion when he attempts to broaden Grierson's definition of documentary:

Even fables and myths and fairy tales have their roots in reality. Krishna, Ravana, Aladdin, Cinderella, Jack the Giant Killer – all have their prototypes in real life. Therefore, in a sense, fables and myths are also creative interpretations of reality. In fact, all artists in all branches of non-abstract art are engaged in the same pursuit that Grierson has assigned exclusively to the makers of documentary film. (Ray 381)

Welles, Irving, and Elmyr, even as fakers, by this definition can call themselves artists. Each of them, through their work, has taken the liberty of creating their own reality. But, for Irving and Elmyr, they cannot truly be exempt from ridicule on this definition alone. Their interpretation of reality within their art is not a problem by itself, but it is the claims of authenticity about their art which is immoral and illegal. It is dangerous because by misunderstanding fiction for fact, a work of art can lead whoever is viewing it to believe in fakeries which can change the reputation of an individual (as Irving was doing with his “biography” on Howard Hughes). Welles makes an interesting case at a time where the modes of direct cinema and cinéma vérité were ebbing, and *F for Fake* should be considered instrumental in helping create to a dialogue against the value of authenticity in art.

Despite becoming a part of the Criterion Collection in 2005, *F for Fake* was not received well by critics or audiences upon its release. The film seems to have been ahead of its time on the critique of authenticity, experts, and the art market. The film’s mystical blending of documentary and essay film is also difficult to follow and can easily confuse the viewers if they don’t stay alert as Orson Welles suggests.

During the 1980’s, new forms of documentary began to emerge. Direct cinema and cinéma vérité began to disappear from the movies and moved towards the new mode of reality

television. However, filmmakers like Michael Moore and Errol Morris still utilized elements of the “truth” cinema and combined them with a highly subjective approach to their films. Michael Moore, in particular, engages his subject with a clear predisposed opinion and fights vehemently for it. This highly opinionated stance that Moore takes against his subject is evident from the filming to the editing of his pieces and separates itself from the objective modes of documentary.

Navigating the Lines Between Documentary and Fiction in *Roger & Me*

Michael Moore’s *Roger & Me* (1989) is a documentary and essay film that examines the aftermath of the General Motors plant closings in Flint, Michigan. The influence *cinéma vérité* had on Moore’s filmmaking style is clear. For example, his use of the handheld camera and portable microphone combined with the confrontation of the subject in front the camera mimic *cinéma vérité*. Moore’s confrontational activist nature and heavily opinionated stance on the subject in *Roger & Me* [and the rest of Moore’s filmography] created a provocative tone to the film that engaged the viewer to a degree that had not previously occurred in documentary film.

Moore used his debut film to introduce himself to the world in the form of the essay film, using his own-voice over narration to develop a level of intimacy with the viewer. His goal in using the essay film is not entirely clear. Tim Corrigan breaks down the two possible motives:

If Moore’s films are essay films of a sort, the more fundamental question is whether Moore simply re-creates those celebrity agencies that he attacks, or does he ironize and parody them to provoke the unstable thinking of selves in public that describes essayism. (Corrigan 173)

Another documentary that was released just a year prior that used elements of the essay film was Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). Timothy Corrigan, writer of *The Essay Film*, quotes Linda Williams, professor at UC Berkeley, to describe Morris' use of the essay film as an:

“anti-verité” documentary that digs “toward an impossible archeology” where the “contextualization of the present with the past...is the most effective representational strategy” since the event, “never whole, never fully represented,” is always “a palimpsest of memory” (qtd. in Corrigan 172)

Both of these films used the essay in strikingly different ways, but each produced significant results. Moore shed light on the declining standard of living in Flint, while Morris exposed a false accusation of murder that led to the sentencing of a man to death. In the end, Morris' film produced clear results as his film helped to eventually free Randall Adams, the wrongfully convicted man, and to identify David Harris as the murderer. Moore's film, however, has not had such a clear impact on Flint beside bringing it to the viewer's attention. A further examination of *Roger & Me* reveals more blurred lines in Moore's strategies in the film.

Moore starts *Roger & Me* with a collage of footage about his early life growing up in Flint, Michigan. This collage establishes Moore's personal point of view in the film. It quickly turns into an origin story of General Motors, also starting in Flint. It highlights the prosperity that GM brought to Flint, which Moore fondly recalls. The film continues to offer snapshots of Moore's departure from Flint to become an editor for a newspaper in San Francisco. His witty voiceover and quick editing pace paint the picture of a funny, cerebral filmmaker. He uses footage from other sources in order to reinterpret moments of life and highlighting events relating to the subject to provide satire in the film. Most of the footage filmed by Moore is used to confront his subjects, most often victims of the plant closings, or security people preventing

him from directly confronting GM Chief Executive Officer Roger Smith. These sequences are shot in a similar fashion to *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema. Now mentioned several times, the shooting of footage in this style grounds the film with the “impression of authenticity”. The indexicality of the historical real in documentary, established decades before, makes it difficult enough to create something that the viewer can understand as only an interpretation of reality. Moore’s choice to shoot the film as he does only further convinces the viewer that he is providing an accurate account of reality. Footage of distressed locals of Flint begin to appear as Moore begins his critique of Roger Smith.

Moore conducted an interview with Tom Kay, spokesman and lobbyist for GM, and edits in segments from the interview throughout the film. The placement of these segments are calculated strategies that make it difficult to believe anything that Kay is saying. In response to the protests against the plant closings, Kay assures that Smith is a “very warm man” and would not close the plants without care for the now unemployed workers. Moore responds to the viewer in voiceover “A warm man? Did I have Roger Smith judged all wrong simply because he was eliminating 30,000 jobs from my hometown? I decided to find out.” The inflection in Moore’s voice tells the viewer he does not believe Roger Smith to be a “warm man.”

Moore tries several times throughout the film to meet with Smith but fails each time. A camera crew follows behind him as he interacts with the various guards and representatives who prevent him from getting to Smith. Moore plays naïve, giving the impression that he doesn’t understand why an “everyman” like himself cannot just meet with the CEO of a major corporation. This is an effective comical method for Moore to gain the trust of his viewer. The lack of weight that his name carries, and his docile performance connect him to the passivity of a viewer. James McEnteer speaks more on his persona:

Whether masquerading as a TV newsman to get into an auto plant, interviewing little people about big issues, or trying to push past corporate flunkies to beard white-collar miscreants in their aeries, Moore largely remains in character as a shambling, slovenly--if bright and relentless—Everyman, out to confront the heartless Corporate Beast. Moore's persona incarnates blatant buffoonery and righteous indignation. He's a *faux-naïf* whose apparently simplistic questions tease out the hypocrisy and greed behind the feel-good surfaces of modern corporate flummery.

(McEnteer 81)

This carefully constructed persona flourishes throughout the film, becoming the primary tool that Moore uses to convey his message of protest and outrage.

Arguably the most powerful scene in the film is when Moore speaks with the autoworker whose story started Moore's interest in creating the film. The man recounts driving home after being laid off, and the irony of driving through Flint to The Beach Boys' song *Wouldn't It Be Nice*. The man is a casualty of the American Dream. The freedom that is sought after by the working-class individual is the same freedom that allows the large corporations which dominate capitalism to leave the cities that helped found them in order to gain larger profits. Moore then edits in footage of the abandoned neighborhoods juxtaposed by the song. This is the situation that General Motors has put the factory workers of Flint in, and the irony that the man is speaking of when he drives through his decaying town to the sounds of America's boy band, the Beach Boys. This could be considered the turning point in the film. Moore deliberately manipulates the emotions of the viewer to distort reality. By interviewing the factory worker and sharing his emotional story and ironic ride through his once blooming neighborhood, Moore

holds General Motors and Roger Smith entirely responsible for the economic downfall of the city of Flint. The viewer's perspective becomes that of the filmmaker. His cry for justice becomes the viewer's fight. Moore's refined editing skills provoke the viewer to action, playing on their emotions to justify the ridicule he places upon his corporate subjects.

Moore emphatically embraces subjectivity in his film. The construction of his life story, sequencing of historical events, and heavily opinionated voiceover show him to be a provocateur. The film is performative, "a mode that does not draw our attention to the formal qualities or political context of the film directly so much as deflect our attention from the referential quality of documentary altogether." (Nichols, *Performing Documentary* 93). It moves beyond the interactive mode of *cinéma vérité* and confronts the subject in order to record a reaction that is used to weaken his subject's position. Moore's film is about the spectacle of watching the character "Michael Moore, Everyman" take on Big Business. Sadly, it is less focused on the affected victims of the situation. McEnteer says:

As Moore says in the film. "My mission was a simple one, to convince Roger Smith to spend a day with me in Flint, to talk to some of the workers laid off by General Motors." Of course, Moore knows that will never happen, but that premise provides a focus for his righteous anger and his withering wit. (McEnteer 80).

It is the character "Michael Moore" that drives the "impression of authenticity" in the film. The viewer is induced to trust in Moore's representation of himself. Once this trust is established, Moore can willingly blend fiction with fact, convincing the viewer of his argument. But Moore doesn't stop there. He creates a dialectic between himself, the hero "Michael Moore," against the "villain" Roger Smith. He protects the victims of the plant closings, portrayed as vagabonds who

wander helplessly, unsure of what to do next. This constructed narrative operates in the guise of reality. Mitchell Block explains the problem:

If *Roger & Me* (1989) were a fiction, with actors instead of real people, it would be fine. Alas, Moore is a documentary liar; his work holds up its subjects for ridicule and scorn. We laugh at these real people who, in some cases, are being presented in a false light by Moore. (Block 194)

This critique of Moore rings similar to Welles' interpretation of the artist as a professional liar. Moore is a faker host just like Welles, [Drew,] and the others who have worked under the "impression of authenticity". What is more concerning about this is not Moore's fakery, but the commercial success that his fakery has brought him. His films *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) were both the most financially successful documentaries ever upon their releases (McEnteer 79). The large audiences that he has reached through his films has provided him with a platform to spread his messages. His name has outgrown the image of the "Everyman," yet the character he portrays remains much the same: the underdog advocate for those unfortunate victims of...

Sometimes the focus of his film is placed into doubt through Moore's desire to make everyone else look worse than himself. He detracts from his original subject on more than one occasion to paint a negative picture of other figures of authority or celebrity, regardless of its relevance to the GM plant closings. One example from the film repeats throughout the film as Moore records Deputy Fred Ross. Deputy Ross was a former factory worker who found work as the man who carried out eviction orders throughout the city of Flint. Moore records him doing this which pressures Ross into justifying his actions. Moore uses his camera to make Deputy Ross and others in the film appear somewhat immoral, corrupt, and villainous. Some of those he

portrays in this way may deserve it, but others (like Deputy Ross) hold no real power and are just trying to earn an honest living like the rest of the working-class citizens of Flint.

While Moore's persistence to get Roger Smith to answer for the betrayal of the Flint working-class community is a righteous cause, his reasonings and methods behind doing so are somewhat problematic. The messages of his films often spark controversy, which only further emphasizes the need for a dialogue on the issues he raises. But his style of filmmaking also creates controversy. There is not a clear right or wrong when it comes to the manipulation of characters, the events that take place, and the sequencing of those events in documentary. The emergence of more subjective modes of documentary such as *Roger & Me*, or Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line*, are important in showing how the director's interpretation of reality is valuable in documentary. Yet, a director must remember the indexicality that documentary holds toward the historical real, and not confuse his own representation of something as "the truth and nothing but the truth". Michael Moore's career as a filmmaker borders on the fine line between social activism and propaganda.

Conclusion

Documentary film continues to have an indexicality towards the historical real. Viewers often believe in the authenticity of documentary because of the way it presents itself. Yet, many filmmakers like Jim McBride, Frederick Wiseman, Orson Welles, and Michael Moore continue to embrace subjectivity in their art. Unfortunately, this is not enough to separate a film from the impression of authenticity in documentary. Both Wiseman and Moore have created films that enables the viewer's epistemic gaze towards the notion of objectivity. *High School* shares

many traits with direct cinema films. Wiseman has tried to expose the subjectivity in his films, but the visual appearance of the film draws the viewer into believing in the objectivity of direct cinema. *Roger & Me* takes from cinéma vérité, as Michael Moore puts himself in front of the camera as a provocateur and confronts his subject directly. While his use of satire in the film projects a subjective gaze, Moore creates a false likeness of himself under the frame of objectivity. These films navigate the lines between objectivity and subjectivity in documentary film dangerously and end up providing what many viewers consider to be an objective representation of the subject in the film. McBride's *David Holzman's Diary* and Welles' *F For Fake*, on the other hand, effectively warn the viewer of the "impression of authenticity". *David Holzman's Diary's* deconstruction of direct cinema effectively highlights all of the manipulations that can take place in such a production. The film concludes with the realization that, in film, the only truth is that there is no (objective) truth. *F for Fake* attacks the "experts" who control the value of a film and stresses the importance of the film medium's role as art.

Today, the "fake news" era is dominating people's lives. There is mass distrust in the government, and in the media. As a result of this, people are yet again looking towards other mediums to seek truth. Politically motivated art displays are gaining popularity, speaking personal truths that are motivating people to action. The filmmaker must also engage themselves in this artistic pursuit of truth. But it is essential that claims of objectivity do not dominate their work, for it is the subjectivity in art that allows the freedom of interpretation. Furthermore, it is the sharing of those different interpretations of the artist's that allow people to debate and create a common truth. It is the responsibility of the filmmaker to guide the viewer towards finding truth for themselves, when everything else around them misleads them into believing someone else's truth.

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